Learning and Social–Emotional Supports for Students Experiencing Family Transitions:
Meeting the Needs of Military, Foster, and Homeless Children

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Selected Research

Homelessness

- More than 1.5 million American children are homeless during the course of each year[1], and their numbers are rapidly growing[2].

- During the 2008–09 academic year, U.S. schools identified 956,914 students who were homeless, a 41% increase over 2 years[3].

- Homeless children are twice as likely as other children to repeat a grade in school, to be expelled or suspended, or to drop out of school, and their estimated high school graduation rate is less than 25%[4].

- Many homeless children are unable to attend school consistently because they constantly move to find shelter[5], lack the records needed for school enrollment[6], do not have transportation[7], or are ashamed of their situation[8].

- A higher proportion of school-age children of homeless families report mental disorders with impairment, such as disruptive behavior disorders, social phobias, and major depression, as compared to low-income children who are not homeless[9].

- Major factors that contribute to homelessness among children and youth include lack of affordable housing, financial insecurity, violence at home, behavioral health problems, lack of positive social support, and involvement in the child welfare system[10].

- About half of all school-age homeless children have problems with anxiety and depression, and 20% of homeless preschoolers have emotional problems that require professional care[11].

- A longitudinal study of homeless and runaway teenage adolescents revealed that 36% met lifetime criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder and 16% met 12-month criteria for the disorder[12].

Foster Care
- There were an estimated 423,773 children in foster care in 2009, with an average age of 9.6 years[13].

- Foster children have higher rates of placement in special education, school dropout, discipline problems, and involvement in the criminal justice system[14], and they exhibit poorer academic skills than their non-foster care peers[15].

- Changes in home placements of foster children are often accompanied by school transfers, which frequently lead to disruptions in educational services, enrollment delays, or temporary placements that result in the loss of days or even weeks of schooling[16].

- Placement in foster care is associated with increased educational risks, including absenteeism and tardiness, school changes during the year, disciplinary problems and suspensions, poor reading and math skills, lower scores on achievement tests, repeating one or more grades, and dropping out of high school[17].

- A longitudinal study of former foster children revealed that 48% were unemployed at ages 23 and 24 (with a median income of $8,000), compared to 76% of a nationally representative sample[18].

- When compared to all households with children, those with foster children are more likely to be low income, have severe financial housing burdens, receive public assistance, have a householder who did not work in the previous year, and have a householder who did not complete high school[19].

- Delays in language development are common among foster children under the age of 6, highlighting the need for early identification and intervention efforts as they enter school[20].

- There is a lack of coherent policy regarding how to identify and address the needs of children in foster care in the United States[21].

Military Dependents
- About 1.35% of the 1.96 million military dependents attended Department of Defense Educational Activity schools in the United States in 2009[22], suggesting that an overwhelming majority of military dependents in the United States attend public schools.

- There were 700,000 children with at least one parent deployed in 2007[23].

- A parent's deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan has potentially long-term adverse effects on a child's standardized test scores in most academic subjects, with the most detrimental effects occurring during the actual deployment[24].

- The rate of child neglect in U.S. Army families is significantly elevated during periods of deployment, with the highest rates coinciding with periods of large-scale deployment[25] [26].

- Having a primary caregiver deployed to a war zone for an indeterminate period of time is one of the most stressful events a child can experience[27].

- Move-related stressors negatively affect military dependents' adjustment to new school environments[28].

- Some female adolescents with a deployed parent may demonstrate increases in risky sexual behaviors and self-injury in an attempt to keep the parent home[29].

- Military dependents experience significantly higher stress scores[30] and rates of emotional and behavioral difficulties compared to national averages[31].

Endnotes

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