

## Military OneSource Podcast — Parenting Through a PCS — Caregiver Resources and Tips

### 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. If you're a parent and you're moving, you're still a parent. So we're going to talk about that, parenting through a PCS. That's our topic for today. And helping us through this topic is going to be Marly Hinstroza. Marly is a DOD military family life counselor. And Marly, welcome to the podcast.

#### Marly Hinstroza:

Thanks Bruce. Thanks for having me on.

#### Bruce Moody:

Well, we're happy that you're with today. Let's start off, what is a DOD military family life counselor?

#### Marly Hinstroza:

So MFLCs provide non-clinical, solution-focused counseling. You can find MFLCs embedded in units or commands, in schools, and in CDCs as well, providing that non-clinical support to families and children and service members.

#### Bruce Moody:

Fabulous. Before we get going on this topic here, why don't you tell us a little bit about your background?

**Marly Hinestroza:**

Sure. I'm a licensed clinical social worker and a perinatal mental health counselor. Currently, I work as a youth and child behavioral MFLC in an elementary school near Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. I'm also the wife to an active-duty sailor and a mother to three children. They're 3, 7, and 15. So kind of every stage of development there.

**Bruce Moody:**

All right, so training at home and elsewhere as well. Well, great. So when it comes to being in the military, we're flooded with acronyms, but when we talk about military moves, a lot of people use the term PCS, permanent change of station, but really we just say PCS. So we'll kind of use that term in today's conversation. When we talk about PCSing, it's a tough process. It's tough for the service members, but also the parents. It adds just layers of considerations and challenges. So Marly, from your perspective as a military and family life counselor, what are some of the common stressors that parents face when they're in the middle of a move?

**Marly Hinestroza:**

Yeah, the common stressors that I hear are separations from friends, teachers, coaches, neighbors' support, but sometimes also from the service member as they have to move ahead or after, or they have duty-related demands that take them away from the family during or shortly after a PCS. Also, the stressors of being in a new place, being the new kid, new employee, new neighbor, having to figure out how to access supports, making new friends, engaging in new activities or joining a new team, finding your place in a baseball team or basketball team. And very often the logistics of a move or the financial demands can be stressors to the parents and therefore the children as well.

**Bruce Moody:**

So those are the actual stressors that weigh upon people. Talk about the signs of stress. What should we be looking for, big and small or the signs of stress that you might see in a parent or a caregiver?

**Marly Hinestroza:**

For a parent or a caregiver, some of those signs of stress are irritability, kind of feeling hopeless, not finding joy in things that they previously did find joy in. Sometimes being distracted or

feeling like they just can't get things done, they can't get on top of what needs to be completed. Sadness, of course, crying.

**Bruce Moody:**

So Marly, those would be signs of stress that we would see in adults. Talk to us about how it would be manifested as we're looking at children.

**Marly Hinestroza:**

Signs of stress can vary at different stages of development. Generally though, children either internalize or externalize stressors. A child internalizing is trying to hide their struggles, will start to withdraw or pretty quiet and just have a hard time vocalizing what's wrong while a child that externalizes will act out, have anger outburst.

So for younger children, parents will often share with me that their toddlers seem to be regressing. Maybe if they were potty-trained, they're having more potty accidents, being more clingy, sleep is disrupted. They're asking for held more. Having tantrums and new fears. With school-aged children, as a MFLC, I see children struggling to make friends or avoiding making friends. We don't want to invest again and get hurt sometimes, so that they'll try to avoid it. Difficulty with concentrating and just lower tolerance for everyday stressors. So more frequent, crying and feeling overwhelmed.

For adolescents, it can look like withdrawing from parents and friends in their previous duty station, refusing to get involved in activities they enjoyed previously, anger pretty often, or acting detached, acting like they don't care when we know it's clear that they do care. And MFLCs can really help families prepare for these potential challenges and signs of stress by providing the psychoeducation. When we increase awareness of those potential challenges, regressions, then we can manage expectations. And parents can respond rather than react, and in that way, feel more in control. And we can help prepare the children as well by working on skills to increase confidence, skills to make friends, coping skills, helping them acclimate to new schools through different activities like lunch bunches or small groups and providing resources as well.

**Bruce Moody:**

That's a good point. So let's get into some tips and some tools that you would recommend for parents and caregivers, and these would be tips and tools for both the children and the adults, the caregivers themselves.

**Marly Hinestroza:**

Mindfulness is a great tool. I know some people think of mindfulness as meditating, sitting still and breathing, but mindfulness is really about grounding yourself and coming back to this time,

this moment and place that you're in. So making sure to take time to breathe deeply, to move about, make sure that everyone is nourishing themselves well. Sleeping and taking time to rest. It helps tremendously to take a break, to take a walk about your current or new neighborhood, stop and notice things, breathe, and help children do the same. I really encourage parents to stop and listen to their children and accept their emotions about it. One child or one parent might be really excited while another may not be and that's ok. So validating the emotion, and reminding the children that parents are there to listen and support them in navigating the transition. I remember being really excited about our move to Hawaii several years ago.

My oldest was eight years old then and she was not excited. And I really wanted her to be excited because I mean, Hawaii, but she wasn't excited and I had to remind myself that our experience is different and she had concerns about making new friends, about living on an island that she knew had volcanoes on it. And so being able to listen and validate that she was sad and she was scared about this move, even though I was really excited about it and that was ok, that we were having somewhat different experiences at that time.

Another tip is to reach out for support. Connecting with an MFLC of course, but there are also school liaison officers, Military and Family Support Centers. Some families qualify for the Exceptional Family Member Program, EFMP. FOCUS, the USO, Military OneSource. I know you guys have great resources as well.

The Military Child Education Coalition or financial counseling program. There are a lot of services and reaching out to one can help the chain of referrals or connections to others. So that is a great way to reach out for support, which is a great tool. These are all great tools that the military has available for us. Accepting help from friends, helping you pack, taking your children while you manage some logistical piece. That's really a tip that sometimes parents struggle with taking help, but we really need it. You don't have to do it all by yourself. Even the kids, getting them involved in the packing and unpacking of their room, decorating their boxes. So when you get to the new house, you can easily see whose boxes are whose and let them start to get their room settled. And that can help children feel a sense of control as well.

So by involving them, we're helping kids also feel a sense of control over this whole experience. And get informed. Awareness and action become resilience. And MFLCs can really help support families by providing that psychoeducation and resources before and after a move. And parents can do that by navigating or researching their new duty station and becoming a little bit more informed about it. That can help also feel a little bit more like we have some control over what's happening.

### **Bruce Moody:**

Thanks, Marly. A lot of good stuff in there, but let's just say that somebody does that, things are going well, they got it all held together, but then there's like a setback and it throws you off course. What can parents do at that point to get back on track?

**Marly Hinestroza:**

As an MFLC, when I see parents at this point, I remind them that when we fly, we're always told to put our air mask on before we help others. So we really need to stop and slow down, take care of ourselves. And I also like to talk to parents about co-regulation. Our children are taking cues from us on how things are going and so our stress impacts them. Their stress impacts us. So just remembering to give yourself permission to slow down, to really engage in that self-care, whatever that is. Self-care can be a day out on the golf course, a spa day, right? A self-care can also be taking three minutes to listen to your favorite song with your earbuds on in the bathroom, right? So our self-care is our children's self-care as much as their self-care is ours. And oftentimes parents are really focused on making sure the kids are ok and they're not ok themselves, and then the children are picking up on that.

So making sure that we're slowing down, taking time, giving ourselves grace and permission for unpacking later. Take the kids to the playground, find the best ice cream place in your new duty station or go to your favorite coffee place one more time. It's worth it. The packing and unpacking can wait. Certainly reaching out for supports. When things are going along, they're going well and you hit a bump on the road. Their supports, MFLCs, school liaisons to help figure out school-related things. Military and Family Support Centers to get more information can definitely help. I've been able to help families during this time by helping to prepare the child for the move. Just kind of learning what it looks like, what happens. during a move. There's some really great books out there about PCSing. And so being able to meet with the kids and listen to them, and I've had parents just share gratitude for knowing that their child had another caring adult to talk to about these tough feelings while they were managing the logistics of PCSing.

**Bruce Moody:**

I know that the support you provide is confidential, so I don't want to ask for specific stories, but if you can just kind of pull from your experiences, some examples of working with parents and caregivers, service members and how you helped them cope with moving-related stresses.

**Marly Hinestroza:**

So really listening and validating those emotions. Providing different coping skills, so figuring out what that looks like for each individual, whether they are someone who likes to journal or they're more mindful, maybe they like list and checking off things. So finding those coping skills that work best for them. I have helped families sort of get acclimated to their new duty station, so I've had different spouses who shared it's difficult to get out of the house with small children, maybe not sure where to go, what to do, wanting to explore, or meet new people. And there is a great program at different installations. It's a running club called Stroller Warriors, which is a great place to be active, get out of the house, meet new spouses, many who have small children as well, and get a community that you can start growing into. So that tends to be a good

informal resource to share, but also formal resources, getting them connected to the USO for all of their programming.

I have helped different families being able to talk through, work on the communication with their spouse on what the challenges are. Sometimes there's a worry about not wanting to add stressors and so spouses or service members are not sure how to communicate with their partner about the stressors of their new job or their new job search. So helping to build those communication skills between parents or individually so they can have effective conversations around those stressors and get support from one another as well. And then with the children, one of my favorite things to do with kids, because I am in a school so I'm primarily working with the kids directly, is to do lunch bunches. And a lot of times we'll talk about where they've been, and I like to learn facts about where the kids have been. So we'll talk about that. And one time I had a child share that they were moving to a new duty station.

They're pretty bummed about it, a lot of apprehension. But another child in the group had been in that duty station previously and they got really excited about hearing just the name of the duty station and started talking about how great it was and their experience there and what they like to do and where they like to go. And that enthusiasm was just contagious, and the child that was moving there, started asking that questions and getting more excited about that move. So that was really neat for me to see how the kids helped each other out as well. Sometimes parents worry about how to help their kids stay connected with friends at their duty station that they're leaving. What I hear, especially in an elementary school, is navigating social media or electronics. So talking with parents about ways they can support their child, helping them come up with a plan that lets them feel like they can effectively support their child. I know guilt, moving your children away can be heavy. So being able to have effective solutions helps parents navigate that guilt as well.

**Bruce Moody:**

Interesting, Marly, listening to your examples. And a lot of the really strong examples that you bring up, kind of point to the fact that you're getting into a community of people who understand you. So talk about the benefit of getting help, getting a sense of community with people who specifically understand the military life.

**Marly Hinestroza:**

Yeah, it can really help to have those people who can commiserate with you but also give you hope. So they can validate how hard it is. They can validate how much you might want to not like something in your new duty station and compare to your previous duty station, while also encouraging you to give this new place a chance and guiding you to find new activities. Having that sense of connection, someone who has been there or someone who just gets it, so we don't feel so alone in our experience, can be really helpful for military families and for the children as well. Getting them connected to groups, whether it's on base or with other military families where the children can also talk about what they like and dislike about moving.

**Bruce Moody:**

When I introduced you, I introduced you as a military family life counselor and you talked about how you were in the schools, you're here, you're there. How does a family member find you? Where are you in a military community, and what would be the first steps to linking up with someone like you?

**Marly Hinestroza:**

The military and family life counselors that are embedded in units or commands, they're often visible to that unit. That command team knows about that MFLC, the chaplains or I know in the Navy we have ombudsman. Marine Corp has URCs. Their role is to help support family readiness. I'm not sure what other branches call that role, but they can help to connect to the MFLC. Also in the school, the school liaisons can help to give that connection or make that connection. The teachers, administration, Military and Family Support Centers, typically they can really help to find the different MFLC, whether it's in a unit or command or in a school. And I believe Military OneSource also can help link to those rotational MFLCs on the installations.

**Bruce Moody:**

Good to know. So a lot of local resources. The people in your command, they're the ones who know. Also Military OneSource, but your command, your community can point the way.

**Marly Hinestroza:**

Your MFLC at your duty station you're leaving can help to make that connection to the MFLC where you're going.

**Bruce Moody:**

Oh, fantastic. Yeah, thanks for adding that. Let's just kind of jump ahead in the process of moving. So you've packed up, you've moved, you're in your new installation, maybe you're in temporary housing or you've found your new home. At this point, you're settling into the new community. What would be some ways that parents and caregivers can manage this transition for themselves as well as their family members?

**Marly Hinestroza:**

Yeah, I think when you get to the new duty station, again, slowing down and making sure that you're taking time to rest. You're taking time to find what you need as well, but also managing expectations. We know that it can take some time to connect to those resources. So making sure that you're aware of that. Being able to start to find those new communities, oftentimes, whether it is through the school, getting involved in the school, getting involved with the command can help to start to really have that community self-care in little ways. So making sure that we're eating three meals a day and that we are resting. And sometimes giving yourself grace, like finding that balance and flexibility.

Let's say you are in transitional housing. You might be in a hotel for a while with your family and everyone is sort of in each other's space a lot. And you don't have a lot of room to cook, let's say full meals. It's ok giving yourself grace. It's ok to have chicken nuggets several times a week or to not have the meals that you usually would right now because there just isn't the time and the space for that, and it's not going to be that way forever. But in this moment, having that flexibility and grace for yourself to do what can be done.

**Bruce Moody:**

All right. Yeah, I'm a retired military and I have lots of memories of being in temporary housing, and it was actually kind of fun. It was like a little adventure, so very, very cool. To kind of wrap things up, give us a little more of a sense of MFCLs, again the military family life counselors, they're available for kids at various ages and stages. Kind of wrap up for us what you and your colleagues have to offer and bearing in mind, we've got a bunch of links in the program notes that talk about this at great, great detail where people can get more information.

**Marly Hinestroza:**

Yeah. So we really can help families by normalizing the experience, by providing tools that they can use themselves, whether it is a solution-focused counseling, also connecting them to those resources. I think those are the three main things that MFCLs are poised to do. And it is confidential, so families can come and we can talk about what is going on, listen, validate, provide the psychoeducation to increase that awareness of what's happening, coping skills to be able to manage what is happening, and also connecting to the community at large for those other resources and other opportunities for support for parents and for service members and for the entire family and the children as well.

**Bruce Moody:**

Well, we appreciate the work that you do and we really appreciate you joining us today. Thank you so much. We hope to have you back.



**Marly Hinestroza:**

Thank you.

**Bruce Moody:**

Marly Hinestroza is a DOD military family life counselor. I want to remind you all that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We love to hear from you. We have a link in the program notes. You can send us a question, a comment, or an idea for a future episode. Be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcast 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.