

## Military OneSource Podcast — Understanding Non-medical Counseling: Mental Health Awareness Month

### **Military Community Support Programs**

#### **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. It's true, military life is stressful. There, I've said it. It's true. There's stress, there's challenges, but we do offer help, and we're going to talk about that today with our guest, Michelle Aldana. Michelle is with Military Community Support Programs, which is the team that brings you Military OneSource, us. So, Michelle, welcome to the podcast.

##### **Michelle Aldana:**

Thanks for having me. I'm always glad when I get to talk to you, Bruce.

##### **Bruce Moody:**

We are glad because it's wonderful to be able to talk with you, and you have such great information to bring us. When it comes to Military OneSource, one of the, I mean, frankly the number one reason that people call you is for something that what we call non-medical counseling. Well, it's a term, and what I would like to do to kind of kick things off is get you to explain to us what is non-medical counseling.

##### **Michelle Aldana:**

That is such a good question because we hear it all the time too, like, "What? I have not even heard of non-medical counseling before. What's the difference between that and just some counseling?" For us, non-medical counseling, Military OneSource, the things that we provide really are a great prevention resource, something that we want you to use early and often whenever you can, so that's whenever you really kind of want to use that non-medical counseling. We don't diagnose anyone with a medical condition, a medical issue and we can't treat any medical mental health issues either.

So, if you're looking to be diagnosed because you feel like you had a sign of something, or if you got a diagnosis, and you're like, "Oh, I really would love to talk to

people at Military OneSource." We can't treat that diagnosis because that's what we do is provide that short-term solution-focused care, and then we refer you to those medical resources and connections so that you can get the level of care that you deserve and that you can have regularly.

So, it really is, non-medical counseling is for those stressors, everyday challenges that you might have that solution-focused, and you get 12 sessions per issue per year per person. So, you don't have to hold it in and be like, "Oh, I only have 12. That's all I can do." And it can be any of those things.

Now, if you have a diagnosis, that does not exclude you from our services. You can use all of our other service regardless. But one of the things about Military OneSource or when you ask for non-medical counseling, even though if you have a medical mental health diagnosis, we can still help out. We may still be able to help you out. Please contact us. We'll ask those questions. More than half of the people have anxiety or depression. We're not going to disqualify more than half the people just because you have this thing.

So, if you call us and you say you have a diagnosis, we ask you some extra questions, make sure you're in a good stable place, make sure, hey, are we able to give you that level of care that you deserve? And if you need more care, we are going to make sure you get that referral. But if not, we're going to go help you with those things. You can use all of our other Military OneSource resources. Maybe you have stress, you want to just have some help managing your stress, we can still give you stress management, and maybe it'll help those other things. But you can still get stress management or couples counseling as long as with that diagnosis you have, you're in a stable place. It doesn't automatically disqualify you. We want to make sure we get you the level of care that you deserve and that you want and need.

**Bruce Moody:**

Michelle, you offer two types of non-medical counseling. It's free, it's confidential, we'll get into that later, but it's definitely free and definitely confidential for service members, for families. And we're talking about Military OneSource and Military Family Life Counseling. Let's take the two individually. Talk to us about Military OneSource.

**Michelle Aldana:**

For Military OneSource non-medical counseling, you access it differently than your military family life counselors. You would just call us, or you can connect with us online through secure chat and you can make that request for non-medical counseling, and you can do your counseling sessions in person by telephone, by video or that secure online chat. While our military family life counselors also provide non-medical counseling, but there really are boots on the ground. You're going to find those military family life counselors on the installation, whether that's embedded in a unit at your family readiness centers, child and youth centers, school-aged children. They're also located in schools outside of the installation that have a high military child population. So, you can find MFLCs in a lot of places, but those are the people that are in the

location to be face-to-face. There are boots on the ground, and you can just go and see them.

While our Military OneSource non-medical counseling providers, you would just call or chat or connect with us online, and we'll find a provider within your area. But because we can do it by phone and telephone and things like that, it doesn't have to be someone that's within a certain number of miles. You can just anybody in that state, or if you're OCONUS, you can call us too. A lot of people don't know that. You can totally use non-medical counseling if you're OCONUS and do that chat video and telephone option too.

**Bruce Moody:**

Yeah, for those of you who are new to the military and don't speak as fluently as Michelle does, that OCONUS means outside the continental United States, basically means overseas. But interestingly we include Alaska and Hawaii when we talk about OCONUS. But there you go. When you're outside of the mainland, as we say, you still can get this help.

Now, Michelle, what would be a scenario that would demonstrate why somebody would choose one option over another, why they would choose Military OneSource in one situation and maybe another, they would choose a military family life counselor.

**Michelle Aldana:**

It's just whatever you're comfortable with. And you might have gone to the Family Readiness Center lots of times and maybe seen that MFLC, and you're like, "You know what, that person's my jam? I'm going to talk to them. This is who I feel like I connect with." While another person says, "I really want to be able to do a video option in my house or on my phone or through that chat. I'm going to call Military OneSource to do that," or "I don't want to see anyone that might be on an installation, and I just want a person off the base, and I want to talk to them face-to-face." It's just really giving you the options that you want and need.

And a lot of times people don't realize sometimes you will meet a counselor or meet someone and you're like, "Ah, I don't know if this is going to work." And not everybody is everyone's jam, and that's okay. You can go find someone else. And that's one of the good things about our non-medical providers. We have so many that you can just call us back and say, "I was not vibing. I was not clicking with this person. Can you connect me with someone else?" And like, "Of course, yes, we will do that for you." But it's just really what your preference is.

**Bruce Moody:**

Now I know you're saying call, but there's more options than that. So, what would be other ways somebody might want to receive non-medical counseling?

**Michelle Aldana:**

So, if you are an adult, all adults can do it in person via that secure online chat by telephone or online video. But if you are a child, you can obviously do it first face-to-face. So, if your age is 6 to 12, if you have a child that's 6 to 12 and need non-medical counseling, a parent has to be there because we want to make sure everyone's involved in making them help them be their best selves. But a parent has to be present. It's a family session. Those ones can only be in person and through a video because we have to confirm that that's their guardian because anyone could be on the telephone like, "Yep, I'm their parent." No, I need to actually know.

And then if it's 13 to 17, the kids can do it in person or on video, and then that parent just gives permission at the very beginning of the session and says, "Hey, it's cool. My kids just wants to talk to somebody, and I'm cool with it." And then they can pop out, and they don't have to be part of that session. But all adults can do in-person, secure chat, telephone and video. It's just the ones for the kids. We just got to make sure it's a parent and not someone just pretending.

**Bruce Moody:**

Right. Okay. Reasonable. Michelle, who is eligible to participate in non-medical counseling?

**Michelle Aldana:**

So, for non-medical counseling as a part of our Military OneSource and Military Family Life Counseling Program, it is a Defense Department program, so our DOD service members and their immediate families are eligible. That includes our active duty, our reserve and National Guard regardless of activation status. Everyone's like, "What? I did not know that it does not matter if I'm active orders or not and I can still use Military OneSource." Yes, yes please. Of course, you can, though I do know that sometimes there's other resources that can't be used if you're a reservist or a National Guard's person without active orders, but not with Military OneSource. You call us up, we got you. Coast Guard can use us if they're activated with the Navy because it is the Department of Defense program. They're part of the Department of Defense, they can use it.

The immediate family members of both of those groups, and they have to be a family member, like a dependent in DEERS. So, if sometimes we have kids that are a little older that maybe, I had somebody that they're like, "Oh, can you help me with my kid? I want them to get out and really live life." And I was like, "Yeah, of course. How old is your child?" And they were 39. I was like, "Oh, they have to be a dependent in DEERS." So, I was like, "It only can be those people," but we can sure enough help that mom help her get her baby out of the basement as she said, even though he is 38. We can help her and give her all the tools, and they can meet together as a family session as long as she's doing it.

But yeah. And then one of the other great things that we have, all those people that I just said were eligible, but they can also use it for 365 days after they separate or retire, which is great because it gives that person that family time to transition to those other resources. We know at the Department of Defense, we just want to make sure we can take care of you and give you that cushion whether you're transitioning to get those services from Veterans Affairs. We know you've heard us, you're comfortable with us, and maybe that's who you want to use until you get to knowing the other systems and the other resources. And we have you. We've got you for that whole entire year after you separate or retire. And then our surviving non-remarried spouses and their children are eligible to use Military OneSource as well.

**Bruce Moody:**

Fantastic. So, you've identified several populations who may not be aware, Coast Guard, guard and reserve regardless of status, and folks who were 365 days or less having put away their uniform. And these are people, I might say, who maybe should be sharing this podcast episode with somebody in a similar situation. There you go. It's called organic marketing.

**Michelle Aldana:**

Sharing is caring.

**Bruce Moody:**

There we are, there we are, there we are.

So, Michelle, what would be some of the topics or issues that would fall into the bucket of non-medical counseling?

**Michelle Aldana:**

So, it's just those kind of everyday stressors or challenges you might have to deal with that can be military specific or not. The number one reason people do call Military OneSource is relationship issues. A lot of people have that, and it's normal. It's, not all marriages, partnerships isn't fairytales, glitters and rainbows, and unicorns. We all have to put in work into it. We want to be able to learn those skills. That is the top reason people call Military OneSource for non-medical counseling. It's just like, "Hey, I want to improve my relationship with my spouse or my partner." And you might get there and say, I said it earlier about we get 12 sessions and go, "Hey, I need 12 sessions for marriage counseling." And then you can say, "Oh, while you're there, I might need 12 sessions about communication." How to improve your communication, that's great for everybody, whether you have a partner or not have a partner. You're just being your best me before you become your best we.

And also for helping with parenting issues. It might be in preparation for deployment or having to maybe like, "I'm real stressed about when my spouse comes back from deployment. We have a really good system here." I know that was me when my husband was deployed. I was like, "We have a good system. We have a great

bedtime schedule, and I know he's going to come back in here and it's all going to be amok. How do we do this and transition it so that we can reincorporate our person back into our lives in the least disruptive and bestest funnest way ever."

But it could just be like, "Hey, I just want someone to vent," and that's great. Call someone, you deserve to have that unbiased third party listen to you event and be like, "Oh, my gosh, there is someone at work that just breathes out of one nose hole, and it just drives me crazy." Or, "They're just chewing those crackers so loud. Why is this making me so mad or bothering me so much?" Call us. Talk to us about it.

Sometimes you just have to let someone else hear it and you're like, "Okay, I feel great. Thank you for letting me just vent to you." And that's okay. You don't have to wait until there's a problem. You can go ahead of it and just say, "Just want to work on some stuff before it becomes big. Want to just get ready," and that's all right. We got you. No matter what. If you call us, we have a no-wrong board policy. If we don't have the resources or maybe you're not eligible, we'll make sure we connect you to other resources, and that we do that hand over to a different person or make sure you get your level of care. We're not going to just say nope and hang up the phone.

**Bruce Moody:**

Right. So, if somebody calls you up and they ask for something that's just not what you offer, does the person on the other end of the line know, do they have that resource available, do they know where to send somebody?

**Michelle Aldana:**

Yes, of course. Everyone that answers our phone has a master's level social sciences degree and experience, so when they answer the phone, not only do they have that knowledge, so, when you call up, maybe you don't even know what you want. And you're just like, "I just need something, and I just need someone to help me out." Well, guess what? They're going to help you out. They have that training to ask you those extra questions. "All right, well let's figure it out together. What do you think is the most...?" And they'll ask all those things, and that's wonderful.

And then in that as well, we have all of these community resources that they have access to. Our Military OneSource team also has a research team, and they'll find out information, and they have a lot of stuff and a lot of people that will research for you. Even in that same kind of thought of being preventative and making sure we have those connections, you can call Military OneSource and say, "Hey, I'm moving to a new area, and I want to make sure I have some friends or I have some people I can connect with," because we know no matter what base you're at, a base is as good as the connections you make. If you've got good people or good co-workers, man, that's going to be a great place to be at.

And then if you have things to do, so you can call us and be like, "Hey, I'm about to go to this place, and I really love pickleball. Can you help find me some pickleball clubs?" We'll get a list for you, and we'll get that back to you. And at least you know that

list of people you have something in common, at least one thing in common with everyone on that list. They all love some pickleball or whatever your thing is, whatever your group is. But we can help with that too, and that can help your overall mental health. Having those connections is very positive to be able to have.

**Bruce Moody:**

Okay. Michelle, we're talking about the non-medical counseling, but there is a lot more offered through Military OneSource, and I'd like you to touch on some of these things starting with peer-to-peer support. Talk to us about that and some of the other items that you offer through Military OneSource.

**Michelle Aldana:**

Yeah, we have peer-to-peer support. Sometimes we just need someone to talk to that's been through it and say, "Yeah, that does stink." "It does stink. Thank you for telling me that." And it might be something that someone might feel more comfortable with. "I just need someone else that's been through it and knows what it feels like, and I just want to talk to another person like me." You can call, we can connect you with another spouse, a person who knows what it's like to be a service member or is a... We can make sure you have that person so you can have that talk. And a lot of times people might feel more comfortable with that peer-to-peer support because sometimes the word counseling feels a little heavier or a little more serious, and peer-to-peer is like, "Oh, I'm just talking to a person, shooting the breeze, talking about the things." So it's a little easier for some people, and it's just a good resource to have.

**Bruce Moody:**

Okay, so there's a couple of other tools that I want to touch on very briefly. There's health and wellness coaching. Talk to us about that.

**Michelle Aldana:**

This is great. Health and wellness coaching, I was amazed when I first heard about it when I came here. One, I forgot to mention, all of the Military OneSource resources are free to our service members and their families and those who are eligible to use it. You do not have to pay any money. That's \$0. I thought of that because you asked about health and wellness coaching because that can be really expensive in the civilian world to have your own personal health and wellness coach. And this person is going to help you, is going to ask you like, "What does look like when you're feeling your best and your life is at its best? What does that look like?" And they'll help you reach that goal.

They can help you with helping you pass a PT test, weight management, stress management, time management, being able to just reach those personal goals that you have, and you get an unlimited amount of sessions, and you can do it virtually or you can talk to your health and wellness coach by phone or video or chat. And it's just time that you get to just have that's just dedicated to taking care of you, and in preparation to any major transitions in life, they can help you with that too. And everyone that I've

met that does the health and wellness coaching team for Military OneSource, they're great, they're so nice and wonderful, and I was like, "They're the best." I think they are.

**Bruce Moody:**

No, they are, they are. It's an amazing bunch of people.

And real quick, I just want to list off a couple of things and just sort of capture this for us because there's specialty consultations for new parents, for relationship strengthening. There's elder care. Elder care is a huge growing issue, and it is happening in our military community. Caregiver support, also financial counseling. Just give us sort of a wrap-up on all of these specialty consultations.

**Michelle Aldana:**

We have so many specialty consultations, and with all of our resources for Military OneSource is personalized. They will help you with whatever you have. And I kind of think of Military OneSource thing, someone told me, they're like, "Michelle, this kind of sounds like a concierge service." I was like, "Yes, it does. You can just ask us for things, and we will give you that information." So, if you want elder care, and you can sometimes get to googling something and you get just sucked into all the googles, or if you're a person like me, I do not like to read past the first page. I will not read all the oogles at the bottom. You can ask us to do it, and our consultants will give you a list of resources. So, if you're like, "Hey, I want elder care for my parent, and I want it to be within this many miles of this zip code, I want them to have their own room, a 24/7 nurse."

You give us all your things that you want, we will research it and then give it back to you. It's usually 48 hours, within two days, and then we'll follow up and say, "Did you get all that stuff? Is there any questions?" That's just one less thing that you have to do. And that's with a lot of our consultations.

And then in regards to relationship strengthening and new parenting, it's really wonderful having a kid, but sometimes it's tough. Sometimes your child will say, "I don't want to wear pants because it's harder for my left leg to get in my pants instead of my right leg." And I was like, "I don't know what to tell you. You just have one strong leg, I'm not sure." And it will turn into... You can call someone and say, "Hey, can you help me manage some of these challenging behaviors?" And you'll get a new parent consultation, and you can talk to a person and help you through that because all kids can be challenging sometimes even though they're absolutely wonderful. But if we have the tools, we can tackle that and you can tackle it with someone, and it's great when you can do something together.

Relationship strengthening. The number one reason people use non-medical counseling is for relationships. And so we have tons of relationship tools. So whether that's Love Every Day, and you want to have a little text message sent to you and your partner every day of how to connect, or OurRelationship with this, a self-paced online one that usually takes about four to six weeks, and you can just identify a couple of



things. It doesn't matter if you and your partner are in the same house or if they're deployed or out or geo-batching, whatever that is, you can still work on things together and stay connected. And we have things are building healthy relationships. We just have a ton. So you can just connect with us and say, "Hey, I just would like some information or want to connect on." You can say anything. We really can connect you for all the things. I just talked to a consultant, and he was like, "I helped someone find tires for their car yesterday." I mean, just call us. We got you.

**Bruce Moody:**

Michelle, as we started the conversation, we did mention that everything that we're talking about here is confidential, and I really would like you to just explain that something called Military OneSource is in fact confidential.

**Michelle Aldana:**

Yeah. So Military OneSource, all of our resources are free and they're confidential up until I have to keep you safe. I care, and we as a department care about our service members and our families, and we have a duty to keep you safe. So, if you call us and you express harm to self or harm to someone else, I have to keep you safe. I care about you. So, I do have to contact someone to make sure that you are safe. If you express that someone else is hurting you or any kind of harm that's happening, I have to make sure to keep you safe. So, we do have to notify the proper people when those situations happen.

And if you say you're going to do something illegal, I can't just say, "Okay, hope that works out." No, I want to keep you safe from jail. I don't want you to have that. So, we do have to notify people if there's harm to self, harm to others or illegal activities. We do have to, but other than those situations, it's confidential. We aren't going to reach out to command. We don't reach out to anyone. It is confidential. We only have to make sure that you are safe and that you are okay. And that's what we always want to do. When you use our resources, we're giving you the tools to help you be your best self, whatever your best self looks like from day to day and making sure that you are at your best and you are safe. And because we care, and we want to make sure you're okay.

**Bruce Moody:**

So, we've covered a lot of ground in this episode. I'm really so grateful for you being with us today too just for military families to take that first step to get started with any help. What would be their first step?

Michelle Aldana: So ways that anyone who's eligible for Military OneSource can reach us is they can call us at our number that's going to be in the notes for the podcast. Or you can do a live chat, and you can go onto our [militaryonesource.mil](https://militaryonesource.mil), on the page, you'll see a little chat box, you click on that, you can chat, connect, set up, schedule that session. And we also have an app and it has connect to us.

And if you're overseas and you want to know how to call us, you can go to our site and it says "Overseas? Contact us," and it'll tell you how to call us because sometimes you have to dial a couple more numbers to be able to connect. But you can call us from DSN phones and be able to contact us. But so, you can contact us through chat or phone, through our app, and we can be there for you, and we'll answer the phones. We're open 24/7, 365, and you'll always talk to a live person.

**Bruce Moody:**

Michelle, we will end it there. Thank you so very much for joining us, and great to have you back on the podcast, and we hope to have you back again.

**Michelle Aldana:**

Anytime. Glad to share always.

**Bruce Moody:**

Deal. We will be in touch.

All right. Thank you, everybody, want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We always like to hear from you. Click on the link in the program notes to send us a question, a comment, maybe an idea for a future podcast. And 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.