

Military OneSource Podcast — Sesame Street for Military Families, Month of the Military Child

Children, Youth and Families 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.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast, I'm Bruce Moody. Sesame Workshop returns to the podcast. They're the ones of course who bring us Sesame Street, the show we all know, along with characters like Elmo and Big Bird. What you might not know is that the Defense Department works closely with Sesame Workshop, and one of the results is something called Sesame Street for Military Families. Our guest today is Tara Wright, who's from Sesame Workshop. Tara, welcome to the podcast.

Tara Wright:

Hi, Bruce. Thank you so much for having me.

Bruce Moody:

So let's just get started and talk about what it is that you do with Sesame Workshop.

Tara Wright:

Sure. So, I create content for not only Sesame Street for Military Families, which you can find at sesamestreetformilitaryfamilies.org, I create content for that website, but I also create content for our other social impact initiatives here in the U.S. And those topics can range from anything like health and healthy hygiene and healthy habits, to ABCs and 123s, to those tougher topics like grief or trauma. So, I have the pleasure of creating content for kids and families and also providers who serve them, and it's been a great ride to be with Sesame.

Bruce Moody:

Well, us as well. It's just always a joy to work with you guys, specifically with Sesame Street for Military Families. Talk about that. These are really military-specific topics and programs and products that are available for military children, military families. Talk about those, please.

Tara Wright:

Sure, no problem. Yeah, it's been so delightful to work with and learn from military families everywhere. And I'm actually a pretty recent military family myself. My husband is an officer in the Marine Corps Reserves, so it's been really fun. We're in our 16th year, I think, working with military families. So we have created a whole suite of resources that walk through life with military families, all the ups and downs, the big changes, the big transitions, everything from deployments and homecomings. We of course have resources around grief. But we also have resources for those everyday challenges and transitions, so transitions and routines, and special occasions like birthdays. So we kind of run the gamut. And our goal is really to create content that walks along with military families, no matter where they are in their military journey.

Bruce Moody:

I would really like to talk about the work that Sesame does with the Department of Defense. A lot of people may not realize that you guys talk with us. Talk to us about that. How Sesame Workshop comes to understand military life so that they can create products that military families can find useful.

Tara Wright:

The process is pretty in depth. We have our ear to the ground, I guess you could say. We work very closely with military partners, lots of providers who are working with military families specifically, and we meet those through the DOD. We have a team that we work with directly with the DOD to also help inform and consult on our work. And we do a lot of research with military families, everything from surveys to online bulletin boards where we get to ask questions and get feedback, to in-person interviews. And what we like to do is really ask military families what they're going through, what types of challenges they're facing, what joys they're facing also, and how we can amplify and highlight the things that will help them.

And we also, of course, test any of the content that we're thinking about developing. So most recently we have done work around grief and even death by suicide, and that's a really difficult topic. So we want to be sure that we're reflecting a diversity of experiences with that, and not only hear from experts but also from the families, what strategies really helped them? What resources helped them? How can we amplify those

things and hear directly from them and then reflect back to them their experience? So, we are constantly listening and we're always open to feedback. My team will definitely welcome any feedback, any ideas, and it might take us a while to develop things, but we usually get around to it.

Bruce Moody:

I understand. So, when you have the feedback and the understanding and the research, all of that surprisingly tough, detailed research that goes into it, then how does Sesame Workshop help families address typical topics and make learning fun for children?

Tara Wright:

That's really kind of where my job comes in. So we have a great research team that does all this research with families, with providers. And then they give us some top-line findings in a very detailed research report with lots of quotes and lots of very rich anecdotal experience. And my job as a content creator is to take those findings, and really distill them down into themes that keep recurring and try to get some key messages across. And then we get to decide how to deliver those messages. So what type of media is really going to serve the message the best, and who does it need to serve? So is it a kid-facing message or is it a parent or grownup-facing message? Because we like to serve both in our content.

So I get to take that, create some key messaging and sort of envision with our broader team, of course, and our production team and our content team, what that type of content will look like. Sometimes we get to test it a little bit more and then we get to make it. So, we really like to make content that is serving both kids and families as a whole and grownups also. So lots of opportunity to explore the themes and unpack them in different types of media.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah, this is a great behind-the-scenes understanding. Before Elmo speaks, there's a lot of work that happens

Tara Wright:

That's right. That's right.

Bruce Moody:

So let's get back to Sesame Street for Military Families. Within that, you've launched a new resource and it's called Learning and Growing Together. Talk to us about that.

Tara Wright:

Of course. So one of our more recent topic pages on Sesame Street for Military Families is called Learning and Growing Together. And this page really aims to build on the resilience that military families already have. And we wanted to hone in and help families hone in on some key skills that they can continue to develop together as a family, and of course practice those things in very playful ways.

Bruce Moody:

We're going to put a link to Sesame Street for Military Families in the program notes. People can click on it and they can find this new resource Learning and Growing Together. Talk to us, if you would, about this link, this page, Sesame Street for Military Families and some of the other products where they can go to get more information.

Tara Wright:

Sure. On this page in particular, the Learning and Growing Together and really all the resources or all the topic pages on Sesame Street for Military Families, you'll find a variety of assets. So we've got videos, we have some short actionable articles for parents or caregivers, and then we have some printable activities that really correlate and correspond with the key messages, as I mentioned. So on the Learning and Growing Together page, for instance, you will see resources that include those key skills that kids and families need to keep building their resilience. So things like flexible thinking, curiosity, persistence and confidence, and really that sense of family togetherness.

So, this is the big theme of this page, and it complements some work that we're about to launch later this year. And it's really about this family togetherness, that as a military family specifically, we're going through lots of changes. We have lots of ups and downs that can be particularly challenging. I know this in my own experience. And I know that I'm not perfect, so I need these reminders just like my kids need these reminders that we need to be flexible. We need to find new ways to manage our big feelings. I need to take a deep breath every now and then.

And what I love about this page and really all our content on Sesame Street for Military Families is that we really emphasize caregivers and parents being involved in the process, where you can read these articles, you can watch the videos together with your kids, and then you can practice and model the strategies. So that's a recurring theme throughout the website. You'll see the videos that really pack a punch with a big key strategy. We've got Muppet families modeling for us what we could be doing to have healthy relationships and conversations.

And then the articles really go deeper into those strategies, especially for parents, "What are those actionable things that I can do? How can I practice this?" And then printables really kind of pack in that learning and fun and give you something tangible

that you can remember what you've just done and what you've talked about during the week and reference back to. If you hang it up on your fridge, you can say, "Oh, that's our I Can calendar. These are all the things we've accomplished." And that really adds to the strategy of confidence and persistence. So, it's kind of a suite of resources that all work together on this topic page and throughout the website.

Bruce Moody:

Let's transition from Sesame Street for Military Families to Military OneSource, our website. Our website Military OneSource has information and resources designed to help children and parents navigate military life challenges. I'll list a couple of items here. We're going to put links in the program notes. On Military OneSource we have our Military Parents Resource Center, which is pretty much what it sounds like, ton of stuff there. You can also directly contact Military OneSource. We are a call center after all. You can call us directly by phone. You can set up a live chat, that's 24/7. And you can also, this is really important, you can also contact your local installation, their Military Family Support Center. They go by different names, different branches. But on your installation, there is information about local support programs and services. So definitely check that out.

But Tara, back to Military OneSource. We have stuff that we have available for military families. We have a Sesame Street for Military Families magnet, which is awesome, and people can go online and order that. There's also, and I want you to talk to these two things, so there's a resilience kit and a deployment kit that families can order and have delivered to their homes. Talk to us about what families can find in these kits.

Tara Wright:

That's right. We have two physical toolkits we like to call them. One is about resilience and the other is about deployments. Both of these have strategies and information both for kids and parents, and they each come with a DVD and an activity guide that families can engage with together. And I do want to note importantly that these are free, so there's no cost to families. If they want to go on and order these online, they'll be shipped for free to make them very accessible to everyone.

Bruce Moody:

I grew up with Sesame Street. We all did. But it's just so very, very cool that in addition to that program, which is awesome and amazing, and just what a treasure, that we also have this very specific Sesame Street for Military Families. And I just invite any final thoughts that you would offer to military families about what the Sesame Workshop offers them?

Tara Wright:

Yeah, well, I just really want to encourage everyone to visit our website. So it's Sesame Street for Military Families, or for short you can go to ss4mf.org. And you can also visit our Sesame Workshop page. You can find sesame.org. And right now we have a page called sesamestreetincommunities.org that has some military resources as well, so you can find us there. And I really do encourage military families to check those resources out and see how they can work for them and help them through changes and ups and downs of military life, because we all know they come and go. It's a unique lifestyle.

I also want to encourage people to start following us on Facebook and Instagram. We are on Facebook and Instagram, and the handle is both Sesame Street for Military Families, but on Facebook, it's the word F-O-R. And on Instagram, it's the number four. So I'm sure if you search, you'll find us. But if you want to join us on social media, we'd love to have you there. And especially during April, which is the Month of the Military Child, we will be celebrating in our stories, and we'll have some shout-outs and some prompts there for you to get involved with us. And we'd really love to see families post their pictures and tag us so we can celebrate with them.

Bruce Moody:

Tara Wright from Sesame Workshop, thank you so much for joining us today.

Tara Wright:

It's been a pleasure. Thanks, Bruce.

Bruce Moody:

Absolutely. Want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We are a website, a call center, we're all over social media, and of course, we are a podcast. So go ahead and subscribe wherever you listen to your podcasts because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. And we'd like to hear from you. We have a link in the program notes, you can click on that. You can let us know what you thought of this episode, or previous episodes. Or you can let us know what you'd like us to talk about in future episodes. So thanks a lot. We really look forward to hearing from you. I'm Bruce Moody. Thanks a lot for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.