

# Welcome!

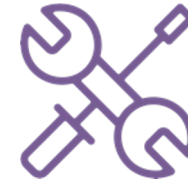
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# Managing Bumps in the IECMH Road

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## Event Materials

Visit the **event page** to download a copy of the presentation slides and any additional resources.



## Continuing Education

This webinar has been approved to offer continuing education credit. Please stay tuned for more information!



# OneOp

**Readiness. Knowledge. Network.**

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# Today's Presenters

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# Today's Objectives

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1. Identify family stressors that impact IECMH
  - Discuss unique stressors relevant to military families
2. Apply culturally relevant tools, strategies, and resources to help decrease and manage military family stress
3. Understand your role as mandated reporters through a family-centered lens

# Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH)

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IECMH is the developing capacity of the child from birth to 5 years old to:

- Form close and secure relationships;
- Experience, manage, and express a full range of emotions;
- Explore the environment and learn.

All in the context of family, community, and culture.

# Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH)

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- 10-16% of young children experience mental health concerns/conditions.
- Infants and other young children experience mental health symptomatology to include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and generalized anxiety.
- Exposure to family stress can have detrimental effects on a child's development, health, and overall well-being during infancy and early childhood.



# Reflect & Chat

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How do you define family stress?

How do you think military families' experiences of stress might differ? Can you name certain stressors that are unique to this population?

How does stress impact a family's ability to provide a supportive and nurturing environment for their children?

# Definition of Family Stress

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- Any stressor that concerns one or more members of the family, or the whole system, at a defined time.
- Impacts the emotional connection between family members, their mood, well-being, and the maintenance of the family relationship.

# Family Stress Theory

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- Hill (1949) examined how families adjusted to the return of soldiers from World War II.
- He suggested that families' responses to stress were dependent upon:
  - their previous experiences with stress;
  - the meaning of this specific stress;
  - the family context where the stress is experienced, including how the parent is coping; and
  - the inherent, as well as external, resources available to deal with the stress.

# Family Stress Theory

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- Posits that stressors can lead to family disruption and negative outcomes for children.
- It also suggests that supportive relationships and resources can help mitigate the negative effects of stressors, ultimately promoting family resilience and well-being.
- Family Stress Theory has been updated and refined over time to better understand the complex relationships between stressors and family functioning.

# Understanding Family Stress

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## Locus:

**External:** Stress that comes from outside the family  
Financial or work related stress

**Internal:** Stress that originates within the family  
Severe marital problems

# Understanding Family Stress (continued)

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## Intensity:

**Macro:** Common stressors (e.g. critical life events)

Birth, death, moving, etc.

**Minor:** “Everyday” stressors

Getting stuck in traffic

# Understanding Family Stress (continued)

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## Duration:

**Acute:** temporary and associated only with a single instance

Forgetting something at the grocery store

**Chronic:** stable and long lasting

Having an ill child

# Understanding Family Stress (continued)

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## Affected person:

One parent, both caregivers, a child, multiple children, the entire family



# Active-Duty Military Families

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- Active-duty service members actively serving in the Uniformed Service on a full-time basis.
  - Including: full time training duty, annual training duty, full-time National Guard duty, and attendance, while in the active service, at a school designated as a Military Service school by law or by the Secretary concerned

# Veteran Families

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- Veterans are former service members (who may or may not have service-connected disabilities) with at least 24 months of full-time service.

# Military Family Stress In-Context

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Like all families, military families experience many common struggles, such as:

- Child Care
- Elder Care
- Financial Stress
- Marital Issues
- Mental Health Issues
- Parenting Concerns
- Work-life Balance

However, military families also face unique challenges and children in military families have distinct childhood experiences when compared to civilian children.

- Separation
- Frequent Relocation
- International Moves
- Military Parent Deployment Status
- Military Culture

# Military Family Stress In-Context

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A study conducted in 2008 found that preschool-age children whose parents were currently deployed during wartime displayed higher levels of:

- emotional reactivity,
- anxiousness/depression,
- somatic complaints, and
- withdrawal compared to children whose parents were not deployed.

# Military Family Stress In-Context

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## Participants:

57 families with at least one young child (0-47 months) and an active-duty soldier serving at a midwestern post.

## Results:

- Young children with a deployed parent showed increased behavior problems during deployment and increased attachment behaviors at reunion compared with children whose parents had not experienced a recent deployment.
- Child behavior and attachment problems were related to many individual child and family characteristics, such as:
  - child age and temperament,
  - length of the deployment,
  - total time deployed parent was absent,
  - number of moves,
  - number of stressors reported by parent.

# Short-term Impact of Family Stress

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## Infants & Toddlers (0-3)

- Chronic eating or sleeping difficulties
- Inconsolable fussiness/irritability
- Inability to adapt to new situations
- Excessive hitting, biting & pushing of other children or withdrawn behavior
- Flat affect

## Preschoolers (3-5)

- Throws intense & more frequent tantrums
- Withdrawn; shows little interest in social interaction
- Repeated aggressive or impulsive behavior
- Not meeting developmental milestones
- Anxious & fearful in many situations

# Long-term Impact of Family Stress

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- Toxic stress is caused by strong, frequent, and/or prolonged biological responses to adversity.
- Long-lasting effects of exposure to toxic stress can impair:
  - brain development,
  - school readiness,
  - academic achievement,
  - and both physical and mental health outcomes across the life course.





# The Impact of Cultural Differences on Stress Management

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- Stress response, management of stress, and ways of coping varies significantly cross-culturally
- Active duty status and military culture may have a significant impact on stress response, management, and coping among military personnel.

Consider...

Perceptions of and Responses to Stress

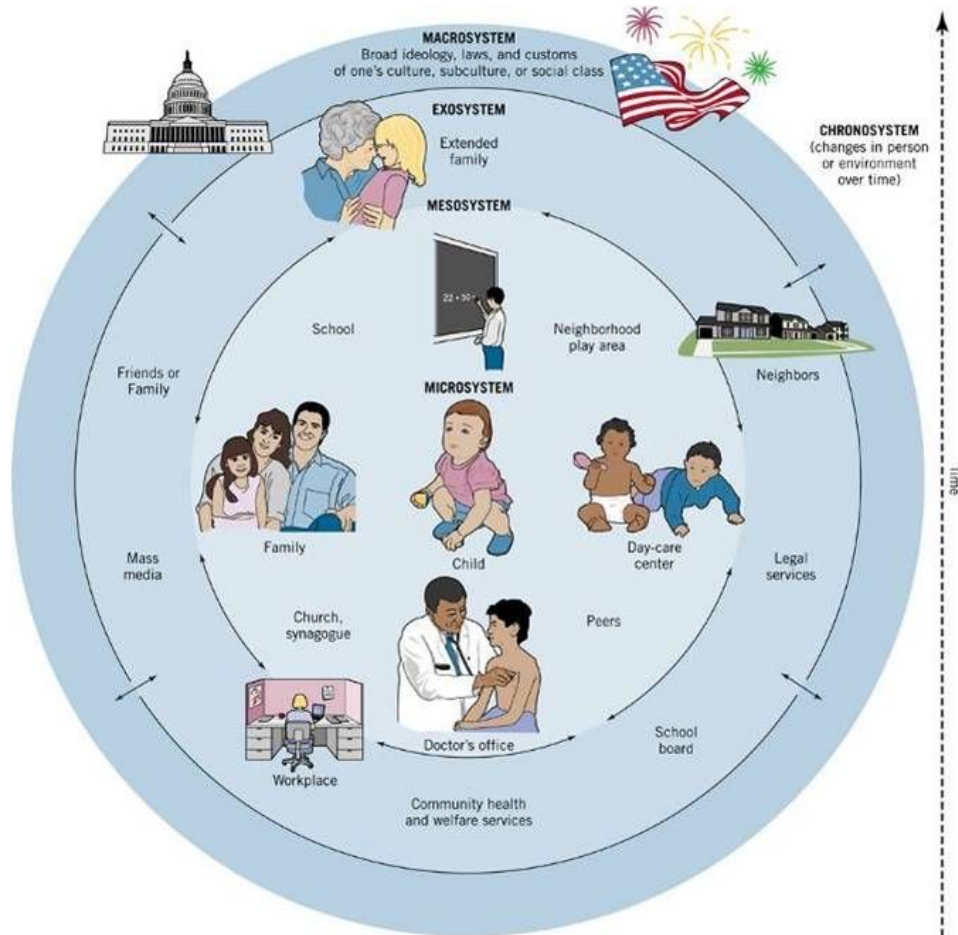
Availability of Social Support

Help-Seeking Behavior

Consider the "buddy system" & peer support

Consider organizational stigma around mental illness

# Consider Person in Environment



- Family stress is intertwined with the family, social, and cultural contexts in addition to the availability of support and resources.
- Consider the broader ecological and military family context and examine the “whole child.”

# Strategies for Stress Management: Tips for Practitioners

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- Lead with curiosity and use open ended questions to learn about the family's situation
  - Ask how/what questions not are/do questions.
    - What is going well? vs. Do you think things are going well?
    - How do you feel about...? vs. Are you feeling...?
  - Sometimes yes/no questions designed to be very specific can be useful.
    - Would it be helpful if I provided you with...?
    - Do you want me to find resources on....?
- Practice active and reflective listening

Demonstrating that you heard and understood what was communicated through words and body language



Responding by reflecting back what you believe the person thinks, feels, or is saying

# Strategies for Stress Management: Tips for Practitioners

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- Offer affirmations to establish and maintain a supportive relationship
  - "You really care for and love your family a great deal."
  - "You are doing your best, and your best is good enough."
- Ask permission and inquire about what information/resources are most helpful for families' unique circumstances
- Know the resources available in your community

# Strategies for Stress Management: Tips for Families

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- Maintain routines
- Know your own stress cues
- Practice self-care
- Engage in physical play
- Implement reflective quiet time- savor the moment
- Collaborate with your support team
- Practice open communication
- Meditation and mindfulness

# Mandated Reporting

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A Pathway to Resources and Support

# Assessing When and How to Report

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Most mandated reporters are very knowledgeable about their responsibility to report....

But **less than one-third** are equally as knowledgeable about the process of reporting.

Professionals may worry about the process and outcomes of reporting and have concerns about children being immediately removed from their homes.

# Assessing When and How to Report

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- Mandated Reporters are **required** to:

Report when they have **suspicious, reasons to believe, and/or knowledge** that child abuse, neglect, and/or maltreatment has occurred

- Mandated Reporters are **not required** to:

Investigate or gather evidence, have proof, or later prove that abuse, neglect, or maltreatment has occurred

This is the responsibility of **Child Welfare Services** and/or the **Family Advocacy Program**.

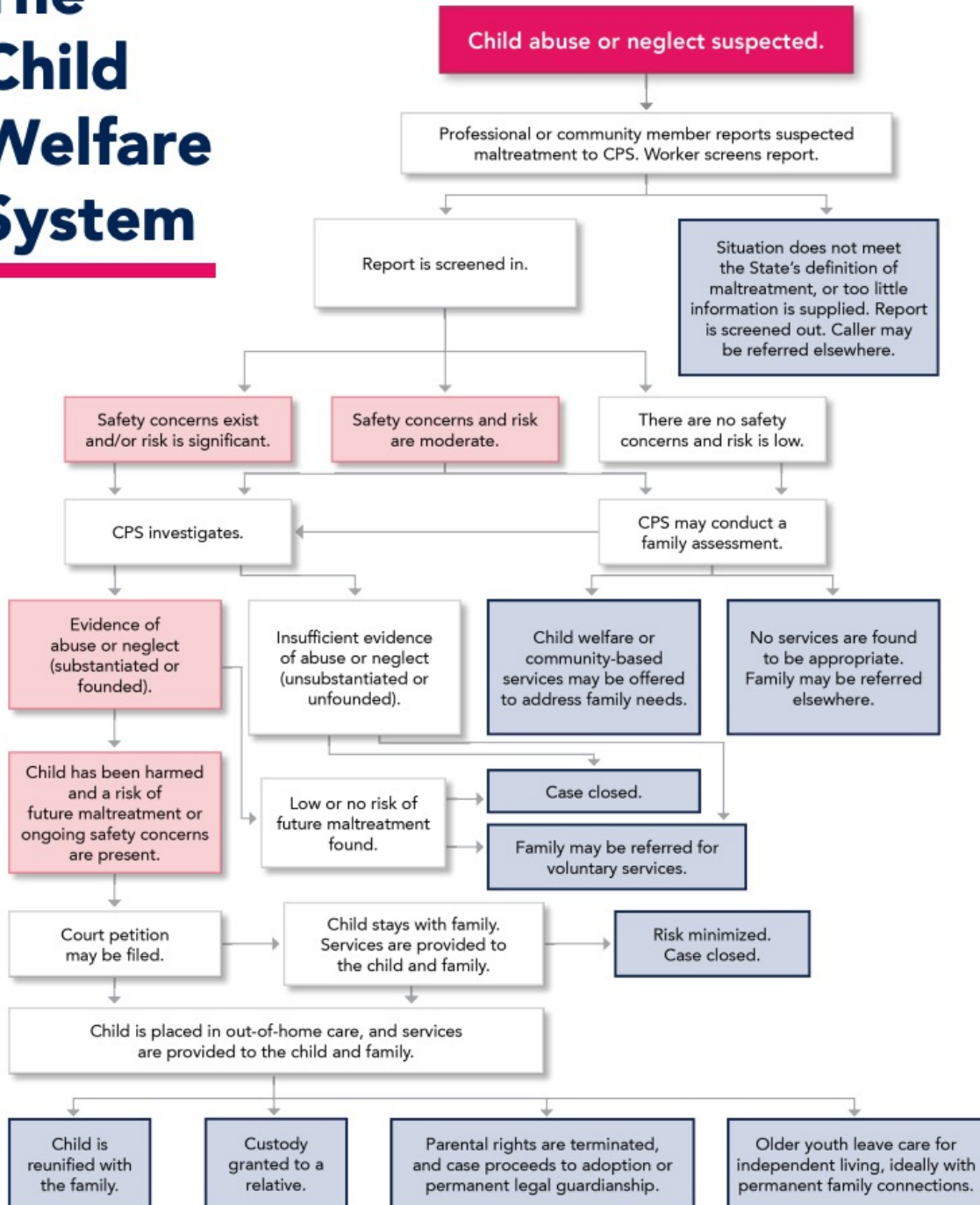


# Mandated Reporting and Military Connected Families

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- Talia's Law compels members of the armed forces, Department of Defense civilian employees, or contractor employees to **report any suspected abuse on a military post** to State Child Protective Services in addition to military personnel.
- Civilian care providers associated with the military and working with military connected families should report suspected abuse, neglect, and maltreatment to **both** the Family Advocacy Program and local/state Child Welfare Services.

# The Child Welfare System



A PDF copy of this flow chart can be found in the Event Materials at the Event page for today's webinar.

It is also available at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/cpswork.pdf>

# Recognizing & Reporting Child Maltreatment: Family Centered Lens

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Things to consider to maintain integrity with families:

Socioeconomic  
Status

Frequent  
Relocation

Immigration  
Status

Social Isolation

Culturally  
Sensitive Habits

Culturally  
Relevant Coping  
Mechanisms



# Putting it All Together

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Let's discuss the following case study and decide amongst our group the most appropriate and culturally responsive next steps to assist our military family.

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# Case Study Pt. 1: Identifying Family Stressors

# Miguel Acevedo

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- Five years old
- Displays:
  - Increased worry
  - Lack of interest in play
  - Trouble sleeping
  - “Tummy-ache” daily
- Diagnosed with autism at four years old
  - Demonstrates:
    - Rocking, Echolalia, Rigidity, Difficulty following directions, Repetitive behaviors, Restricted interests, Poor social skills
- Lacks friends
- Isolated from family due to manifestations of Autism
- Very attached to his mom, Maria
- Misses school due to separation anxiety, exacerbating academic and social difficulties



# Case Study Pt. 1 Discussion Questions

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- What stressors do you think this family is facing?
  - Locus: External & Internal
  - Intensity: Macro & Minor
  - Duration: Acute & Chronic
  - Affected Person



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# Case Study Pt. 2: Cultural Considerations

# Miguel's Family

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Mom & Dad



Sister



Paternal Grandparents



Paternal Aunt & Uncle & kids

# Maria & Cesar Acevedo

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- Born in the U.S. to immigrant families
- Settled in Southern California
- Maria's Upbringing
  - Parents spoke English
  - Diverse neighborhood
  - Childhood experiences "normal"
  - Close to sister and stepfather
- Maria's mother died when Miguel was very young.
  - Maria was deeply grieved and worries this may have affected Miguel.
- Maria is a homemaker
- Cesar is an active-duty service member
- Cesar has been deployed for seven months
- Maria reports feeling overwhelmed with caregiving and household duties



# Case Study Pt. 2 Discussion Questions

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What cultural factors important for us to consider?

Perceptions of  
Stress

Unique Responses  
to Stress

Coping Mechanisms

Risk & Protective  
Factors

Availability of Social  
Support

Help-Seeking  
Behavior

# Maria, Cesar, & Miguel Acevedo

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- Fought frequently when Miguel was young
- Briefly separated after an episode of domestic violence
- Maria and Miguel lived with her family during the separation
- Currently Maria and Cesar have reconciled
- Maria reports little support from Cesar's family despite living with them
- She is having difficulty sleeping and back pain
- Grocery shopping is particularly difficult
- Maria does not appear enthusiastic about Cesar's return. She is concerned about the disruption to the routines she has established in his absence.
- Miguel refuses to discuss his father's return.



# Case Study Pt. 3 Discussion Questions

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- How might Miguel's experiences with his parents' rocky relationship and domestic violence impact his mental and behavioral well-being?
- What support systems might be necessary for Miguel as he navigates his parents' reconciled relationship and the potential for future conflict?
- How might examining the broader ecological and military family context of Miguel's life help to provide a more comprehensive understanding of his well-being?
- What interventions or strategies might be effective for supporting Miguel's family in managing their stress?

# Key Takeaways

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- **Family stress can have significant short- and long-term impacts on IECMH.**
  - This is especially true for military families who may experience unique stressors related to military culture.
- **As practitioners, it is essential to offer family-centered support and guidance that can help promote positive outcomes for children's mental health.**
  - This includes uplifting the safety and well-being of family systems while considering the effect of underlying stressors.

# Contact Us

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# Upcoming Event

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## **IECMH: Practical Strategies to Support Attachment Relationships**

**Jan. 18, 2024, at 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. EST**

This webinar addresses what you, our participants, have asked for - implementing the information provided into practice. This session discusses ideas, strategies, and resources for fostering healthy attachment. Presenters also share ideas for supporting, sustaining, or repairing when attachment might be disrupted, such as during deployment or in situations where a caregiver and child might be separated.

**Continuing education credit will be available for this session!**



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