



The following established style guidelines reflect the long-standing practices of developers and editors of content for the Office of Special Needs. They are consistent with the rules and guidance outlined in The Associated Press Stylebook and reflective of Office of Military Community and Family Policy style and usage preferences.

Content Tips

- Keep the wide audience range in mind. Include individuals/adults with disabilities as well. Stress that the program is for military family members of all ages with special medical or educational needs.
- Use language that avoids defining a person by their disability. For example, “Ray Charles was a famous musician who was blind,” versus “Ray Charles, a blind musician.”
- Keep instructions with related actions (e.g., “Select from the following options.”) Avoid directional language that refers to the layout of the document (e.g., “Select from the options in the box to the right.”). This can be confusing when using screen readers.
- Focus on positive outcomes, services and supports.
- Target acquiring knowledge, personal empowerment, self-advocacy and advocacy for others.
- Ensure tone is informative, reassuring, relatable.
- Use images and multimedia that are representative of individuals with disabilities

Things to Avoid

- Making assumptions.
- Telling people how they feel.
- Telling people what they should, need to, must, ought, can’t or won’t do.
- Focusing on the negative, the struggle or the challenge.
- Assuming all family members enrolled in EFMP are children.
- Using unusual words, idioms, acronyms or euphemisms (e.g. “handi-capable”), unless part of the name of an organization, event or cause.
- Using pictorial metaphors or negative terms.



Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation or acronym	Full title
EDIS	Educational and Developmental Intervention Services
EFMP	Exceptional Family Member Program
IEP	individualized education program
IFSP	individualized family service plan

Preferred Terms

Acceptable

Office of Special Needs or OSN (instead of Office of Community Support for Military Families With Special Needs)

Military OneSource special needs consultants (instead of EFMP special needs consultants)

families with special medical or educational needs (instead of special needs families; exceptional families)

individual or family member with a disability (instead of disabled individual or disabled family member)

intellectual disability or developmental disability (instead of mental retardation)

families enrolled in EFMP (instead of EFMP families)

“resource” or “support” (instead of “benefit,” (in alignment with the DODI 1315.19 and DODI/DODM 1342.12))

older person; older adults (instead of elderly or senior citizen)

uses a wheelchair (instead of confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound)

disabled (instead of handicapped)

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caregiver (instead of caretaker)

person without a disability (instead of able-bodied)

individualized education program (lowercase); IEP (on second reference)

Section 504 plan (instead of 504 plan)

When mentioning service-specific guidance or support for EFMP, use the following language and links:

EFMP is a War Department program that provides comprehensive support and services to military families with special medical or educational needs through identification and enrollment, assignment coordination, and family support services. Each branch of service implements EFMP to support individual, family and unit readiness needs in accordance with DoD Instruction 1315.19. Click the links below to access service-specific information:

[Army Exceptional Family Member Program](#)

[Marine Corps Exceptional Family Member Program](#)

[Navy Exceptional Family Member Program](#)

[Air Force Exceptional Family Member Program](#)

Official Resources

Department policy

- [Department of Defense Instruction 1315.19 Exceptional Family Member Program](#)
- [Department of Defense Instruction 1342.12 Provision of Early Intervention and Special Education Services to Eligible DoD Dependents](#)
- [Department of Defense Manual 1342.12 Implementation of Early Intervention and Special Education Services to Eligible DoD Dependents](#)

Legislation or regulations

- [The Americans With Disabilities Act](#)

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Military OneSource websites

- [Special Needs page](#)
- [EFMP & Me](#)