

Program title: Podcast: Adoption and Foster Care**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.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. The decision to start or expand a family is a deeply personal one. Choosing adoption or foster care can put a couple on a journey that is long, complex and emotional. And we're going to talk about adoption and foster care today.

Our guest is Heather Brouillard. Heather is a team lead with Military OneSource. We're going to talk about help that military families have available to them, resources and support that can help them navigate their adoption or foster care journey. So, let's just get right to it. Heather, welcome to the podcast.

Heather Brouillard:

Thanks, Bruce. I'm excited to be here.

Bruce:

I'm glad to have you with us today. This is a really wonderful topic. I'm excited to talk about it, so let's begin. Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself? We mentioned you're a team lead. What do you do and what's your background?

Heather:

Sure. Yeah. I've been a part of the Work Life Department of Military OneSource since 2017. I began as a Work Life consultant, so that was directly supporting service members in their families on a variety of topics, including adoption and foster care. In 2019, I became team lead of the Work Life Department and have continued to support the mission by now leading adoption consultants and the entire team just to ensure that our participants' questions do get answered. I also have a master's degree in counseling and I come from a large military family myself. This allows me to connect with all types of participants and, honestly, that's something I thoroughly enjoy doing.

Bruce:

Excellent. Well, we're glad to have you with us today. Let's just jump right into it. Basically, what does Military OneSource offer military parents who are considering either adoption or foster care?

Heather:

Military OneSource offers adoption specialty consultations to help parents through really every aspect of both adoption and foster care. So, although the title of the consultation is adoption, consultants also provide information and support for foster care. Our consultants are specially trained in military adoptions and foster care because we know that being in the military, there are very specific and unique situations. We're just here to help parents navigate the process.

Bruce:

So, before we get too far into the process and all of that, let's kind of get an idea of what it feels like. Can you share some stories, people that you've worked with who've gone through the process of adoption and foster care?

Heather:

Yeah, I've had some really good experiences actually, just kind of connecting with families and getting them through the process. Some of them really do stick out to me.

For example, I once worked with a family who had just recently PCS'd to Germany. They had originally started the adoption process while they were still stateside. So, they had all the information they needed. It was just time to actually get started. But most of the time, one of the first steps in the adoption process is a home study. But with this family being in Germany, they were having a really hard time finding someone who could do the home study. So, they reached out to social workers on base, and they were just really still stuck. That's why they called Military OneSource. And through an adoption consultation, I was able to research actually two agencies in the United States who fly social workers out to military families. So, they were OK going to Germany and they could complete the home studies for this family. So, once I connected the family with these agencies, they were able to move forward with the adoption process.

And that actually reminds me of another situation because with our military families being all over, we have unique situations. Another time I was working with a service member who, she was originally from Jamaica. She still had some family over there. So, she was interested in adopting two young family members who were still in Jamaica. And she had started the process, but she kept hitting roadblocks. So, she called us really frustrated. Again, through an adoption consultation, I informed this service member that this was actually a kinship adoption because it was her family members. So, this one works a little bit differently than going through an adoption agency. I was able to provide her with her family court information as well as adoption attorney information. And this one was really heartwarming for me because she called me back some time later, just to let me know that the process was finally complete. The two children were adjusting well and they were absolutely loving school, specifically, in America.

Bruce:

That's fascinating. You bring up a couple of things and listening to you describing it, I think that when people imagine calling up Military OneSource because they want

information about adoption, that you've got some fact sheets and some links that you're going to provide to people who call up. But it's a whole lot more. You get really involved. I mean, you really get actual resources. You get in touch with them and connect the dots with the people, help them understand what they're really dealing with and the proper way forward. Can you talk a little bit about that for us?

Heather:

Absolutely. We definitely follow up with our participants. In addition to consulting with them in the moment, we then send them all that referral information, but we follow up with them as well. Typically, when we send the information, we're having another phone conversation with them, but then about a week later, we follow up again because that gives the participants time to look over the information. Maybe they need some time to think of some more questions that they'll have for us. It's sort of a check-in just to see how else we can be of assistance.

Bruce:

So, when they call in initially and then they call back or you call back as followups. So, there's continuity, they're not just calling the call center each time. There's continuity. There's an awareness of what this family is working toward. Do I have that right?

Heather:

Yes, exactly. And we let them know that from the beginning, too. It's not like they're stuck in limbo wondering, "Should I call Military OneSource back or not?" They know that they can expect a call from us within a week to catch up with them, check in, see if they're needing anything else.

Bruce:

Well, honestly, this is really cool. Who's eligible for this? Because we do serve military families, but what categories of service members would be eligible to take advantage of these consultations?

Heather:

Military OneSource adoption specialty consultations are available to active duty, National Guard and reserve service members, regardless of their activation status, as well as their immediate families.

Bruce:

OK. Good. So, let's start from the beginning of the process. So, you have a family and they're considering adopting or fostering a child. What specific adoption and foster care assistance can they expect from an adoption consultation?

Heather:

When someone calls in looking for information on adoption or foster care, we can help them, whatever step in the process they are at. If they are at the very beginning of

adoption and they just want to learn about the different types of adoption, we can give them that information.

Maybe they are in the beginning of the process and now they need to get the home study part going. We can help them by giving them basic information on home studies. We can also put them in touch with agencies in their area that offer home studies. In the beginning, a basic information on the general process. Home studies, length of time. A lot of times people want to know what sort of costs they can expect that are associated with adoption and with foster care because the costs do vary quite a bit between those two options. A lot of times, families will call in looking for financial assistance.

There are military-related programs that can help with that, as well as some tax credits that do apply to military related adoptions. And then, like I said, for those families who are a little bit further along, maybe they need an agency in their area. We can put them in touch with agencies and just confirm what sort of services they offer because it's not just placing them with a family. There may be post-adoption services or support groups for new parents, things like that.

And then, when it comes to foster care or adopting through foster care, we can refer them to their state or county agency, just depending on what area they're in. Foster care usually goes through a specific licensed agency, and every state does vary a little bit with foster care or foster-to-adopt. We can just help them understand the requirements and how maybe a PCS can affect wanting to foster-to-adopt or adopt. Just in general, we can provide information on really the agency support groups and just general literature.

Bruce:

When you describe the type of support that you provide, does it range with families? I would imagine that there're some families who probably would benefit by saying, "We as a couple have decided to adopt. We have no idea what that entails." And they call Military OneSource. And then maybe at the other end there's people who say, "No, we're going to do this, we know what to do. But we just have one or two questions about this and that part of the process." Do you support that range?

Heather:

Yeah, Bruce, actually, that's exactly what we do. I would say more often than not, families are calling in saying, "We have decided we want to adopt, but we have no idea where to start." Those are actually my favorite kind of consultations because the families are so excited and just really grateful for the information. It turns into a really wonderful conversation. But if families call in and they just need a specific question answered or specific literature, we can certainly do that, too. Adoption consultations are really comprehensive in that nature.

Bruce:

OK. So besides talking to an adoption consultant, what other adoption and foster care resources does Military OneSource offer to families?

Heather:

With Military OneSource providing a centralized location for adoption and foster care information, there's a landing page on our website, militaryonesource.mil. The adoption and foster care landing page offers resources for many aspects. All these things that I have mentioned, including the information about different types of adoption, foster care, sometimes families are looking specifically to adopt children with special needs and what the agencies may consider a special need. So, there's information on that. And then, of course, the financial reimbursements because we know adoption is quite expensive. So, definitely some good resources there. Like I said, those resources can be found by visiting militaryonesource.mil. If you just search adoption and foster care, there is an article there called Adoption and Foster Care, the Essentials.

Bruce:

Great. And we'll put a link to that also in the program notes. Now you mentioned, adoption absolutely can be expensive. So, does the military offer adoption reimbursement to families?

Heather:

Yes, definitely. Thanks to the Defense Department, the Defense Department Adoption Reimbursement Policy. Eligible service members can request up to \$2,000 per adopted child in reimbursement. That is capped at \$5,000 per calendar year for qualified expenses. And they would just do that through completing the form. It's the DD 2675 form. So, that is through DFAS. They are able to complete that application, send it in and get that reimbursement, if they do qualify. And part of the information that we send, we actually include the specific application, as well as the policy so that families can read through it for more specifics.

Bruce:

So, the policy and application are, and I'm 99% sure, on the Adoption and Care, the Essentials website that you just mentioned, and that's listed in the program notes. So, it's expensive. So, it's really valuable to get in there and check that part of it out. So, does the Defense Department offer other support for families growing through adoption or foster care?

Heather:

They do, yeah. Service members may be eligible for up to 21 days of non-chargeable leave for adoption. We know that adopting is quite a big transition period for families. So, it's great that they do have those up to 21 days to take. Families adopting may also qualify for a tax credit, which is a good amount. It's up to \$14,440 for this last tax year. So, that helps offset adoption costs. And then, of course, families can find more by visiting irs.gov. The specific link will be included in the program notes.

Bruce:

What resources are available to military families who have already welcomed an adoptive or foster care child into their home?

Heather:

That's a great question because, as we know, the support doesn't end just as soon as adoption is finalized. We do have support for families even after adoption is complete. The Military Family Readiness System offers an array of parenting and family support for the military community from in-person resources. So, they have the New Parent Support Program and Installation Military and Family Support Centers. There's also a wide variety of online resources, such as the Thrive Parenting Program. Military OneSource also offers the free New MilParent Specialty Consultation, which helps new parents of young children ages five and under tackle a variety of challenges. Including just building routines, mastering potty training is a tough one. Navigating sleep issues and just getting expert tips for parenting through anything from deployment to everyday challenges.

Bruce:

That's great. Tailored for military families. Love it. Heather, it has been a pleasure having you on the podcast today. Do you have any final advice for military families considering adoption or foster care?

Heather:

Thank you so much, Bruce. I would just want to let military families know, to not be discouraged by their unique situation. That's why Military OneSource is here. We know that there are specific and unique challenges to military life, but there are always options, especially when it comes to adoption and foster care, some of which families may not even know about. So, I would encourage them just to ask questions. They might be surprised by what they learn.

Bruce:

That's great. And really, my last question, but just run through some of the ways people can get more information or contact an adoption consultant.

Heather:

Yeah, definitely give us a call. Call Military OneSource at 800-342-9647. We do have OCONUS calling options as well. And if that's not an option, we have a live chat through the Military OneSource website.

Bruce:

Heather, it's been a pleasure having you on the podcast. Thank you so very much.

Heather:

Thanks so much for having me, Bruce.

Bruce:

Heather Brouillard is a team lead with Military OneSource, talking about adoption and foster care. Thank you so much.

We want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We're a website, we're a call center, we're all over social media. And now, we're a podcast. Be sure to subscribe because we cover a wide range of topics that help military families navigate military lives.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thanks for listening. Bye, bye.