



# EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION SUPPORTING MILITARY FAMILIES IN OHIO

**Children in military families at Wright Patterson Air Force Base face higher levels of developmental risk. Partnership between WPAFB's child development centers (CDCs) and Greene County Educational Services Center furnishes early childhood mental health consultation services to build capacity and resilience of parents and caregivers.**



**34,000 OHIO CHILDREN HAVE 1 OR 2 PARENTS IN ACTIVE MILITARY SERVICE.**

**MORE THAN 40% ARE BELOW AGE 6, A PERIOD WHEN CHILDREN ARE MOST DEPENDENT ON THEIR PARENTS' PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY.**

**1 IN 4 SHOW DELAYS ENTERING 1ST GRADE.**

## → CHALLENGE

Wright Patterson Air Force Base (WPAFB) is one of the nation's largest, most diverse, and most organizationally complex military installations. With 27,000 employees, WPAFB provides four [child development centers \(CDCs\)](#) to care for soldiers' young children. "Our parents want a place to leave their children with staff they can trust to keep the children safe, and to educate them too," says Vivian Gadson, director over all four CDCs. "Our goal is to make sure that while parents are away at work, we put them at ease and provide excellent care for their children so they can contribute to their mission and not have to worry about what is happening with their children's safety, health, and well-being."

Unfortunately, young children of deployed military parents have more post-deployment visits for mental health and child maltreatment. Mental health problems, injuries, and maltreatment after a parent's return from deployment are amplified in children of combat-injured parents. Increased preventive and intervention services are needed for young children as parents return from deployments. Child health and mental health providers are crucial to effective identification of these at-risk children to ensure effective care provision ([Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2015](#)). Young children's emotional reactions to the stress of their parents' military deployments can be particularly severe, including feelings of anxiety, fear, and worries about their own safety; worries about harm, injury, or death of their parent; war-related play/fascination with war, death, and weapons; increased activity level; decreased concentration or attention; withdrawal, irritability, or moodiness; angry outbursts and aggression; school phobia; difficulty separating from/clinging to parent, caregiver, or teacher; and decline in school performance or interest in learning.

WPAFB CDCs reached out to the Greene County Educational Services Center for support in addressing the caregiving, developmental, and learning challenges of pre-school-aged children.

## → SOLUTION

Through the Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant, Greene County had already successfully piloted an early childhood mental health consultation model that appeared to hold promise for the CDCs' special challenges. The WPAFB programs and Greene County early childhood experts embarked on a mutual endeavor to adapt the [Georgetown Model of Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation](#) (ECMH-C) to the special needs and circumstances of the young children they serve.

## → RESULTS

**“Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation has changed how we see challenging behavior, how we see the child, and how we see the parents.”**  
– *Director of one of Wright Patterson AFB’s four child development centers*



**[CLICK HERE TO WATCH A TODDLER IGNORE MILITARY PROTOCOL, AND HUG MOMMY ANYWAY](#)**



**WPAFB CDC AND GREENE COUNTY ECMH-C EXPERTS ARE RETHINKING TRADITIONAL TABOOS AGAINST AGGRESSIVE SUPERHERO OR “WAR PLAY” AMONG CHILDREN.**

WPAFB and Greene County ESC provide three types of early childhood mental health consultation services, using strategies and approaches that are sensitive to and respectful of the policies, practices, and culture of the military installation. Services provided to the children and families help address each child’s needs through individualized plans. Services provided to CDC classrooms help caregivers provide improved care to all children, in part by identifying and addressing attitudes, practices, and conditions that might otherwise undermine high-quality relationships between adults and children. And administrators, center directors, trainers, and other program leaders are learning how to promote practices and policies to benefit all of the children and adults in their settings.

ECMH-C services at Wright Patterson’s CDCs promote positive behavioral strategies for responding to and preventing challenging behaviors of children. They encourage adults to be well regulated and emotionally connected to help the children learn new social and emotional skills. At the same time, guidance discourages punitive responses when children use maladaptive behaviors to communication chronic stress, or in the absence of developmental skills.

ECMH-C services are expected to lower parents’ stress by helping prevent missed work due to suspension and expulsion of children, to improve their communication and relationships with providers, and to create a greater sense of community and collaboration. ECMH-C services appear to be fulfilling that promise, as data from Devereux Adult Resiliency Survey (DARS) show a reduction in reported stress, and increasing adult resilience related to reduction in stress.

Further, Greene County has used its Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant opportunity to begin to break down isolation of AFB families from the surrounding communities. Nationally, more than half of military families have indicated they do not feel a sense of belonging in their local civilian community ([2017 Blue Star Families Military Lifestyle Survey](#)). But Greene County ESC covers a large geographic area and serves eight school districts, many of which also have disproportionately high numbers of students in military families. Grace Shoessow, MS, leads a cross-district team that provides training and workforce development support that includes the WPAFB programs; and has arranged opportunities like a “resource fair” intended to increase collaboration and communication among workgroup members and practitioners.

## → SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Late in 2017 the Greene County ESC Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant team initiated a multifaceted effort to secure funding to sustain and expand ECMH-C services after initial grant funding ends in September 2018. CDC resources are being augmented with funding from Ohio’s Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, and the team has developed grant applications to secure necessary funding until longer-term strategies to apply Medicaid and other health care coverage can come to fruition.

For more information about the program, contact:

Grace Schoessow, MS, ECMH-C

(937) 638-8222

<http://www.greeneesc.org/>

[GSchoessow@greeneesc.org](mailto:GSchoessow@greeneesc.org)

Greene County Educational Service Center, 360 East Enon Road, Yellow Springs OH 45387