

Military OneSource Podcast — Recognizing and Managing Good and Bad Stress

Episode transcript

Bruce Moody:

Hi, I am Bruce Moody, and today we're talking about stress specifically for warfighters and their families because military life throws a lot at you, as you know. Moves and deployment and child care, the list goes on. Even the so-called good stress can quietly shift into something heavier. The good news, you don't have to navigate it alone.

In this episode, I sit down with two colleagues. Jena Moore leads the Military and Family Life Counseling Program and Kelly Smith oversees Military OneSource. We talk about how to keep stress in check before it becomes overwhelming, and the wide range of support available so warfighters and their families can manage everyday stress, stay grounded and mission ready.

So, before we get started, I want to remind you that Military OneSource is by the military, for the military. We are your first line of support giving warfighters and their families tools to stay well and thrive. You can visit our website; you can call us anytime. We've got our phone number and our website address in the program notes along with a link that you can use to send us your questions, your comments, or ideas for a future episode. We'd love to hear from you. And a reminder you can subscribe to the podcast wherever you listen, so please do. Okay, let's jump into today's conversation.

Welcome to the podcast. We have with us today Jena Moore and Kelly Smith. And I'm going to ask you to introduce yourselves. So, Jena, please go first.

Jena Moore:

Thank you, Bruce. My name is Jena Moore, and I am the program manager for the Military and Family Life Counseling Program or MFLC for short. And I'm a military spouse of 20+ years.

Kelly Smith:

And my name is Kelly Smith, and I serve as the program manager for Military OneSource.

Bruce Moody:

We are going to have a conversation about stress. Stress is everywhere, and the military puts a lot of resources behind dealing with stress and helping everybody involved in the

military, from the warfighters to the individual family members dealing with stress. So why is this so important to the military?

Kelly Smith:

Well, I believe we know that, in general, for the general population, stress is experienced across everyone in different kinds of ways. However, with our military families, we know that because of military lifestyle, things that happen on a regular basis for our military families, it can become a bit more difficult to manage the everyday stressors that they face and they deal with, whether we're talking about PCS or deployments or securing child care. I mean, the list goes on and on, and so that might make it a bit more difficult for our military families to deal with or manage stress.

Bruce Moody:

Okay, so let's talk about stress in general. Let's figure out what it is. There's good stress. There's bad stress. Why do we have stress? Who wants to jump into that?

Jena Moore:

Sure. I can jump in. Bruce and Kelly did a great job of explaining stress right now across everywhere to include our military families. And so, a lot of times we have good stress. It's important to be stressed about something. It means it's important to us. We're always going to have stress and problems in our lives, and it's important to the department, though to not have our good stress turn into bigger problems for our military families, our service members and our family members. So, it's important to the department to get ahead of that, and that's something both our programs, Military OneSource and the MFLC program does is to get ahead of those problems before they become bad stress and bigger problems.

Bruce Moody:

But when does that happen? When does good stress become bad stress?

Jena Moore:

So, I think it depends on the individual. It can mean different things for different people. Sometimes there might be an individual that may never have bad stress. But sometimes it's what else is going on in your life, the resources that you have for yourself, the positive people in your life, the people that support you, and maybe you have more good stress going all at once. All those good stressors coming together can create bad stress for you.

Bruce Moody:

Are there signs to be aware of?

Kelly Smith:

Yeah. You know, I think that good stress can become bad stress when it becomes chronic or overwhelming. When you can feel it in your body, that potentially leads to having negative impacts on your physical or your mental health.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. So, there's a lot of information about stress out there. Let's talk about stress in the military community and some of the resources that we have available to combat the stress. And Jena, I want to start with you, and I want to start with the Military Family Life Counseling Program, which we're inevitably going to be calling the MFLC. So, what's an MFLC?

Jena Moore:

So, our MFLCs. We have MFLCs that work with adults, and we have MFLCs that work with our youngest military family members, our military-connected children. And our MFLCs provide nonmedical counseling to service members and family members. And what nonmedical counseling is, it's short term, and it's preventative. So, it's helping build resiliency in service members and our family members. It's helping them build tools in their toolbox to be able to manage that good stress before it gets to big stress, into bad stress.

Bruce Moody:

Right. And you mentioned that they're literally going into the command. Sometimes they're with them when they're working or when they're PT'ing [physical training]. So, my question to you is, how could a service member make good use of the MFLC that's in their command? Should they approach them or should they wait to be approached? And what would be the sort of conversation that would be a good use of this resource? Say there's a stressed-out service member or a service member who has questions; how would they want to strike up a conversation when the MFLC comes around?

Jena Moore:

Well, that's a really great point, Bruce, that our MFLCs are not providing a standard 50-minute session in an office. They are embedded within the military community. So, as you said, they're where our service members live and where they're working and where they're eating, and also where they do their daily activities.

So, it could be as simple as a service member walks up to an MFLC and introduces themselves and asks, you know, "What do you do? How do you support the unit?" Those important sessions or those important connections that are made with an MFLC usually start with just a conversation. And often the service member feels comfortable in meeting with an MFLC because they're part of their day-to-day.

So, there's no stigma associated with it in the sense of going to go see a counselor. It's just someone, MFLC Jena Moore, that's part of our unit. And I'm just going to go talk to them and let them know maybe I'm having some troubles and are there things that you can do to maybe help build my toolbox and toolkit and to help me work through some of these problems.

Bruce Moody:

Now, there are also MFLCs that are working with the kids. I mean, they're literally in the lunchroom, right?

Jena Moore:

They are literally in our lunch rooms with our military.

Bruce Moody:

Those little, those little tables.

Jena Moore:

That's right. And they're really small chairs crammed inside the lunchroom. No. So, our CYB-MFLCs [child and youth behavioral military and family life counselors] are specialized in working with our youngest military members. And they provide support around a variety of topics, just like they do with our adults. And so, they can support children. Children have stress, too, so they can support around the stress that they're having. If there's anger within children or aggression, those are things that our CYB-MFLCs can support with.

And, also, our military children have to navigate a lot of relationships. I don't think we think about that sometimes and understanding how to communicate with those. And we have relationships with — so our teachers, our parents, our friends. It's hard enough to navigate that as an adult. So, as a child, those can be really challenging and those building relationships, understanding how to communicate, is something our CYB-MFLCs can help children with because it can be really stressful for our youngest military members in understanding how to build those relationships.

Bruce Moody:

What should parents understand about these MFLCs in the schools talking with their children?

Jena Moore:

So, the parents will always learn about our CYB-MFLCs as they go into the beginning of the year, or if they register their child for a CDC [child development center]. There's a parent consent letter form that is completed by our parents, and it really lays out what

our program does. It talks about that our program is confidential, but we work in coordination with the other resources that may be at a school or a CDC to best support their child. So, they have a very big part in the support that a CYB-MFLC is providing for their child, and they can always reach out directly to a CYB-MFLC to say, "I would love if you could connect with my child."

Bruce Moody:

Okay. So, we have another episode that we're working on, and we're going to really focus on the MFLCs and their presence in the schools, and to get back to the MFLC as they're working with adults. In some cases, they're able to connect service members, adults, with other forms of counseling and support. So, what would that handoff look like? How does that come about?

Jena Moore:

So that's a really great point, Bruce, that sometimes the MFLC may not be the best support for a participant. Or it may be that they're going to work in collaboration with another resource. Those handoffs to an additional resource or maybe a resource that is more appropriate is what we consider a warm handoff. The MFLC is going to make sure that the participant is connected to the resource and that they're receiving the support that they need.

Bruce Moody:

Wonderful. So, we have a bunch of links. In the program notes and people can go and check that out. And we'll give you a break, and we'll talk to Kelly who's sitting patiently so she can talk about Military OneSource. So, for the stressed out in our audience ... Military OneSource. What do they have to offer?

Kelly Smith:

So, Bruce, we have a very comprehensive range of support that Military OneSource provides for our military families. Some of that support addresses stress directly, and others address things in the military life that cause stress like moving and deployments.

Bruce Moody:

You know, what's interesting to me, I just want to begin with the confidentiality aspect of it. Because that kind of reaches into pretty much everything. You know, there's a comfort level if you know the confidentiality ahead of time, you know your boundaries. So, let's talk about that first.

Kelly Smith:

Yeah. So sometimes we know that the care of our family or our friends may not be enough to pull us through a stressful or a difficult time. And so Military OneSource is committed to promoting readiness and resilience in military members and their families. Our confidential counseling provides service members and their loved ones with resources and support to address a variety of issues and also builds important skills that helps them to tackle everyday life challenges. The confidentiality that Military OneSource provides creates a safe space for service members and their families to come and talk with a licensed professional without the concern or fear that command or leadership will be notified outside of those situations where there's a mandated report or a duty to warn.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. What are the ways that people can engage Military OneSource?

Kelly Smith:

So, Military OneSource is everywhere, despite what people may think or say. We are available 24/7/365. There is a website, Military OneSource-dot-mil. We have an app, which is our My Military OneSource app. There's a MilProvider app, and then there's also an availability to be able to connect with Military OneSource via our live chat function, which is accessible on the website as well as our app.

Bruce Moody:

Alright. Let's go over the eligibility. Who is eligible to contact Military OneSource for counseling?

Kelly Smith:

So, I'm so excited that you asked this question, Bruce.

Bruce Moody:

Why is that?

Kelly Smith:

Well, we recently announced that the Coast Guard is eligible for Military OneSource, but we'll talk about that a little bit later. Okay. Maybe that in another, in another, in another episode.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome aboard.

Kelly Smith:

Yes.

Bruce Moody:

We love the Coast Guard.

Kelly Smith:

We do; we do. Who is eligible for Military OneSource? Our active duty, [National] Guard and reserve regardless of their activation status, as well as their immediate family members can use all the services for Military OneSource. And we also provide support to survivors who are not remarried and their surviving children. And we also provide support to our transitioning veterans within 365 days of separation or retirement from service.

Bruce Moody:

So, just to repeat a bit of what you just said, if you're out of the military, you're eligible still to call Military OneSource up to 365 days a year after you've left the service.

Kelly Smith:

That is right. And their immediate family members as well.

Bruce Moody:

Pretty cool. Alright. So, what are the sort of issues that you can address through Military OneSource counseling?

Kelly Smith:

So, our counseling, similar to that of the Military and Family Life Counseling Program is short term and solution focus, intended to help service members and their families to address those everyday life stressors that all of us deal with. So, what we often see are relationship challenges, stress management issues around grief and loss, parenting, dealing with deployments, etc. So, it kind of runs the gamut of things that all of us experience on a recurring basis.

Bruce Moody:

Let's talk about the counselors themselves. Who are they? What sort of background qualifications do they have?

Kelly Smith:

So, Military OneSource counselors all are independently licensed professionals with a background in a social science field. So that may be psychology, social work, counseling, marriage and family therapy. And they are trained specifically in military life to understand the challenges that our military families face.

Bruce Moody:

And then you also have something called peer-to-peer support, which is ...

Kelly Smith:

Yeah. So, our peer-to-peer support, or our peer-to-peer consultations, is unique in that it is staffed by professionals. Again, these professionals, they may not be independently licensed, but they are master-level professionals with that background in a social science field. But they are consultants that have lived experience. So either they are retired from the military, they served in the [National] Guard of reserve, they may be a military spouse, and they help service members and spouses identify solutions to things that they may be going through from the perspective of, you know, I've lived that I can share with you kind of how I dealt with it. But they also have that professional expertise.

Bruce Moody:

Alright. Let's move on and talk about coaching and consultations because this is more helping people reach a goal or dealing with a very specific aspect of life. What's the general idea? What is this offering?

Kelly Smith:

So, Bruce, I want to talk about our coaching and consultations, but before I do that, as I was listening to you ask the question, it reminded me about our counseling with Military OneSource and the different modalities that we offer.

Bruce Moody:

Okay.

Kelly Smith:

And there's a distinct difference with the counseling and coaching services. So, our Military OneSource counseling is offered in four different modalities. Service members in your families can use it face to face with one of the professionals in their office setting. They can also have video conferencing, so like that typical telehealth on a secure network. We also offer phone counseling. Then we also offer like a text chat-based counseling. So, there are four different ways that people can receive counseling through Military OneSource.

When it comes to our consultation services, like our peer-to-peer support or maybe our health and wellness coaching that we may talk about in a bit, those coaching and consultation sessions are offered only in two modalities. So that includes our phone consultation or over video conferencing. And our coaching and consultation services are offered by trained consultants in that specific area. So, again, like our peer-to-peer consultants are service members or spouses who have that lived experience. But our health and wellness coaches are certified in health and wellness coaching. So, they have that expertise, but they help folks to navigate using like AE [assertive engagement] and motivational interviewing, and it's led by the participant.

Bruce Moody:

And there's a number of different areas where you focus, and I just want to tick through some of them because you've got parenting.

Kelly Smith:

Yes.

Bruce Moody:

You know. Also, adoption. Elder care. So, for those of you who are still rather new to the military, elder care may already be a part of your life, but it probably will be as you get on in age. And as your life changes, you know, the type of coaching and consultations that you need are available to you: Financial counseling, filing taxes, language services.

Talk a little bit about language services. That's a cool one. I mean, for example, a family moves overseas. Maybe they get a rental agreement that they're going to sign with a local national, and it's, well, it's not in English. What are things like translation services able to do for them?

Kelly Smith:

So, this service is unique to Military OneSource in that we offer language interpretation services as well as document translation services. So, say we have a spouse who contacts Military OneSource. English may not be their first language, or they may have difficulty interpreting or understanding English, and they are wanting to know about resources that are available to them at their military installation. They can call into Military OneSource, and if it's a common spoken foreign language outside of English, our team can connect them straight away within minutes with an interpreter to help explain the resources that are available to them.

On the flip side, we may have a military family that is PCS OCONUS overseas, and they have a rental agreement that they don't quite understand. They can send that document to Military OneSource, have it translated into English or whatever language is their preferred language, that will then be sent back to them via secure transfer, and then that document is translated completely for free. And, so, this is one of the many

benefits that Military OneSource offers that helps to reduce the stress that families may be experiencing.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah. And all this stuff is free. All of it.

Kelly Smith:

Yep.

Bruce Moody:

But when you start looking at translation services that are out there, it can get pretty costly pretty fast.

Kelly Smith:

Absolutely.

Bruce Moody:

So, this is really special. Let's go back to the health and wellness coaching a little bit. And give us a picture of how it's structured and what it's like as somebody goes through the process.

Kelly Smith:

So, I really like our health and wellness coaching because it is a true cost savings for our service members and their families. I don't know if you or Jena have ever gone out into town and tried to secure a nutritionist or a wellness coach but it can run up to over \$150 an hour for a session, and so this is a benefit that our service members and families are entitled to that provides them support, encouragement and accountability.

So, someone calls into Military OneSource, or they initiate a live chat on our website or our app, and they say, hey, I want to talk with the health and wellness coach. Our consultants will gather some preliminary information with them, and then they'll be connected with one of the health and wellness coaches. They can schedule a session based on the time that works best for them. And in that initial session, our certified health and wellness coach will ask a few questions to better understand what the need is for that caller, for that user. They can address things from developing a nutrition plan to helping someone prepare to pass their PT exam to managing stress specifically.

And so, they will help them identify those goals. They will meet regularly based on what works best for each of them. And that coach will help keep them accountable to meeting their goals on a regular basis. It really is driven by the participant and there to support them.

Bruce Moody:

So, what we're talking about today is stress. And we're talking about it from the standpoint of dealing with stress but also getting ahead of it by taking care of, say, the questions that you have about going through the process of adoption or meeting goals with regard to your health and wellness. I'm really interested in the contact center as a source of getting ahead of stress. When people have questions, they can reach out to the contact center.

The question that I would like to ask you is how small are the types of questions that people can ask? Because all big problems start with a series of really small problems. You know, especially during a deployment and you're trying to keep the house in order, and then suddenly something goes wrong. And it's not a big deal. It doesn't warrant what you would consider in your mind to be counseling, but you have questions. What can the call center do for someone who just has a question?

Kelly Smith:

So, Bruce, that's a really good question. There is no topic or thing that's too small or minor for someone to contact Military OneSource for. I mean, that is what we're there for, available 24/7/365. I have spoken with some of our consultants and the things that people reach out for help can range from "How do I get my iguana overseas as we're PCSing" to "My child needs to get into ABA [applied behavioral analysis] therapy. I don't know where to start," or "My goods haven't been shipped yet. Who do I contact?"

So, you can call Military OneSource, whether you know what you're looking for or you may not have an idea, but they can help you to navigate and ask you different questions to kind of get to the bottom of what you're looking for and what you need help with.

Bruce Moody:

And it's just totally there. It's totally free. It is really for the military community and that's why they're there.

Kelly Smith:

Yeah, exactly.

Bruce Moody:

Well, nice. Nice. Any final thoughts on stress?

Jena Moore:

I absolutely love the conversation today. Just to reiterate, stress is everywhere and everyone encounters it. And a lot of times it can be a good thing. It means we care about something if we're stressed about it, but we don't want those small stressors to become big stressors that really get out of control for us. So, the department has great

resources through Military OneSource and the Military and Family Life Counseling Program. And that can help address those stressors. And I did want to add that Military OneSource has a great website, and we have an MFLC Locator on Military OneSource. So, you can find your local MFLC and get up-to-date contact information from them and be able to reach out to them directly.

Bruce Moody:

And those will be all links in the program notes. So nice. Kelly and Jena, thank you so much for joining us today.

Kelly Smith:

Thank you.

Jena Moore:

Thanks so much Bruce.

Bruce Moody:

You're very welcome. And I want to remind you that Military OneSource is by the military, for the military, we are your first line support giving warfighters and their families tools to stay well and thrive. Call us anytime. Visit us anytime. We've got our number and the website address in the program notes. There's also a link you can use to send us your questions or comments, maybe an idea for a future episode. And be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you get 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.