

## Military OneSource Podcast — C&Y Mental Health First Aid Course

### **Episode transcript**

#### **Intro voiceover:**

Welcome to the Military OneSource podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit [militaryonesource.mil](http://militaryonesource.mil).

#### **Bruce Moody:**

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody.

Military youth programs are designed to support military children as they transition from childhood to adulthood. Youth centers are available on almost every installation. Centers are staffed with trained professionals who understand how to connect with youth, support them and recognize the signs of stress. Youth mental health continues to be a nationwide concern. In response to the continuing need for mental health support for youth, the Defense Department developed the Mental Health First Aid course to help youth program service providers provide tailored intentional support for military children and youth. Joining me are two child and youth professionals, Chelsea McIntyre and Tina Bolt. Welcome to the podcast, and why don't you tell me where you are and tell me a bit little bit about what you do?

#### **Chelsea McIntyre:**

Hello, my name is Chelsea and we are both located at Naval Base Kitsap in beautiful Washington state. And I, Chelsea, have been working with CYP since about 2008. I've worked in management starting in 2010, and then I transitioned to my role as a trainer, a training specialist, in about 2014. As a trainer, I train the CYP professionals when they come on board to our programs. Whether they're coming on board to work with infants or preschoolers, or school-agers, or teens. Additionally, I train on various topics each month to support the staff in their role. I also coach and mentor the CYP professionals in our programs.

#### **Bruce:**

And Tina, welcome to the program.

#### **Tina Bolt:**

Hi, thank you. Again, my name is Tina and, like Chelsea said, we're in Washington state, at Naval Base Kitsap. My role has been youth director at the Jackson Park School Age Care program, where I support military families and youth.

**Bruce:**

My first boss was kind of a free spirit, and was getting ready to retire and decided she could go anywhere on the planet. And went to the Kitsap community.

**Tina:**

Oh, great. We love our community here. It's outdoors and just, it's great.

**Bruce:**

That's wonderful to hear. Chelsea and Tina, you both work directly with children and youth, and you're also working with the staff, as well. In your experiences, why is mental health support so important for our military youth?

**Tina:**

I think with the diversity of youth and staff, we work with in military families with deployments, and the unique circumstances our families are given in a military community, I think mental health is needed just for helping kids with resiliency. And just those supports, and being able to help, and just try to help meet those families' needs. And have the references and referrals, and tips, and tricks, and things to be able to give them to help them.

**Bruce:**

We're talking about mental health, but specifically what, are we talking about stress or anxiety, depression? What specifically are we talking about or a combination thereof?

**Tina:**

I think a combination of all of it. Just in the work at the teen center, teens dealing with deployments, depression of being just with one parent. I've had teens that were dealing with a lot, significant mental health issues from cutting, from suicidal thoughts. That's why this class was instrumental in giving more supports, and me more knowledge on how to handle some of those delicate situations.

**Bruce:**

I see. The delicate situations are no doubt there. Are you looking at a range of mental health behaviors and actions? I hear cutting is probably on one end of the spectrum, but are you also responding to lower-level aspects of stress and anxiety and depression?

**Tina:**

Absolutely. Just from some behavioral tendencies and outburst that come out as anger, but maybe some significant other things going on in their lives and their backgrounds.

**Chelsea:**

I think that there's a lot of stigma and misinformation, and personal bias, associated with mental health. Children are facing these mental health challenges, and the youth in our care deserve adults who can support them and who are prepared to support them.

As much as we value physical and emotional safety, we as a professional organization can grow, and do better at meeting the needs of our participants when they're facing mental health challenges.

**Bruce:**

What ages are we talking about when we're talking about mental health challenges?

**Chelsea:**

We both work primarily with school-age care, which is 5-year-olds to 12-year-olds. We see the starts of some mental health crises that are happening as they're getting older. But definitely in the teen program you're seeing much more significant needs, and much more diverse needs for mental health services.

**Bruce:**

You've both been doing this for a number of years, and so you've seen the impact of military life and deployments and moves but, of course, COVID-19 was just such a massive impact. To your view, what has been COVID as an impact on the mental health of our youth?

**Chelsea:**

We had what was our normal everyday lives and it got shook up, and we as adults were trying to maneuver and not have the answers for children. Children were trying to live their childhood and live their best lives. They didn't know what was going on either, and everyone was just trying to make it through. And make it through to the next day and support one another.

**Bruce:**

Do you have any examples that you can share that would help us understand what you're talking about?

**Tina:**

I think socially, one example for, it's I think the social needs for youth during the pandemic and COVID, and I think we're still seeing some of the repercussions of it, is just being able to kind of socialize. I think especially with teens, and I'm going to use a teen I work with, they're wanting to isolate a little bit more. And not wanting to be as social as they were pre-COVID. I think their social needs, they're still trying to come back to a norm and friendships and peers.

**Chelsea:**

I think they were definitely becoming dependent on technology. With our dependence on going to schools because we had our kids who didn't go back to schools, but they were doing school online. There was a lot of technology that limited their interaction, limited the time where they could have their peer-to-peer relationships. Trying to maneuver that now where you have second-graders, third-graders, who are struggling

with those relationship pieces because they didn't have that opportunity in kindergarten.

**Bruce:**

You're really introducing socialization on a group scale to a lot of these age groups. When you look at the course itself, this is, we're calling it the Mental Health First Aid Certification, how is that helping you in the work that you're trying to do with the young people?

**Tina:**

I think, first off, it made me more aware in acknowledging the mental health needs of the children and youth we work with. I think, first off, just being that awareness. I just think giving us extra tools, I call it my toolbox, extra tools in my toolbox, and helping support the youth we serve.

**Chelsea:**

I think also helping us identify what are the typical behaviors versus concerning behaviors. Something that I do, I'm more aware of conducting wellness checks, of just checking in, utilizing the knowledge gained from the course as my compass. I'm able to respond with more confidence when I'm there to support a child or a family. The course really helps the participants because there were real-life scenarios, and we had hard, uncomfortable topics to talk about. Now, I don't have that hesitation of what to do. I can maneuver the sensitive topics with care and I have a plan. I know what to do when there's a person who might be in a crisis.

**Bruce:**

In saying that you have a plan that you feel empowered to respond to a particular situation, do you then want to encourage your colleagues to take this course?

**Chelsea:**

Absolutely.

**Bruce:**

OK. You're describing what you got out of this course. Why would you want your colleagues to be taking this course as well?

**Chelsea:**

I think that there is a stigma regarding mental health still, and the reality is that people need people who care. The more mental health first aid responders who are around who can maneuver those hard conversations, and adequately support our youth, helps everybody as a whole. If somebody were to need an EpiPen, we would know how to administer that. We need to prioritize that mental health first aid, and the time is now to take action to support children. And to support the teens and the youth in our programs.

**Bruce:**

Chelsea and Tina, this is a really interesting conversation. I wonder if there are mental health resources that you would recommend for parents or youths who might be listening?

**Tina:**

Well, we have Fleet and Family Services on base that have counseling and support available to help our families, would be one of the first resources I would use.

**Chelsea:**

I think it's so important to identify a trusted adult and start the conversation. We have different experiences maneuvering around the world and starting the conversation is the first step.

**Bruce:**

Chelsea McIntyre and Tina Bolt, thank you so much. Before we sign off, is there anything else that you'd like to share regarding our military youth and mental health?

**Chelsea:**

I wanted to talk about the benefits of this course. The course does require pre-work and the participants review the information. It's a baseline of information before you start the course. And then, you're reviewing the information, there's opportunities for discussion, and that promotes reflection of various scenarios. And creating a feasible plan of action. The scenarios and the role-playing help the participants get their feet wet and practice what they've learned. That gives the first aid responder a good understanding of what they need to do to help a person that might be in crisis.

**Tina:**

Ditto, again, to what Chelsea said, but I feel like with having my time as a team coordinator and as a youth director, I feel if there's a priority of getting our people through this, I think starting with our teen centers. And getting our people trained, the things we went through in the course and what we learned was so much based on our teen programs. And would've been beneficial to me to have those tools when I was at the teen center.

**Bruce:**

Excellent. Well, we really appreciate this conversation. Really appreciate what you do with our military youth, and we hope to have you back on the podcast. Thank you so much for joining us today.

**Chelsea:**

Thank you.

**Tina:**

Thank you.

**Bruce:**

All right. I want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We are a website, a call center, we're all over social media and we are a podcast. Subscribe wherever you listen to your podcasts, because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thanks so much for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.