



The War In Iraq: Kids Serve Too

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New program called Camp C.O.P.E. helps kids of deployed and injured troops deal with emotional and behavioral side effects of parents in war.

PR9.NET April 01, 2008 - Dallas, TX – There is a hidden cost to today's long and repeated deployments: the price paid by service members' children. With 1.6 million American service members deployed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, that leaves an incredible amount of children at home with one or no parent.

Additionally, current military support programs do not typically address a widespread issue for military families and their children - the stress of returning veterans with physical or psychological problems.

Recent government research indicates that if troops come home with a war-related psychological disorder, there is a substantial increase in risk for additional family conflict, such as emotional problems with the children. It is unknown how this will play out in terms of the newer aspects of this war, such as high rates of traumatic brain injury, and what risk, if any, this will pose for child mistreatment. It is for this reason that it is imperative for these issues to be addressed, both by providing services and by studying what is going on so we can learn from it.

There are many nongovernmental organizations supporting wounded veterans and their spouses, but few are specifically dedicated to helping their children.

Dallas-area resident, Elizabeth Reep knows first-hand how children who have a parent deployed and wounded in war can be affected.

Elizabeth's husband, Tracy, was the commanding convoy operator of his patrol in Baghdad in November, 2003, when it was ambushed. The attack included improvised explosive devices, small-arms fire and a rocket-propelled grenade that seriously injured him. Tracy lost two fingers and his left eye in the attack.

When he came home, her step-sons, who were 10 and 8 years old at the time, began acting out in school and at home. Elizabeth is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and quickly stepped in with counseling and hands-on activities to help the kids cope with their father's injuries.

"Our boys reacted just like most children of deployed or injured soldiers do. Some common reactions observed in children in these circumstances include, depression, anxiety, withdrawal, anger, hyper-vigilance and somatic illness," Elizabeth stated.

This was the turning point for Elizabeth. She approached her friend and colleague, Sarah Balint a Licensed Professional Counselor and National Certified Counselor. Using their expertise, Elizabeth and Sarah organized a hands-on, therapeutic program for children of the wounded and dubbed it Camp C.O.P.E.®, an acronym for courage, optimism, patience and encouragement.

"I realized that there were probably hundreds of thousands of children going through the same ordeal and needed help coping with these emotions and fears. That is when Sarah and I got together and came up with the curriculum for Camp C.O.P.E.," said Elizabeth. "We designed it to help children of deployed and injured troops cope with the effects of war, deployments and the sacrifices they are asked to make every day."

At Camp C.O.P.E., children are provided with age-appropriate therapeutic interventions in small groups of their peers, who have had similar experiences. Participants engage in therapeutic activities which highlight coping skills; expression of anger; feeling identification; handling stress and anxiety; caring and empathy; empowerment; and dealing with grief and depression.

The "Camp C.O.P.E. helps me understand that just because my mom is okay, someone else's might not be. It is nice to know that other kids are going through the same thing," says 12-year old Carmen, who attended the camp in December 2007 and whose mother served in Iraq.

Responses from the camp were so overwhelmingly positive, that Sarah and Elizabeth decided to broaden the curriculum to help, not only children of the wounded, but children of deployed troops.

Word of Camp C.O.P.E. has spread quickly. Celebrities like LeAnn Rimes and Big Kenny, one half of the country duo Big & Rich, have endorsed the cause and Kellogg's will raise money for the camp this summer with a special promotion. Camp C.O.P.E. has garnered so much success and recognition that it is going on the road in 2008. The first camp will be held at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas.

For more information or to learn how your child can get involved, please visit

www.campcope.org.

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About Camp Cope

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