

A person in a military uniform, specifically a dark jacket and blue trousers with a prominent yellow stripe down the side, stands in front of a large American flag. The person's right hand is visible, holding the top of the yellow stripe. The background is filled with the red and white stripes of the flag.

MILITARY PARENTING 101



Introduction

Welcome to the world of military parenting. Perhaps you knew that your child planned to join the military or maybe it came as a shock.

Whether you come from a military family, were a military spouse, or have no experience at all, the first months of training are very stressful. And I am just talking about the parents!

We want to help you navigate these first weeks of training so you can transform, just like your son or daughter as they train to become their best selves.

“We want to help you be that warrior on the home front!”

Whether it is basic training or officer’s candidate school, service academy Plebe Summer or ROTC indoctrination, there are some similarities. You will have little to no contact as they go through an intense physical and mental training environment, and there is very little you can do to help them. That combination can make for a very stressful time for you as a parent since it is most likely diametrically opposed to life before the military. It’s a big adjustment!

Our hope is that by learning more about the big picture we can give you tools to cope with boot camp and beyond, when their military life can bring even greater challenges.

As they train to become warriors, you can also train to be warriors on the home front, ready to support your child and yourself if duty calls them to serve in harm’s way.

Let’s start by understanding some fundamentals. There are many resources that explain basic training or officer training. The Department of Defense puts out information and there are a myriad of Facebook Groups and Pages that can guide you through each week.

You can also find Facebook Pages that post pictures that you can search for incessantly. You may even meet some of your best friends ever in these groups as you share this unique time together.

Be forewarned: We are huge fans of a positive approach to the challenges we face as military moms.

“We have little patience with parents complaining “How could they do that to us?” We consider it a great honor to have children who want to serve.”

With the elimination of the draft your child made a choice to serve and no matter whether we agree or disagree, it is not about us. Is it tough on our hearts? Sure it is. But our goal is to learn how to get through this to support them.

If you are in a group that has a decidedly negative spin, our suggestion is to get out. Follow our Facebook Pages where you can count on positive and encouraging messages:

- Army Mom Strong [FB.com/armymomstrong](https://www.facebook.com/armymomstrong)
- Be Safe, Love Mom [FB.com/besafelovemom](https://www.facebook.com/besafelovemom)
- The Heart of a Military Mom [FB.com/heartofamilitarymom](https://www.facebook.com/heartofamilitarymom)

Look for other groups that are supportive online or in your local community. We need to link arms and lift each other up; not only for us but for our service members.

Here are some practical tips to help you step up to the challenges ahead and transition to a more resilient you!

Every day is a new opportunity for change and personal growth.

Let's get started!

Suspend the Need to Know

You most likely spent the last 18 years or so knowing much of your kid's life. You knew their schedule, who they hung out with, their favorite lunch, how they spent their time and on and on.

In one 24-hour period you will go from that to knowing nothing except what can be rattled off in a one minute phone call or a post card with a few lines scrawled on it.

"Mom I'm fine. I'm writing because they said I have to. Very Respectfully Your Son" is a favorite in my mamma souvenir collections. It was not funny at the time. I had a million questions with the uppermost one being "Are you ok?"

That encompassed everything from are they feeding you, screaming at you, did you make the right choice? Those first few weeks with no feedback are grueling. You run to the mailbox and refuse to turn off your phone.

Time virtually stands still until you hear from them.

The reason for all of this is simple. Your child needs to learn a new culture and a new way of life. They need to learn to rely on each other; their shipmates, their teammates, their platoon. They have a new family now—a band of brothers (or sisters).

This unity is what makes them a success. The Navy has a saying, "Ship, Shipmate, Self." That is their new priority. Individual needs go to the bottom. To accomplish this, everything needs to be new and they need to be isolated from outside influences—including us.

We simply get in the way. Yes, it's hard on the heart to feel left out. I know this. After all these are our babies. But it is necessary for them to learn and thrive in this new military environment.

We also have an innate drive to protect them from hard things. As moms, we naturally want to keep our children safe and alive. We're wired that way.

Some of the military training strategies can go against all of that. "Why do they have to be yelled at?" "Why does it have to be so rough?" There is a purpose for all that.

As service members, they must learn to operate under stress. They have to work through being uncomfortable. They have to push themselves through obstacles. They have to know they can go beyond their limits.

Our tender hearts can get in the way of those lessons. So how do we cope with the tough times that come with this letting go? We need to suspend the need to know.

What does that mean exactly? It means there are many things that we will not or cannot know about their lives anymore. There are things our children cannot share with us.

It is a hard concept and one you just might shed tears over. The reality is those days are gone. Some reasons include distance and lack of access, while other reasons are security based.

My kids have deployed to unknown locations and I didn't talk to them for months at a time. It was on a need-to-know basis and I wasn't on the need-to-know list!

The good news is that basic training is where you can choose to begin building those muscles of coping with lack of access or knowledge. It takes mental strength to let go, and grit and a few tears to transition to a healthy place of parenting a warrior who is no longer a child.



Cut the Clutter

Imagine if you were an athlete trying to get to the Olympics? You would have a laser focus on that goal. You would remove everything that was non-essential from your calendar. You would eat, sleep, and spend your day working toward that dream.

As I write this, it strikes me that is exactly what happens to our children in basic training. Their entire world revolves around becoming a well-trained soldier, sailor, airman, coast Guardsmen or Marine. They most likely spent the months leading up to this time working out and getting their head into the game.

That same mental attitude can help you as you use this time to transform as well. No, our lives do not go on hold. We still have jobs, or children or parents to care for.

But there are some things we are going to need to get rid-of, or as I say cut the clutter.

Let's start with self-pity. There is a certain amount of melancholy that comes with our children growing up and leaving. All those times at the grocery store checkout line when our kids were going crazy and an older woman smiles wistfully and says "Treasure these times" come back to haunt us.

Those were wonderful days (I say with a memory that has edited out certain memories, like the kid peeing on the floor in said checkout line). We love our children and miss them, even if some of them turned into sullen surly messes as teenagers.

There is also a grief that comes from knowing that a certain phase of our life is over.

"When we set our minds to it, we can change our attitudes to make the most of this time."

Things will never be the same even if we keep their rooms exactly as they left it. By the way my kids' rooms immediately became craft rooms, but I understand the sentiment.

This is a reminder that we are getting older and we may begin to examine our lives to this point, which is good thing. What is not a good thing is when self-pity and despair have you mired down at these very normal changes.

Kids are supposed to grow up. Do we really want them living in our basements forever?

Grief at the change and them leaving is normal. Being homesick for them is normal. But it can quickly take you down a rabbit hole if you indulge it for too long.

Basic training is not the time to take out the baby books and look at sweet baby faces. This is when you put on that game face and focus on the objective. Your kid has stood up and chosen to serve their country. They have put themselves on a path to find their best selves, develop skills, and become a quality adult.

Start thinking of all the positives, dig into your pride, and when pity tries to rise up, just cut it out. It will not make your days better.

As they are working to their future, we naturally look to ours. Are there dreams we had that we never acted on? Maybe you always wanted to go back to school or run a marathon. Take a lesson from your child who has the guts to step out and go for it. Cut the negativity that says it is too late, or you can't do it. Make a list of things you'd like to accomplish in the next phase of your life.



While my second son was in Plebe Summer I trained for a marathon. I am the most unlikely runner but knowing that every morning for 90 minutes he was doing PEP (physical exercise period) motivated me to get out there and walk.

I did reach my goal and finished the Marine Corps Marathon. I would have never done it without his inspiration.

Are there people in your circle who are negative about the military or what your child is doing?

"How can you let them do that?!" seems to be a common refrain. My first response—which I don't say because I don't believe in answering rudeness with rudeness—is thinking "how can you be so rude."

But instead they go on the toxic list; that is people who I limit my association with. During basic training and in the future during deployments you just need to preserve your emotional energy. Associating with people who are negative just takes a toll and you don't have the bandwidth to deal with it.

In the same way are there things you are involved with that you don't really enjoy or that don't really bring you joy that you can eliminate? The more you simplify your schedule and buy back precious time, the more reserves you have to navigate the roller coaster of loving a service member.

Cutting the clutter also applies to the news or things you watch. I am very careful about the news sources I use and no longer watch shows filled with talking heads

speculating about what might happen. When your kid s is training to be boots on the ground that stuff gets personal. I remain educated but avoid sensationalism. In the same way this is not the time to watch war movies. It is just too real. Those all go on my discard pile of how I spend my time.

**if not
now,
then
When?**

The whole purpose of cutting the clutter in your life is to build you up and help you develop the mental attitude you need to be strong on the Homefront. If you are constantly fretting about the negative or how much you miss them, it can drain you.

We want you to know how to identify what drains you but even more importantly how to charge your batteries. We will talk about those strategies in the next section.

Find Your Focus

Boom! The door slams, whether it's a bus door, airplane security line, or your own front door. It's the start of the next big thing as they head out with their manila envelope in hand.

In the weeks ahead, your child is going to be tried and tested, and pushed beyond their self-perceived limits in a completely new environment. It's a step they have been working toward for a long time. One of mine decided when he was four year old that he wanted to be Top Gun. It doesn't matter if you have had years or weeks to wrap your head around this, it is happening. And while everything is new and different for them, they leave behind a hole for you.

How you manage this makes all the difference in your life and ultimately how you are able to support them.

You need to get your head into the game and find what you need to get you through these next days. Each of us is different and finds joy in unique ways, but there are some things that hold true for all of us.

Stop thinking of them as your baby. Of course they are. But during these training days it is best to think of them as competent young adults learning the skills they need for their future. When those feeling of fear or worry start to rise up, stop them.

Find a mantra you can use to remind yourself. For example “my kid is smart strong and capable and can do this.” I still use “my kid is the best dang pilot in the Marine Corps” when times get tough. Don’t fill your mind with negatives. You cannot fix things for them or protect them, so let it go.

***“They are capable of so much more
than they or we can imagine.”***

Be excited about the challenges ahead. Change your thinking. It’s not too hard; it is getting them prepared so they have the skills they need. Let them know how proud you are. That pride will get you through a lot of tough times so cultivate it.

Surround yourselves with positive people. It is very helpful to find a battle buddy; that is someone who understands what this process is like. Other military moms get it and can be a great ally on the days when it seems like it is all too much.

Seek encouragement and pass it on to your son/daughter. Motivational quotes and memes can be very helpful to focus on. As you build them up you can also be lifting yourself up.

Get Moving

As your child goes on a journey from civilian to military service member, you go on a journey too. It’s a journey that you may not have planned for or even wanted, but yet here you are, transitioning to becoming the parent of a military service member.

As your child prepares for basic training, you may be overwhelmed with emotions that keep flowing throughout the weeks ahead.

Those emotions can keep you curled up in a fetal position, in a state of sadness, or dealing with feelings you’ve never had before.

Just as the U.S. military relies on prescriptive and managed training, we must do the same to strengthen our resolve to be the best version of ourselves.

One powerful tool to feel your best and boost your mood is regular exercise. Exercise may sound like a scary word if you've not included it in your life before. It doesn't have to be.

Getting out and moving your body can be as simple as walking for 20 minutes a few times a week.

If you are up for a challenge, you can run a 5K and train for it ahead of time, do Yoga, or perform strength exercises at a gym. Whichever you choose, make it purposeful and do it to the best of your ability.

Exercise is a great stress reliever. When my son deployed to Afghanistan, I was worried beyond any worry I experienced before. The tears and fears I experienced were not helping me in life. I didn't know what to do, so I began a disciplined exercise routine. Not only did I get in the best shape of my life, but my body and mind just felt better.

I ran two 5K races and focused on my daily training which helped break the cycle of intense stress and anxiety. In turn, other aspects of my life started to improve.

By the end of that year-long deployment, I had friends comment that they saw a real change in my emotional and mental strength. I felt it!

Just move. Do something active.

Being active releases feel-good endorphins that help to enhance feelings of well-being and take your mind off your worries.

Your child is working hard to build mental and physical toughness. You can do the same. As they work on goals for their future, you can too.

But how will you do that if you feel stressed to the max with anxious feelings? Activity can help relieve and manage your stressful feelings.

Your child is working hard to be their best, why not you? Let their hard work, dedication, and patriotism inspire you to be your best!

Get moving!

BE 
Stronger 
than your
EXCUSES

Practice Self-care

Some of the most important lessons of basic training are about self-care. Taking good care of their feet is a lesson all new service member learns. Why? Because an Army moves on its feet.

As a mom my energy comes from the heart, and I have to take care of it to keep moving forward.

We've already talked about the power of movement in taking care of ourselves. The benefits are not just limited to our physical wellbeing, but spill over into our mental and emotional wellness. Using that time to reinforce positive thinking can be so very helpful.

As moms we tend to put ourselves last. We have to be reminded that we need to recharge ourselves as well. Sometimes we go so long with doing for others we have forgotten what we even need.

Take five minutes right now and write down five things that bring you joy that have nothing to do with your family.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Next, do this one more time but list five things that you can do to give yourself a boost, that take five minutes or less.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Now you have a go-to list to use when you need it. We call it a *Military Mom Survival Plan*. It's like charging your smart phone when you get to less than ten percent!

Many moms also find a lot of joy in gathering with other folks and volunteering in military oriented projects. Whatever works in your schedule is a good thing to do.

The more you practice recharging and cultivating a positive attitude the stronger you can become. But there is one more very powerful force that can make a huge difference; it is the pride and benefits that come from being a Military Mom!

Practical Tips for Military Moms

- Boot camp isn't easy but it gave my son an incredible foundation that he needed for continued success in his military career. Boot camp is the start for our kids to forge their way on a new life path. Even amid the emotional ups and downs, you get to forge your path too. Where will life take you? Only you know the answer.
- Boot camp is a time for our kids to soar! As they transition and spread their wings, you can too.
- As you navigate this emotional rollercoaster, give yourself permission to cry or be angry. These are all normal feelings. The key is to let those moments be moments and then carry on. Set your sights on becoming the best version of you.
- As your child goes through training, you do too! This is a time of personal growth as you learn new ways to communicate with your military service member and become more familiar with military ways. You may not always hear from your child. It's not personal! They are very busy in boot camp as they make this very important transition from civilian to military service member and being the best they can be!
- Write to them often. You may not always hear back but they will appreciate your letters of encouragement. Boot camp is one of the biggest challenges in their life and your letters will be so meaningful! Make a copy of what you write. You may find them inspirational to you down the road when they face the next big challenge like deployment.
- More faith and less fear was one way that helped to lift the weight of worry from my mind. My son's chosen military career was a difficult transition for me that often drained my energy and motivation. I turned to prayer and praise to the Lord to renew my strength and protect my son.
- Find a group in your local community to gather with other military moms that understand your heart.



Why OPSEC is Important for Military Families

You may have heard about OPSEC. Operations Security (OPSEC) is a way to protect information that can be used against us by adversaries.

As proud military moms, we tend to shout out unclassified information in social media on a regular basis. These include photos with names displayed, return date countdowns, exact locations, deployment dates and much more.

When information is posted online, any adversary can access it since it is in the public domain (open source). According to the U.S. Department of Defense Educational Activity, “most of the information collected comes from Open Source.”

If information gets out, it can put our service members in danger.

[Learn more about OPSEC resources.](#)

In addition to OPSEC, consider PERSEC (personal security.) Are you oversharing on social media?

Also, ask yourself if your child wants their photo or personal business posted on social media. We’ve seen it all. Moms who post about their child’s personal business in social media groups. That’s not OK.

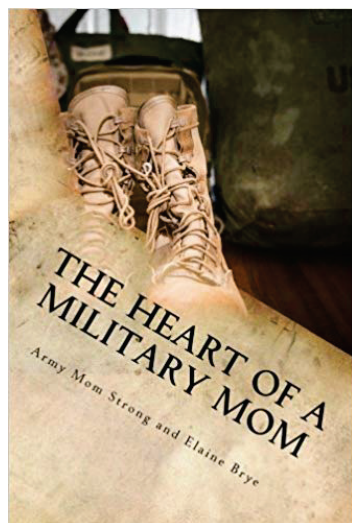
A New Beginning

Thank you for downloading this guide. We hope that you find encouragement and strength here as you start your military mom journey.

We look forward to seeing you on Facebook at:

The Heart of a Military Mom, a collaboration from Elaine Brye of Be Safe, Love Mom and Army Mom Strong.

THE HEART OF A MILITARY MOM



Do you need someone encouraging you, especially when you are learning to let go of your child to military service? How about when they are in difficult places or in harm's way? Do you feel stressed or worried?

You are not alone.

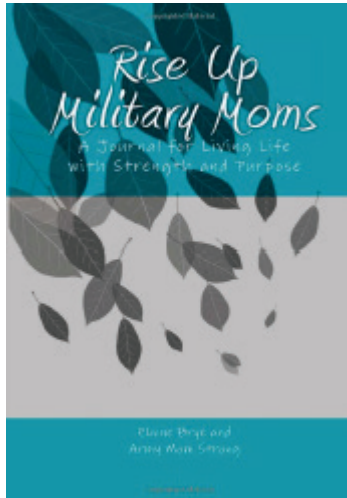
Elaine Brye and Army Mom Strong have combined their efforts to create a powerful, emotional and inspirational pictorial book of encouragement and support for military moms of all branches. The authors are veteran military moms who have supported many moms through the challenges that come with sending a child into harm's way.

"The Heart of a Military Mom" gives you valuable insights to help you to stand strong in the face of fear and on the home front.

GET THE BOOK

RISE UP MILITARY MOMS

A JOURNAL FOR LIVING LIFE WITH STRENGTH AND PURPOSE



As military moms, we all know how those stressful and emotional moments can get overbearing at times. During my son's first deployment, my fears were overwhelming. I decided to spend that time working on me and learning how to get a better handle on this journey as military mom.

I often wished I had a guide to get me through those tough times. That's what Rise Up Military Moms is all about.

With "Rise Up Military Moms," you will have 6 months of weekly guided journaling. Each week features ways in which you can take action to awaken your strength, energize your spirit, and push through your fears.

You'll also find positive insights to inspire and uplift you through your military mom journey. Rise Up focuses on the six areas that help the most:

- Release
- Research
- Reclaim
- Renew
- Recreate
- Represent

Remember that you are the **BRAVE** one who raised a warrior.

GET THE BOOK

About the Authors

Elaine Lowry Brye

Elaine Lowry Brye is a mom who knows about letting go. Like many moms, she cried when her kids left home, wishes they'd call and write more, and spends sleepless nights worrying about them. But Elaine's tears and concerns are even more poignant than most mothers'—because Elaine is the mom of four military officers, one each in the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marines.

An Army brat turned ROTC candidate turned military wife, Elaine never expected her kids to have a call to serve, and certainly didn't expect all four to join up. Three of her kids—two sons and a daughter—attended the Naval Academy, and it was there that Elaine got her own calling: she joined the Naval Academy Parents' Listserv, and began a sixteen-year journey of helping moms and dads adjust to their strange, new, lonely lives as military parents.

She also spent a year teaching in Kabul, Afghanistan where she experienced life in a war zone. Her love of her country and desire to support her fellow parents led to her to write “Be Safe, Love Mom: A Military Moms Stories of Courage, Comfort, and Surviving Life on the Homefront,” and created BeSafeLoveMom.com to further support and connect those who love their military children.

“Do your duty, love your country, live with honor and suck it up” is her mantra as she encourages military moms to face the challenges and struggles of military life with courage. She co-authored “The Heart of a Military Mom” and “Rise Up Military Moms” in hopes that the lessons learned will be empowering and inspirational and provide a reminder that we are not alone in our love, worry and pride for our beloved children.

Army Mom Strong

When Lisa's son prepared for a deployment, she shed many tears amid sleepless nights. Feeling alone and unprepared, she scoured the Internet to educate herself about the mission over there, in a strange mix of fear and pride. She knew there were others who felt the same way.

In 2009, she founded **Army Mom Strong**, an online Facebook community of over 98,000 that supports moms and family of Army service members.

Over the years, she learned to find joy in this journey whether it be deployments, or overseas and stateside duty assignments, while strengthening her inner resolve.

She is fiercely dedicated to her family and enjoys traveling the globe for frequent visits with her family, wherever they may be. She is an avid runner, passionate about living a healthy lifestyle, and helps others do the same through natural solutions.

Her faith in God led her to create "Military Mom Prayer Journal" to help others find strength, peace, courage, and faith while their loved one serves in the military.

Her adventures as an Army Mom over the years led her to create "The Heart of a Military Mom" and "Rise Up Military Moms" with co-author Elaine Brye to help inspire others who are on this journey.

Cover photo by Allie Harrington