

Practical skills for working with military families



ABIGAIL GEWIRTZ, PH.D.
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
DEPT OF FAMILY SOCIAL SCIENCE
& INST. OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT



Overview



- **Military families – focus on reserve component**
 - National Guard
 - Reserves
- **Impact of deployment on children and families**
 - Impact on kids
 - Impact on parents
 - Impact of family relationships
- **Supporting the resilience of military families**
 - Building on strengths
- **Addressing family stress within the context of the deployment cycle**
 - Pre-deployment
 - During deployment
 - Reintegration
- **Strategies to enhance emotion regulation as a key to effective parenting**
 - ADAPT – example segments

Acknowledgements



- **Project funded by NIH/NIDA (R01 DA 030114; 2010-2015)**
- **Co-investigators: Drs. Marion Forgatch, Dave DeGarmo, Melissa Polusny**
- **Facilitators:**
 - Guardsmen
 - NG contractors
 - VA clinicians
 - Community mental health clinicians
 - Psychology grad students
- **Hundreds of National Guard and Reserve families**
- **National Guard command and communication staff**

Background and rationale

- National Guard and Reserves (NG/R) are USA's 'civilian soldiers'
- Dispersed with no common support system
- Now face multiple deployments
 - Unprecedented reliance on NG/R troops
 - Typical deployment is 12 months in Army Guard (mean – 2.2)
 - Multiple, shorter deployments in Air Guard
- Balance multiple daily demands
 - Work
 - Family
 - Military

Reserve Component families

- Increase in attention to families of NG/R service members given data indicating:
 - Higher levels of posttraumatic stress disorder, drug use, other combat-related adjustment problems among NG/R compared with Active Duty personnel - PTSD, depression, interpersonal conflict
 - Posttraumatic distress predicts parenting challenges following deployment
 - **Family stressors (e.g. marital transitions, parent psychopathology, substance use) disrupt parenting and increase children's risk for substance use and related behavior problems**

Combat deployment is a family stressor

- Separations from family and children
 - ✦ Intense work conditions
 - ✦ Exposure to potentially traumatic events
- Associations between combat deployment and family functioning
 - Depression in spouses
 - Child adjustment problems
 - Domestic violence (also associated with children at home)
- Combat related stressors (not just deployment) also affect families
 - Combat-related PTSD associated with marital disruption, spousal abuse, parenting skills & satisfaction

Reintegration is a key transition point



- Stressful for families – longer and more complex than previously thought
- Yet more complex if service member was injured
- Key transition times offer special opportunities for prevention (e.g. as parents are readjusting parenting roles)

Parenting practices mediate the impact of combat deployment stress on child outcomes



- detrimental impact of combat deployment on children may be primarily mediated through its effects on *parenting practices*
- robust association in range of populations between family stressors (risks including parental substance use, PTSD, other psychiatric illness, interpersonal conflict, as well as family transitions, socioeconomic stress) and parenting difficulties, and subsequent child maladjustment

Supporting resilience in military families



- **Build on strengths!**
 - What are strengths?
 - ✦ Of parents
 - ✦ Kids
 - ✦ Parenting?
- **Create goals**
 - Driven by values
 - Measurable, achievable
 - Positive focus
- **Measure progress towards goals by creating small steps to success**
- **Example: giving effective directions**

Addressing family stress in the deployment cycle



- Helping parents maintain rules, routines, rituals
- Helping parents support kids' coping
- Understand and respond to kids' anxiety
- Minimize transitions
- Maintain a united parenting front

Enhancing emotion regulation as key to effective parenting

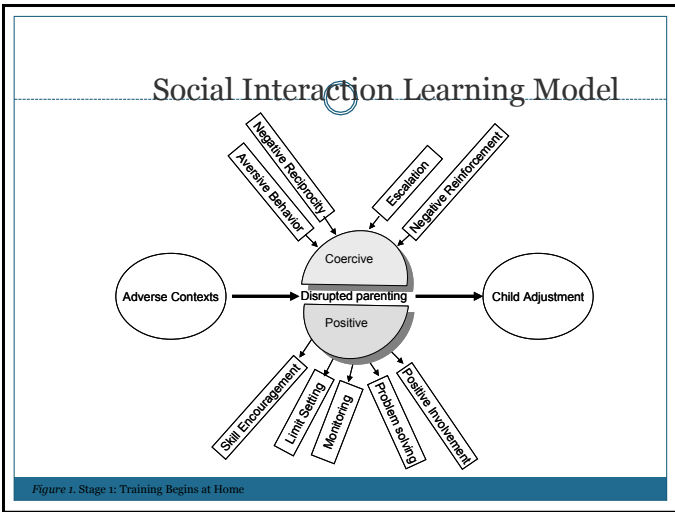


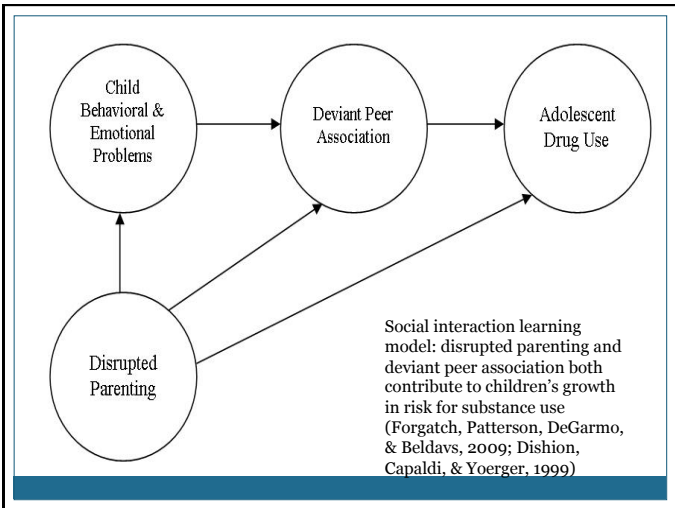
- Support parents to manage stress
- Regulating emotions in family interactions
- Balancing encouragement and discipline: the 5:1 ratio

Extending PMTO for military families: After Deployment Adaptive Parenting Tools



ADAPT
After Deployment: Adaptive Parenting Tools





An empirically supported intervention to reduce childhood substance abuse risk: Parent Management Training – Oregon Model (PMTO)

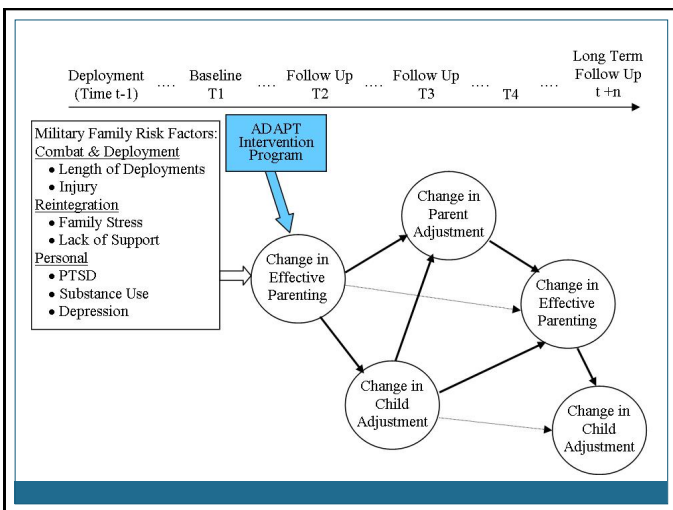
- Multiple studies testing the social interaction learning model have demonstrated the utility of PMTO in improving positive parenting and reducing coercion (e.g., Chamberlain & Reid, 1998; Fisher, Gunnar, Chamberlain, & Reid, 2000; Forgatch & DeGarmo, 1999; Patterson & Forgatch, 2010)
- PMTO (follow-up data to 9 years)
 - Reduced coercion, improved positive parenting
 - Improved child adjustment, reducing substance use risk
 - Improved parents' su and mental health, & couple functioning
- Positive parenting mediates the effects of family stress on children's adjustment

Modifications to PMTO for military families: ADAPT

- **Attention to emotion regulation in family communication (emotion socialization)**
 - Mindfulness training (to address experiential avoidance associated with PTSD symptoms)
 - Emotion coaching (esp. responding to children's fears)
- **Attention to military culture and values**
- **Emphasis on united parenting front (for two-parent families)**
- **Addressing common barriers to participation**
 - Web-component to increase involvement in group program by other caregivers, spouses, etc.
 - Stand alone online ADAPT is under development

Effectiveness of a web-enhanced parenting program for military families

- **5 year study (2010-2015) funded by National Institutes of Health/National Institute on Drug Abuse**
- **400 NG/R families will be recruited and followed over a 2 year period beginning summer 2011**
 - Random assignment to be offered a parenting program (ADAPT) or parenting services-as-usual (web and print resources)
 - Parents and teachers complete online questionnaires, and observational, self-report, and physiological data are gathered from families at baseline, 12, 18, and 24 months.
 - Outcomes: child substance use risk, behavior & emotional problems, parent adjustment (mental health, substance use), parenting, parent emotion regulation, parent emotion socialization



ADAPT: After Deployment Adaptive Parenting Tools

- A 14-week long, web-enhanced, group-based program that will be offered to NG and Reserve troops returning from deployment who have at least one child aged 5-12yrs
- Weekly, provided in the community, 2hrs long, groups begin in Sept 2011
- Online ADAPT is available to participants for 12 months

Recruitment

- Intensive outreach efforts
 - Presence at all NG events
 - Family preparation academies, reintegration trainings, picnics
 - Community education
 - Press and media coverage (radio, TV, newspapers, websites)
 - Social media
- Pilot groups
 - the sessions “gave me time not only to get the material but then to personalize it for my own environment and share with other parents.”
 - “I enjoy my child more...I am able to focus on the positive moments, and the difficult times bother me less”

The screenshot displays the ADAPT web application interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'LISTING', 'ADD NEW LICENSE', 'HELP DESK', 'ED CLIPS', 'REGISTER', and 'MY ACCOUNT SETTINGS'. The main content area is titled 'ADAPT' and 'ED Ed Online'. It features a progress indicator showing '24% complete' and a subscription notice: 'Your subscription ends in 8 days (on 7/18/09)'. Below this, there are sections for 'JOURNAL ENTRIES' and 'DISCUSSIONS FORUMS'. The 'DISCUSSIONS FORUMS' section highlights 'Most active discussions' and 'Reducing Conflict (49 posts)'. The interface also includes a 'Knowledge Check: Family Strategies' and a 'Discussion Forum: Share your experiences'. Several circular callouts provide detailed views of specific features: 'Family strategies for supporting each other under stress', 'Managing Family Conflict', 'Journal entry 1: First, watch the video. Describe a strategy you could use to regulate emotions in this conflict situation.', 'Watch this video to see what Greg and Raymond do in this conflict situation. Then answer the questions below.', and 'concerned that Veronica is falling behind in school. Why? Do you think it's all...'. A 'My Profile' sidebar on the right shows the user's name 'john.doe@lookiris.com' and their current default email address.

Thank You!



Abigail Gewirtz, Ph.D. L.P., Associate Professor,
Dept. of Family Social Science & Institute of Child
Development, University of Minnesota, 290 McNeal
Hall, 1985 Buford Ave, St. Paul, MN 55108
612-624-1475 (ph); agewirtz@umn.edu



ADAPT topics



- Building blocks of resilience
 - Values, strengths, goals
- Effective directions
- Teaching through encouragement
- Observing emotions
- Responding to emotions
- Setting limits
- Following through

ADAPT topics contd.

- Communicating with children
- Family Problem-Solving
- Managing conflict
- Monitoring kids (at home and at school)
- Promoting school success
- Building skills
- Balancing work and play

- Throughout: maintaining a united parenting front

