

# Military OneSource Podcast — Thriving Through Deployment

## Deployment Program

### 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. We're talking deployment today. One of those things that's absolutely central to military life, and we've got some tools to talk about that are going to help you and your family just totally rock the next deployment.

Two guests joining us today. Terri Rudy is with the Thrive Initiative, and Holly Nusom is also from Thrive, but joining us with a different hat on. She's also a military spouse and a military mom. So Terri, let's start with you. What is Thrive, and what is Thrive for military families and civilian families, by the way?

#### Terri Rudy:

So Thrive, it's really kind of become a huge portfolio of parent education programs that are available to both military and civilian families that has a lot of different online modules, resources, downloads, even mini videos for parents and caregivers to look at to get strategies, tips, some practical application pieces for interacting with their family, their children in everyday moments in different situations.

Really trying to provide parents and caregivers some resources that help them to improve their interactions with their families, and work on some skills that they're doing well and enhancing those pieces for themselves and for their family members.

#### Bruce Moody:

So of course we have links in the podcast notes to Thrive, but just really quick so people know where Thrive comes from.

**Terri Rudy:**

Sure. We are at Penn State University. We are the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State. So, Thrive is a program that falls underneath there and we partner with military community and family policy to offer the programming that falls underneath the Thrive Initiative.

**Bruce Moody:**

Right. So while there's a lot of information about parenting out there, Thrive has modules and messages that really resonate with military families, and it's free and it's really easy to use, and the link, again, is in the program notes. So, it's a really great tool.

Holly, let's bring you into the conversation. Why don't you introduce yourself? We want to talk about you and some of your experiences as a military spouse and a military mother.

**Holly Nusom:**

Sure, thanks Bruce. Well, Holly Nusom, I'm an Army spouse of going on 19 years. I'm a parent of four children. My oldest just turned 18, I have a 13-year-old and we have 11-year-old boy-girl twins. My husband has deployed three times over the course of his Army career. Each one being just a little bit different than the last and the dust is settling from our ninth Army move. We just moved to the state of New York and it looks like we may move again next summer.

**Bruce Moody:**

Okay. For people who are new to the military, I think it's so important to understand that every deployment, every move is different. As you go through military life, they're always, always different, 'cause your life is different. Things change in your life, and that changes your experience with a deployment and also a move.

So Holly, what I'd like to ask you to do is share any stories, any experiences that highlight how Thrive can help military families manage the challenges of a deployment.

**Holly Nusom:**

Yeah, so military families are really unique. The Army's different than the Air Force, than the Navy. The deployments look a little bit different. Even within that context, just families are unique, but one thing we do all have in common is that we're often away from our extended family, our best friends. We possibly are living in a location that we didn't choose or don't necessarily love, and for all of us that are experiencing a deployment, we have to have that first deployment, so kind of have to cut our teeth somewhere.

For me, like I said, deployments looked a little bit different each time. My husband's first deployment, we were fairly new to Army life. We lived across the country from family and we had just brought home a baby about four months before he was leaving. So for that experience,

I was just like, "What am I doing so far from home? I have this baby. Is he even going to know this baby when he comes back?"

That was kind of a deployment that we didn't know much about, and we didn't know how often we'd be able to talk. It was a time where they still got a mid-deployment leave, so it was a year-long forecasted deployment, and just kind of like, "What is this even going to look like?"

Second deployment, we had two kids. This time I had a preschooler and actually that second baby came about midway through deployment and my husband just missed it, which was unfortunate, but I felt like I became part of that sisterhood of spouses who has a baby while their husband is deployed.

But that was one where we got to talk a lot, we video chatted often. The pace was a little bit different during that deployment, so whatever I learned from that first one really went out the window with the second one, because just the communication was so different. I had a kid that could talk and tell me that she missed daddy, and then a baby that I was trying to have bond with someone over a video recording.

Then this most recent one, we had four children, we lived 1,000 miles from home, but we had the most amazing community of friends and people that were in our same boat, and also quite a few people that had been there before. That's really where I feel like I had a grasp on how to navigate deployment in a way where I didn't feel like I was surviving, I was more thriving.

I think there really isn't a one-size-fits-all for how to navigate deployment, but the different resources within Thrive certainly address many of the concerns or issues that I've experienced with my family, and really just take a lot of the guesswork for how to do something or what strategies may help your family. Just prevents a lot of that trial and error or even just I don't know what to do and I feel stuck and I don't know where to go.

**Bruce Moody:**

Yeah, the moment you hear of a deployment, whether it's something coming down the pike and you've got time to prepare, or if it's your short-term deployment, you immediately get a flood of questions. Then you get another flood and then you start wondering, well, what am I not thinking about? What am I not taking into consideration here? What are my resources?

There's just a lot of questions that go into the idea that, oh, we've got a deployment coming up and this is what my family looks like now, and it didn't look like this during the last deployment, so I have a whole fresh round of questions.

Terri, can you kind of follow up with Holly's comments and just talk about what Thrive might offer to families who are anticipating this new deployment or maybe just the first deployment?

**Terri Rudy:**

Yeah, we have been developing some supplemental modules for the Thrive programming, so they're again available online. They're shorter modules. We have one right now that is called

Parental Absence. It's a fairly new supplemental module, so it's Parental Absence: Parenting through Family Separation. Within that module there are a lot of resources in terms of, oh, there's a deployment happening, how do we prepare and what do we need to do now? What are some of the things?

Some of the resources are downloadable so you can work through what is it going to look like? What do we need to plan for before this happens? What are we going to do during, what do we need to plan for after? So, the reintegration coming home and sitting down together as a family and figuring out what it's going to look like.

So thinking back to some of the things Holly mentioned, in terms it's so nice to have recording and video capabilities these days, but depending on where your deployment may go or what your situation looks like, maybe you can't do. Like Holly said, she had a nice experience where she could do the video calls with her husband and her child, but if your significant other is going somewhere where that can't happen, potentially doing some video recordings before so that your children can still hear, see the other parent as they're deployed. But there are definitely a lot of resources that you can take away from that module.

We also have a co-parenting module that has some really nice resources in terms of thinking about a co-parenting plan. What does it look like now before you go? So you're doing these pieces, I'm doing these, but now you're going to be gone, so who's going to fill in? Who's going to pick up that slack? Is it going to just be me or do I need to reach out to my larger circle of support?

Like Holly mentioned, she had that group of mothers who were supporting each other. Do you have other people like that? Who can you identify? So, really getting yourself set so that you can be successful while there's an absent parent at the same time.

**Bruce Moody:**

So you had this community, so when you are talking with them, what concerns are you hearing from this community? What are you hearing from them regarding the resources or the needs that they have when they learn that their service member is about to deploy?

**Holly Nusom:**

So being in this community, just moved recently from Fort Campbell, that's a high tempo location with deployments, rotations, time away. The first thing I hear is, "Oh my gosh, we have a deployment coming, I have kids. When should I tell my kid?" Maybe I have the child that's a little bit anxious, they don't want to cause a bunch of worry, unnecessary worry when there's a lot of time before that parent leaves, but they also don't want to spring it on their child, so finding that perfect time to let their child know that their parent's leaving.

Another concern is how do they keep their children connected to their away parent? Little kids grow very rapidly, and a lot of developmental milestones happen. They want to keep that away parent connected and feeling like they're part of the family, and making sure their child knows that the away parent misses them and knows what's going on in their life. It's scary when you

think about how long a deployment may be and how much a baby that is just born is going to be possibly walking when their parent comes home, and what that looks like for connecting those two and keeping that relationship strong.

The community of moms that I tend to fall into really is the difference-maker in being. In my experience in Army family, I don't know if I didn't have those communities that we would still be an Army family without those. It's really nice to find a group of other parents that are experiencing deployment. That's been kind of a lifesaver during deployment, finding other families, spending time with those families, leaning on others that have been there before. So they encourage you or let you know, "I see you, I was there, this will pass, or hey, here's some resources that helped me."

One of my husband's deployments, I moved home. I lived with my parents, and gosh, that was really hard. They couldn't relate, I didn't have that community of other military families around me, and that year really went by slowly. But the year that I was surrounded by that community, I mean, I look back at it, that was probably one of my most favorite years of our time as an Army family, which sounds maybe crazy to someone.

My husband wasn't there, but we really relied on each other, I made my best friends, my kids made wonderful friends, we just have some really great memories. We were at Fort Drum, New York, which is lots of snow, very far away from a lot of things, and so I don't know if that reinforces how important having that community was during that deployment time, but it definitely did for me.

**Bruce Moody:**

You bring up a great point. It is possible for a deployment to be a really amazing time of growth and deepening relationships, and that's just one of the reasons that we have things like Thrive, because there really is an opportunity here.

Terri, if you could kind of take over for a bit and talk about any specific Thrive resources that can help parents with the different phases of a deployment cycle.

**Terri Rudy:**

Absolutely. I think one thing that Holly was kind of touching on that I think is important to mention too is making sure that you make the children part of the process, right? They are going to be experiencing this too, but that may look different for each child depending on ages or even depending on where your child is at developmentally, but making sure you somehow make them part of the process.

We definitely have resources that are available that talk about ideas for staying connected, things you can do to prep before that deployment. For example, the deployed parent is the one who reads the bedtime story. So that may be a hard time for that child to transition when that person isn't there, so potentially doing recordings or scheduling a specific time each day to be able to talk or do something very similar, or do a video call where that parent can continue to do

that, or if that isn't possible, what are the other ways that you can keep that away parent connected with what they're doing?

Definitely want to think about self-care not only for the parent who is present, but also the parent that's away, 'cause that could be very challenging for them, too, to be away from their family, and they're missing on those important pieces. The away parent isn't getting to experience those things, so what can they do for themselves to make sure that they're mentally okay with missing out on those pieces?

Then for the parent that is still present and still there, it could be a lot for them. There could be a lot of things going on, so making sure that they're maintaining a certain sense of self-care and that the parents are working together. So, we have a lot of co-parenting resources. How can you lean on each other since you're both going to be experiencing some different things? Some different, but also same challenges, right? How can you lean on each other and what are the things that you need to prep for, for yourselves and for your children?

I think for deployment specifically, I think the largest two resources that we have as a whole for Thrive are that parental absence supplemental module and the co-parenting supplemental module. I think those two speak really specifically to a lot of the challenges that families would have through deployment, but we also of course have the four core modules based on the different ages.

So, families may want to start there with a core module and then build on some of those skills, strategies that are really for any family, any parent or caregiver, and then come into some of the more specific items that they'll find within that parental absence and or co-parenting supplemental module.

**Bruce Moody:**

One of the phases of a deployment that I think doesn't get enough attention is the reunion, the return, and I'll describe it this way. There is the picture that we all have in our mind of the couple in a romantic embrace on the flight line or at the pier, and they're back together, the deployment is over.

That photo makes us and the work that we do cringe a little bit, because coming home is a process, it's not a single event. When a service member comes through the door and then realizes that the spouse has been running the show pretty efficiently, and that service member needs to figure out how to reallocate what happens in the home, it's a real process. This reintegration is really interesting part of a deployment and it is something that Thrive gets into. I'm really glad that you guys do.

As we wrap up here, Terri, you've already described Thrive, but what is a family member going to encounter when they get to the website, and how do they get started? Also, how do they return? Can they store things and continue modules over time?

**Terri Rudy:**

Yeah, so when a family, parent, caregiver goes to the website, the Thrive website, that's at thrive.psu.edu, they will see the programs that are available. You're going to see the four core programs. So that's Take Root, Sprout, Grow and Branch Out, and that's based on the age of your child which program you would want to take. Then you'll also see the supplemental modules that we've been talking about today. You can navigate to those.

In order to register for either a core program or a supplemental program, you'll see it's very easy to navigate. You just sign up, you enter your name, your email address, and then you're granted immediate access right into the programming. Once you're in there, you're going to see the program that you originally wanted, but you're going to see all the other programming that's available to you as well.

So once you start a program, so you have an hour to engage with the program. You can stop, leave, and when you come back, it's going to pick up where you left off. So you don't need to re-sign in, you don't have a certain amount of time to take the program, it's really an infinite amount of time to work your way through.

We do recommend that you start with a core program and then move into those supplemental modules that may be relevant for you or for your family, like co-parenting, parental absence. There's also some other modules like adolescent mental health or harmful behaviors, some exceptional family resources there as well.

But it's very, very easy to register, to log in, to keep your information. Like I said, it doesn't time out, so a very easy process. Of course, if any families ever have any challenges, we're available. We've got a "Contact Us" page on the website as well, and we're generally very, very responsive and get back to individuals quickly.

**Bruce Moody:**

Thanks. Again, we've got a link to Thrive in the program notes, we also have a couple of links to Military OneSource with articles about preparing for a deployment. Terri, great to have you on the podcast today. Any final words before we close up shop?

**Terri Rudy:**

I think maybe final words would be if any families, parents, caregivers, or even professionals who are listening to this have any ideas for additional resources that we could add to Thrive that could be helpful for families, we are always happy to hear those things.

So, feel free to send us an email through that contact us page on the Thrive website or bringing it through Military OneSource. However you can get to us, we'd be happy to hear that information. It's always nice to hear from the field or from the families directly what resources they need or what's really lacking. Then I also want to thank Holly for joining us today and sharing her experiences with us. We're grateful to have her on our Thrive team.

**Bruce Moody:**

Thank you. Yeah, we're grateful to have Holly with us as well. In fact, Holly, we'll give you the last word.

**Holly Nusom:**

Yeah, so again, just for professionals out there, families out there, Thrive is a great resource. So much information, some downloadable tip sheets, fact sheets with things that parents can do now to help their families. I really wish a lot of these resources were around when I was first embarking on Army life, but you know what? They're here now. I'm sharing them constantly with those that I meet that are wondering where they can go for support. Like Terri mentioned, we're here to meet the needs, and so those missing pieces or pieces where families would like some more information, we'd love to hear about it.

**Bruce Moody:**

Thanks, and we'll leave it there. I want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department, and we always appreciate hearing from you. We have a link in the program notes. Send us a question, a comment or maybe an idea for a future episode.

Be sure to subscribe to this podcast 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, thank you for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.