

**Program title:** School Liaison Podcast – Geo-Dispersed Families

**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](https://militaryonesource.mil).

**Bruce Moody:**

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. Today, we're going to be talking about support to geographically dispersed families, specifically support that we provide through school liaisons. So, those are two concepts that we're going to discuss, bring together, and we'll do that with our guest, who is Kristin Fernandez. Kristin is a Marine Corps school liaison. Kristin, it's great to have you with us today.

**Kristin Fernandez:**

Thank you so much, Bruce, for having me. It's a pleasure being here today and talking about our very important topic about geographically dispersed families and how does school liaison support that.

**Bruce:**

Absolutely. So, we're going to unpack both of those topics. Now, you work with the Marine Corps, but really this is a purple conversation. We have school liaisons who support families within all of the branches. So, really, it's great to have your perspective on this, but from any family, from any service, will get something from this conversation. Kristin, let's just begin. What are we talking about when we're looking at geographically dispersed families? What groups of people are we looking at?

**Kristin:**

Sure. That's a great question. First, I just want to kind of define what geographically dispersed means. Basically, this would mean that the family of the service member, they are living either close to an installation, a military installation, or they may not be living as close to an installation. So, they're dispersed further away.

Sometimes, when school liaisons are supporting those families, we want to definitely encourage them to live on an installation if they can so they're not as dispersed, but let's say they do have to live further away and they are further dispersed from military installation. Sometimes, it's not always a Marine Corps base. So, when you spoke earlier about it being a purple conversation, if it's a Marine Corps family that's geographically dispersed, they may not be living near a Marine Corps installation or on a Marine Corps installation. It may be a naval base, an Army base, an Air Force base. When we talk

about this, it is across the board. There could be different branches of service that are geographically dispersed, but the families that are dispersed, they are living either on a military installation or they're living close to the military installation, but they're still geographically dispersed from a lot of the programs and resources.

**Bruce:**

Then, we would also include recruiters in among the geographically dispersed?

**Kristin:**

That is correct. Then, diving into that second part, who we mean by geographically dispersed military families and military service members is the unique part about the installation that I work at is a recruit depot. So, you have those recruiter families that the service member went through recruiter school, and now they're getting their first assignment for recruiting duty. That's going to be their next three years in the service. So, we're talking about these recruiter families that are out there getting dispersed into different areas throughout the United States.

You also have the National Guard and reserve families that are also geographically dispersed. Sometimes, there's not always an installation close for these National Guard and reserve families. So, when you talk about access to resources, which I think we'll probably be getting into a little bit more in this conversation, but it is very dispersed for them. It could be scarce. Also, too, just speaking in purple language here, any family that gets PCS orders, we call it, or permanent changes of station, their next duty station could be in a geographically dispersed location where there's not a whole lot around. So, the populations, they do vary, but specifically for the installation that I work in, it would be our recruiter families that fit this category.

**Bruce:**

Right. So, we have a family living out in the community quite some distance from an installation, and they have a child. Their children are in the local school. As a school liaison, what are the sort of challenges that you see that these military families are experiencing?

**Kristin:**

That's a great question. More often than not, sometimes those civilian schools or those public schools, they don't always understand that military lifestyle. They don't always understand the dynamic of a recruiter family. For example, our recruiters, they're working long hours. We're talking 12- to 15-hour days. Sometimes, they don't always make it home for dinnertime. Sometimes, they don't always make it home to tuck their kiddo into bed. So, it's hard for the schools that are not on an installation that are out in the civilian community to understand that whole dynamic. When a student goes to enroll into that school, and let's say they are the only military student in that school, sometimes, it's hard for those students to, one, make friends, and two, transition in and kind of fit into that new school. Everything is so different. They're so used to the friends they had, the neighborhood they came from last, trying to connect with the teachers,

but, of course, try to establish the voice for themselves of how unique they are and how special they are as a military-connected student.

So, they are experiencing a lot of challenges when it comes to that transition from school to school. Sometimes, it's specific things for recruiter families that they have a challenge with. Specifically speaking, let's say at their last location, they had a child that may have been attending a gifted and talented program at the school. Then, they get their recruiting duty orders, the family follows the recruiter, and they get to enroll into the new school. Sometimes, the school doesn't offer those programs. So, it's not always a consistent or continuum across the board with education. It does vary quite often from state to state, especially if you're not attending a school on an installation. So, the programming or the courses offered is not always consistent. Then, that can pose as a challenge when it comes to having to not repeat courses and kind of keeping on a scheduled track to graduate.

So, you do kind of run into things when it comes to programs and courses that are offered between school to school and transitioning in. You also have that with particular sports, as well. So, we have quite a few families in the recruiter population that maybe their child was playing a particular sport or extracurricular and it may not be offered at that new school. Then, as a school liaison, it's really important for us to get to know these families and kind of know what their students are interested in, what they like, what they've taken as far as courses and things like that. Then, if it's not offered at that school, what other types of resources and supports and programs are out there in the community that can help kind of fill that void if the school is not offering it?

**Bruce:**

OK. Let me get into some of the things that you talked about. For a family who is trying to track their child's education and they're seeing things that are not quite right or maybe they have questions, what is the action that they take to bring in a military school liaison?

**Kristin:**

Sure. Yeah. When a family has a need or a concern and they reach out to a school liaison, whether it's myself or sister branches, the first thing we want to do is we want to listen carefully. So, we're giving the family or the spouse or whoever's calling us, if it's the service member, we want to give them that opportunity to express everything that's been going on. We're listening carefully to those needs and those concerns.

At the same time, we're taking important notes of things that we know we're going to want to provide some resources and tools for. We want to know exactly how best to support them. So, that's why we're taking some notes and we're active listening to everything that's been going on. Sometimes, families that have those concerns, they may just need somebody to talk to. A lot of times, we just have families, yes, they do have some concerns and we're going to provide them some supports and resources, but a lot of times, if they're the only military family, they're geographically dispersed, but let's say they do live in more of a civilian community and they're the only military family,

they need someone to connect to, someone that's going to understand those unique needs and challenges that come with military lifestyle and that come with a military-connected student. So, it is. It's a conversation. It's a genuine conversation that school liaisons are having with these families.

Then, once we know what the needs are and how to best support their needs, based on what they've told us, we want to make sure that this feedback and these resources we're providing are responded to within a timely manner because they live so far or they are geographically dispersed, that the timing is definitely important when it comes to getting back to these families. So, we want to respond back. Typically, that's within a 24- to 48-hour window of time.

Now, I will say, sometimes, depending on what the need is and the supports that we're providing, sometimes, it takes a little bit longer because we may need to call the school of concern or the school that these things are happening at. How can we educate some of these schools about, one, what the military lifestyle is? Some of them may not be familiar. Also, two, what are those unique needs of military-connected students?

Sometimes, schools are not always aware of that, like we were talking about earlier. If it's things that we're calling to find out and get a point of contact, sometimes, we're not able to if maybe it's a time difference, as well. Sometimes, we're not able to respond within that 24- to 48-hour time frame. It may be a little bit more complex of what we're providing, but we definitely touch base as a school liaison and say, "Hey, we need a little bit more time." The resources that we're providing, we need to make sure that we have that accurate amount of info, so then we can provide that information.

We also do want to collaborate with various agencies, and this is not limited to, but it does include Military OneSource, of course. Sometimes, we're collaborating when providing resources for Military Child Education Coalition, Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission. Some of those agencies, we may have to collaborate with, and it may be a little bit more time that we need to make sure whatever those issues or concerns are getting resolved.

Because we don't live local, I do partner a lot with the sister school branch school liaisons. So, Navy school liaisons, Army, Air Force and Coast Guard. I think, collectively, across the board, if you are a military school liaison or school liaison officer, you are collaborating and partnering with those other branches of service to make sure that, "Hey, is there something locally that you know about that I can provide to this family in regard to, let's say, some soccer teams or clubs that they can be a part of out in the community that may not be provided at the school?" Maybe there are some tutoring resources out in town where this family lives that I can connect them with that that school liaison at the local level may know about.

**Bruce:**

Kristin, this is a really interesting conversation. There is a whole lot here. We could come back again and again because there's so many different areas because, as you say, there are the individual challenges of ensuring that a teacher understands that the parent is a

recruiter and is working crazy hours, but then you get into the other interstate issues, especially the state civics classes that they have to take and making sure that they transfer from state to state so you don't have to do it all over again. There's a lot to cover here, but, Kristin, if you could give any sort of final thoughts with regard to a school liaison and what they can do for our military families.

**Kristin:**

Sure. I'd just really like to highlight what our depot has been doing here in San Diego, California. We've had a lot of great ideas and a lot of things that have rolled out that I would just like to highlight, if that's OK.

**Bruce:**

Yeah, yeah, please.

**Kristin:**

One thing with our recruiter families is, whatever recruiting district they get an assignment in, we have what's called a District Spouse Orientation Course or DSOC for short, as we call it. These are opportunities for spouses of the service member or recruiter to come out and get a three-day worth orientation course of, one, what it's like to be a recruiter spouse, what kind of dynamics and challenges are they going to face being a recruiter family, and all kind of different things and resources, guest speakers that come out to relay what they can do to provide support while they're on recruiting duty. So, these spouses get a really good opportunity to do that. So, as a school liaison here at MCRD San Diego, I'm able to get invited to some of these orientation courses to really talk to the spouses in person, and they get to put a face to the name, but they know that I am going to be their point of contact.

It's just been a great conversation, a great presentation that I'm able to provide either from a virtual level, of course, with COVID guidelines that we've had in the past or in person. So, I would just encourage you out there, if you are a part of the Marine Corps and you are a recruiter family, that if you haven't gone to one of those District Spouse Orientation Courses, that I highly recommend it. It's just great for a geographically dispersed family that may not be close to an installation, that you get to meet points of contact that you can interact with and get support from.

On another note, from a social media platform standpoint, here at MCRD, or Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, we are doing a lot of things on social media. We have a very active Facebook that we have put out there, and I would think across the board, yes, a lot of our school liaisons out there, not just myself, but that's one way that we're able to put our programs out there, put our workshops out there, but we're very active on our Facebook and our Instagram.

We have also just gained access to YouTube where we've rolled out what's called BookIN It With SLP, School Liaison Program for short, and we provide a monthly newscast about trending topics in education, hot topics that we've seen that have come across our desk as a school liaison here for MCRD, San Diego. We kind of put together

some hot topics and have a discussion every month on YouTube. We make these videos for our families, and we encourage our recruiter families and our geographically dispersed families to check those out because they're just a great way to not only gain some information, but they can also respond and comment to those videos, and we can have a conversation and dialogue, whether it's we then create a next video in inspiration of their topic or comment or we're getting in contact with that family, in specific.

**Bruce:**

Well, we covered a lot of ground today.

**Kristin:**

Yes, sir.

**Bruce:**

A lot of ground. Kristin, I really hope that you come back because I really think that there are any number of topics that we could jump into and really further unpack for military families. Thank you, Kristin Fernandez, for joining us today.

**Kristin:**

Thank you so much for having me again. It was my pleasure. I am looking forward to future episodes to be a part of.

**Bruce:**

Good. We're definitely going to have you back. I want to let everybody know that the stuff that we're talking about, if you go into the program notes, we're going to have a couple of links. One of them will be to Military OneSource, and you can read about the School Liaison Program. Also, Military OneSource is actually a fleet of several websites, and one of them is called Military Installations. Think of it as the Yellow Pages for military installations. So, you can go to an installation, find it in the directory, and in that listing for that particular installation, you will find the contact information for the local school liaison. All right? So, we're going to definitely return to this space. Thanks a lot, Kristin.

**Kristin:**

Thank you so much.

**Bruce:**

I want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We're a website, several websites, actually. We're a call center. We are all over social media, and we're a podcast. So, go ahead and subscribe. We cover a lot of issues to help military families navigate military life.

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