

Blue Star Families Blog #1: April is Month of the Military Child

I wrote a blog post for a non-profit that serves military families. See the link below. If you cannot access it, I have provided this PDF version.

<https://community.bluestarfam.org/blogs/andrea-coakley/2023/03/30/pcs-planning?CommunityKey=1eb9392e-47dc-4550-b23e-71a2c0e4ab9b>

Blue Star Neighborhood > Communities > Craig Newmark NY Tri-State Community > Blog

PCS Season Is Around The Corner. Are You Ready?

By Rosemarie Tracy, RN, BSN

If you've ever made a PCS (Permanent change of station) move with children, you get how stressful it can be for both you and your kids. If your first PCS move is rapidly approaching, read on for tips on how to be prepared, keep your sanity and reduce your kid's anxiety.

Overseas Screening

If you're about to experience your first overseas PCS or you're new to the military, you should know there is an overseas screening process. The purpose is to identify medical, dental, educational and potential duty limiting conditions or requirements of both service and family members.

Medical service capabilities in overseas locations may be limited. Overseas Screening (OSS) will determine if your family requires ongoing services that may not be available overseas.

Families undergoing this process should bring required OSS and EFMP (Exceptional Family Member Program) paperwork to their healthcare provider for completion and return to their screening coordinator.

If a determination is made by the receiving overseas medical coordinator that the patient's medical needs exceed local capability or if the environment may exacerbate a medical condition, then the service member may receive unaccompanied orders to the overseas location.

Concurrently, the servicemember could be reconsidered for an alternative duty assignment in an area with the needed services in order to keep the family together.

Exceptional Family Member Program

- [EFMP](#) is a mandatory program for all active duty servicemembers across all branches of service. EFMP identifies families with special medical, behavior health or educational needs and provides resources and referrals for potential services at your current and future duty stations.

Relocation Assistance Program

- The [Relocation Assistance Program](#) can assist you with everything from household goods shipments and youth sponsorship programs to housing options, childcare and newcomer orientations and more.

When the Orders Are Cut

Any kind of traveling with kids can be stressful, however, a PCS move entails specific caveats that are exclusive of military families. When the orders come and the planning has begun, don't forget to involve your children:

- Give children time to process the new plans.
- Make a list of places to visit at your new duty station.
- Carve out time to visit favorite places in your current location before you leave.
- Spend time with friends and family before you go.

Allowing children time to process the idea of moving will help them cope. Don't wait until the last minute and drop it on them. This only worsens their anxiety and will make things difficult for everyone.

Together, research your new duty station and plan outings to places of interest. Making plans to visit new places will stir their interest and generate excitement which will alleviate anxiety.

Spending time visiting your old haunts and time with family and friends can bring closure to this chapter of your lives. But it doesn't mean friendships and ties with family have to end. Let your kids collect contact information and plan to write letters, send pictures and schedule facetime calls.

It's important that kids understand the difference between deployment and a permanent change of station. Having heart to heart discussions with your kids will help them feel more confident about transitions when they know what to expect.

Don't be surprised if those heart to hearts draw out some deep emotions. Remember to be patient with children. Validate and encourage them so they feel heard.

Spin Up

Don't be afraid to reach out to your sponsor. Sponsors are assigned by the gaining unit and are matched by rank and family status to the family they are sponsoring. They will be knowledgeable about your new location and will be available to assist with in-processing on your arrival.

- **Network with military communities.** Connect with other families online and in your new community to gather advice and ideas for making your move.

There's a lot of families out there that have millions of miles under their belts who can share tips, do's and don'ts.

Check out social media platforms, and [blogs just like this one on the communities page here on Blue Star Families](#).

School Transition

Be sure to check out the [Military Family's Guide To School Transitions](#). There are many resources for making school transitions.

The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children addresses many educational transition issues encountered by military families including enrollment, placement, attendance, eligibility, and graduation.

- Military children are granted enrollment in sports teams even after deadlines or in the middle of a season.
- If you have a child with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), plan to communicate with your new district's Special Education Director to identify where services that your child may need are provided.
- For your high schooler, gather contact information for their teachers and coaches at the previous school who might be future references for your child.

Remember, you are not alone. Military spouses at your new location have learned the nuances of that location and are often very happy to share their experiences.

Be Ready Medically

Just before you are ready to depart, you will need to change your primary care enrollment to a new provider at your new duty location. Provide your new location, a city and zip code will help Tricare to [enroll](#) you with a new primary care provider.

- You will need a logon account at [MilConnect](#) to manage your Tricare benefits.
- The [TriCare](#) website is full of additional resources that may be helpful to you.
- Search [online reviews](#) of local doctors to see if they're the right fit for you and your family.
- It's a good idea to [request copies of your families medical records](#).

Sometimes a servicemember is scheduled for school or training in between departure from your current duty station and prior to arrival at your next duty station.

Perhaps your children will be spending time visiting family or friends before moving on to the new location. Having your records on hand can help healthcare providers with maintaining continuity of care anywhere you go.

Planning ahead for children with unique medical needs will ensure a smooth transition of care. Case managers at your current duty station will contact the gaining unit and begin coordinating to order medication, share information, and schedule appointments.

Plan for urgent care. Pop up ear aches and fevers love to show up during moves. Your family is authorized to visit urgent care locations without charge or referral.

The Breakdown

There is surely some packing the kids can handle. Give them a box and let them pack their toys or stuffed animals. Older children can pick out clothes they want for the trip and pack the rest of their stuff. This is also a good time for purging old things which will make for lighter traveling.

- Allow young kids to keep a box of easily accessible favorites such as toys, games or stuffed animals.
- Delegate a special job to kids around the moving process.
- Give them a choice of how their new room might be decorated.

Make sure your littles have access to their favorite teddy, blanket or toy. Children thrive on familiarity and routine.

Try to stick to their daily routine as much as possible. Consider breaking down kid's rooms last, to ensure less of a disruption to their routines.

Keep kids behind the curtain on the whole moving process so they feel like valuable little assets. Store a bin where they can place their old items for donation.

Ask an older kid to map a route on Google if you're planning to drive, or have them look up restaurants along the route that sound interesting for your meal breaks.

Kids love the idea of making exciting new changes to their rooms. Give them some choices in how they might set up their new room, for example paint colors or new bedding.

Planning for their new room will elicit enthusiasm.

Troop Movement

Every parent worries about how their children will sleep during travel. Some parents have used medications and supplements as a sleep aid.

[Benadryl \(diphenhydramine\)](#) is an antihistamine used for allergic reactions, hay fever and insomnia.

Many parents give their kids Benadryl on long car rides or during air travel. The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend the use of Benadryl for travel.

In some children, Benadryl can have a reverse affect and cause hyperactivity which is not what you want at 32,000 feet.

Always talk to your doctor before giving children any new medications.

[Melatonin](#) is a hormone produced in the brain that helps you fall asleep. It is sold over the counter as a supplement at many stores in several forms including gummies and tablets.

Talk to your doctor about using melatonin if you think it will help your child fall asleep during odd travel times.

- Look on the label for a logo that shows the product is certified by a third-party such as Consumer Lab, NSF International, UL and U.S. Pharmacopeia. This indicates it has been tested to make sure it contains the listed ingredients and is not contaminated. The Food and Drug Administration does not test melatonin or other dietary supplements.
- Start with the lowest dose and give it to your child at the time recommended by your pediatrician. Test it out before traveling.
- Keep melatonin and all medications out of children's reach. Call poison control if you suspect your child has overdosed. 800-222-1222

Comm

Long trips are riddled with continuous screen time. Think of ways to replace the screen with something else to occupy their time. On long trips this is challenging, regardless if you're in the car or on a plane.

However, watching their favorite movies during long trips does pass the time away. This is way better than Tik Tok! Download their favorites and remember to issue headphones especially for air travel.

- Talk about reasonable rules and set time limits on their device time.
- Try to limit screen time particularly before bedtime as blue light suppresses natural melatonin and sleepiness in children.
- Define for your children what too much screen time means to you.

There's nothing wrong with rewards such as a little candy or small gift cards when children comply with screen time reduction demands. Especially when traveling!

By all means use technology to your advantage! Engage the parental control setting on your devices and use a parent monitor apps such as:

- [Qustodio](#)
- [Google Family Link \(free\)](#)
- [Canopy](#)
- [BARK](#)
- [NetNanny](#)
- [Family Time](#)

Check Amazon.com or the dollar store for [Melissa & Doug](#) travel activities. Young children tend to love these. A variety of them will keep little hands busy and off the screen for a bit.

Scrap paper, crayons and stickers are excellent for travel as well. Kids can create masterpieces to hang on your new refrigerator or send to grandma.

Chow Time

Pack a small cooler tote with their favorite healthy snacks and drinks. Having snacks on hand and keeping them hydrated can stave off an impending tantrum on a long trip. Especially air travel as airlines do not provide many options for children.

Make frequent rest stops when driving. Finding healthy affordable meals on the road can be impossible. Don't worry about a few chicken McNuggets or quarter pounders with fries. They'll be back to arguing with you over eating their vegetables before you know it.

Choose your battles.

Medical Readiness

When that earache or fever pops up, you can logon to [MilConnect](#) and enter your location for all of the authorized contracted urgent care providers wherever you are during your PCS travels.

- Be ready for planned and unplanned changes! Store valuables in safes, folders, file cabinets, and digital clouds and ensure they are quickly accessible.
- **Keep on hand any immediate medicine your children may need.** Keep a three-month supply of all medications your children take to ensure there won't be a disruption in treatment while you are traveling and later, establishing relationships with your new medical team.
- **Store medical records in a safe and accessible place.** Medical records contain PII (personally identifiable information) and it's important to keep this information secure.
- **Use the Tricare Nurse Advice Line.** You can use the number 1-800 TRICARE (**1-800-874-2273**) to speak to a nurse who can provide medical guidance or connect you with a local hospital/emergency room.

By taking advantage of the resources available to you, all members of your family can be treated for medical needs before, during and after a move!

Boots on the Ground

It's all about your mindset. As a military family you're going to have to be flexible, resilient and always have a contingency plan.

You're going to have a million things to do. Take a deep breath, make a list and prioritize. It will all come together.

Make an appointment with your new health care provider. Bring documentation and prescriptions so your new medical team (including dental) is up-to-date on the needs and well-being of their newest patients.

Implement all those fun plans you made in your new location! It's important for you to have down time with the kids despite having that long to do list.

Remain positive, it will be stressful. Your kids will sense your anxiety which will make them anxious as well.

These moves don't happen automatically. It takes a great deal of thought and planning. If you stay consistent and stick to your schedule, children will be more comfortable with the transition.

When a military family like yours experiences a Permanent Change of Station (PCS), all family members can have a stake in each part of the move, so that children can stay healthy and in their routines before, during, and after they adjust to a new setting.

Follow these steps during a move, and your family can handle anything, every step of the way!

[Military One Source](#) is a standard for resources and information. Check it out.

Author's Bio:

Rosemarie Tracy is a registered nurse and health content writer. She has 19 years and counting of combined military service in the US Army and US Air Force- Air National Guard. She is a native New Yorker, living on eastern Long Island with her family.

Resources:

<https://sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org>

<https://milconnect.dmdc.osd.mil/milconnect/>

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/special-needs/family-support/special-needs-resources/>

<https://efmpandme.militaryonesource.mil>

https://www.militarychild.org/upload/files/resources/Military_Families_Checklist_Scho.pdf

<https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/16325>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6295443/>

<https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/meds/a682539.html>

https://www.healthgrades.com/?gppc=1&cid=pa_BRAND&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=BRAND&utm_term=Healthgrades&gclid=CjwKCAjw5dggBhBNEiwA7Pryalj9bn49-tKmQYWwwJukad2-qwKelTXnN0vjDookhX67obJBmA8KoxoCWsUQAvD_BwE

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4830653/>