

# Lesson Plan for Making Hero Packs



## A Service-Learning Project

for the

## *Operation: Military Kids Initiative*

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This lesson plan is posted at <http://operationmilitarykids.ohio4h.org>  
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# Supply List

Below is a list of items that are needed to complete this lesson.

- Hero Pack Backpacks
- Items to put in Hero Pack
- Copy of letter writing guidelines & letter example (page 11) for every group
- Copy of *Walk This Way* activity for all participants (page 13)
- Pencil or pen for all participants
- Paper to write letter

## **Operation: Military Kids Background Information**

Use this information to introduce youth to *Operation: Military Kids*. Most youth may not have heard of the *Operation: Military Kids* initiative. Use only the information that will be understood by the age and education level of the youth that are present.

### **What is Operation: Military Kids?**

*Operation: Military Kids* is an initiative formed to support children who are coping with the stress of having a deployed parent. When a parent leaves for a long period of time to do his or her job over seas, the kids who were left behind suddenly become different. These kids become “military kids.” Just as the deployed parent switches from a civilian to a soldier after only one phone call, the children of the soldier at home go from being kids to military kids. These kids become military kids who frequently worry about the harm their parent may be exposed to while being a soldier. *Operation: Military Kids* strives to connect military kids who are dispersed from one another with those who are in similar situations. Because these youth and their families are in not necessarily in the same geographic area, they need to meet one another to confide and share their personal experiences with someone who understands how it feels to be a military kid.

When parents are deployed, “suddenly” military kids who live in local communities:

- Become “different” but still “look” the same
- Discover their world turned upside down
- Find usual support systems no longer relevant
- Lack connections to each other
- Are impacted by intensity and frequency of media coverage of the Global War on Terrorism
- 

(U.S. Army Child and Youth Services and USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, 2005)

## **What is a Hero Pack?**

The Hero Pack Initiative is an outreach effort for *Operation: Military Kids*. Hero Packs are care packages made to thank and salute children of deployed parents for their sacrifices made as a military kid. Hero Packs are assembled and distributed to geographically dispersed military kids to help raise community awareness for these families. Some of the items inside a Hero Pack are things a military kid could use to keep in touch with their deployed parent. Other items are used to entertain a military child.

Usually the Hero Pack comes as a backpack containing fun and educational items such as a disposable camera, picture frame, 4-H bear, story book, stationary, and several other items. A key component in the Hero Pack is a hand written letter. The letter thanks the child for their contribution to our country.

These knapsacks are assembled and distributed by youth organizations, such as 4-H, Boys & Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, in conjunction with the state's National Guard and Reserve and the *Operation: Military Kids* Team.

## **Interest Approach Activities**

Start asking members what they think it is like to have a deployed parent and ask if anyone knows a relative, friend, or neighbor who is a deployed soldier right now. Move into one of the interest approaches (see below). Pick the activity that matches the group's age level the best.

## **Interest Approach Activity for Youth Ages 8 through 11**

### *If the Shoe Fits...*

**Objectives:** Youth will be able to demonstrate to one another that it is much harder than what they think to “walk in someone else’s shoes.”

#### **Activity Instructions:**

- Have youth sit in a circle.
- Instruct each youth to take off both of their shoes and put them in the middle of the circle.
- Instruct each student to find two shoes that are not their own and put them on.
- Have each student stand up and have them try to walk around the room.

Youth will find that it is much more difficult than what they think to walk around in someone else’s shoes.

The facilitator should explain to the youth that while they can be supportive of military youth in many different ways, they will never truly understand what life is like for them. However, by being a strong support system and a good friend, they can help them cope with any problems or difficulties that might come their way!

## **Interest Approach Activity for Youth Ages 12 through 19**

### *Thinking Like a Military Family...*

**Objectives:** Youth will gain an understanding of what members of a military family are thinking.

#### **Activity Instructions:**

- Divide the group into at least three smaller groups and give each group the role of a member of a military family (deployed parent, spouse of a deployed parent, and child of a deployed parent).
- Have each group brainstorm what they believe each member of the military family is thinking and write the thought in the thought bubble. (See thought bubble template p. 14)
- Post the thought bubbles on the wall.
- Ask each group to share their ideas on the thought bubbles.
- Adding more members of a military family such as grandparents, close friends, or neighbors can modify this activity.

This activity should allow the participants to understand the challenges that exist within a military family. The facilitator should try to fill in any challenges of a military family that are missing from the thoughts of the group.

# **Assembling a Hero Pack**

## **Where to Begin**

Assembling Hero Packs is an excellent service-learning opportunity for youth organizations. As a service-learning project, youth involved should be able to do the project, reflect on it, and have a realistic application for it.

Youth advisors should introduce the *Operation: Military Kids* initiative to their members. Tell members why the initiative was formed and what it does for youth. (*See pages 1 and 2 of this lesson plan.*) Start asking members what they think it is like to have a deployed parent and ask if anyone knows a relative, friend, or neighbor who is a deployed soldier right now. Move into one of the interest approaches (refer to page 6). Pick the activity that best matches the group's age level.

## **Directions to Assembling Hero Packs**

Have a Hero Pack backpack set out with its contents around it in a place where it is visible for all members to see. Ask each member to gather all the items along with the backpack, and take it back to their seats. Older members may need to be paired up with a younger member. Don't start until everyone has all of the items gathered together. Begin assembling the Hero Packs as a group, placing the items in the backpack one at a time. As each item is picked up and placed into the backpack, discuss its significance to a military kid. The next page is a list of items and possible discussion points.

**Camera** Take pictures of family and friends and have people take pictures of the military kid to send to the deployed parent. If a parent is deployed for 18 months, how long is that? (1.5 years)

What would a parent miss in 1.5 years? Think about birthdays, first day of school, holidays, and anniversaries.

***Non-Breakable Picture Frame*** Use creativity to decorate the picture frames. Ask artistic members to decorate the picture frames or send items in the Hero Pack that the recipient could use to decorate the frame. A child is going to want to frame his or her favorite picture of their deployed parent.

***4-H Bear*** The 4-H youth organization is an opportunity for military kids to become involved with youth of similar interests and backgrounds. By providing a 4-H Bear, military kids may be more motivated to join 4-H.

***Stationery*** Military kids will want to send their parent lots of mail and especially hand written letters. Soldiers really enjoy getting mail. Providing the child with paper will motivate him or her to write more to the parent.

***Flashlight*** Younger children enjoy playing with flashlights. This item is intended as an entertainment tool for younger military kids. Older military kids will enjoy having a flashlight to put in their car, or to take on camping and hiking trips.

***Bandana*** Most soldiers carry bandanas with them. Bandanas could be used by the soldier to absorb perspiration or cover wounds before medical attention arrives. A military child will enjoy having the same thing to use as their deployed parent.

***4-H Brochure*** This brochure provides the information the military kids needs to know for how to join 4-H.

***Story Book and Raccoon Puppet*** Have an older member read the story aloud to the group. Reading in front of a group is especially good for youth who are interested in public speaking,

child care, or leadership. The book, *The Kissing Hand*, deal with the topic of separation, which is timely as the youth and parent will be separate by deployment.

**Day Planner** Kids will use a planner to write down their daily events. This may serve as a journal that will be shared with the deployed parent on homecoming day. Homecoming day is the day the soldier arrives back home.

**Frisbee** A frisbee is something to entertain the child and keep his or her mind off of worrying about the danger the parent may be in each day. Frisbees can be used to play fetch with a pet dog, or older youth enjoy playing ultimate Frisbee as a competitive game.

**Photo Album** Military children will want to take lots of pictures to show their parent. Photo albums will help the child to organize the pictures by chronological order, by events, or by favorite pictures.

**4-H Piggy Bank** This encourages military kids to save artifacts while they are separated from their deployed parent. Artifacts may include items they found, such as rocks or shells or CDs that they bought.

**Handwritten Letter** This letter should be written to the child thanking them for their service and sacrifices to our country. **Please see the heading *Letter Writing Guidelines* on page 11 for guidelines on writing the letter.**

What other items could be included in the Hero Pack? Add things that are specifically from the group that assembled the Hero Packs. Below is a list of possible items that could be included. Do not limit your items to just the suggested list.

Postage Stamps	4-H Lanyards	Puffy paints, stickers etc.
Pens	Candy	(For decorating the non-
Yo-Yo	Prepaid phone calling card	breakable picture frame)
Batteries for flashlight	Daily Journal	

## **Letter Writing**

### **What to include in the letter**

To apply what the group has just created, organization members will write a letter to the youth, thanking him or her for the service and sacrifices they make as a child of a deployed service member. It is not a beneficial activity for members just to assemble a Hero Pack and talk about the significance of some of the items. Youth need to think about why Hero Packs are wanted and appreciated by military kids. This letter writing activity will draw the meaning of Hero Packs closer to organization members. Writing a letter may be harder for young members, so pair older members and younger members together for this application activity.

Have members write a letter to Hero Pack recipients, expressing their sincere appreciation for their situation. There are guidelines that must be followed for the letter writing. **See *Letter Writing Guidelines* on page 11 for details.** All letters will be read by a member of the *Operation: Military Kids* team before the Hero Pack is distributed to the military family to ensure that they are appropriate.

## **Letter Writing Guidelines**

This is a list of guidelines to follow while writing a letter.

- Letter must be politically neutral.
- Letter must have a positive tone. Do not tell the military youth how bad you think their situation is or how sorry you may feel for them.
- Do not provide personal identification of who wrote the letter.
- Thank the youth for their sacrifices that they are making.
- Remind the military youth that they are heroes too.
- Think about what a 4-H'er may say to a military youth if they were to talk in person.
- Share some of your favorite experiences in 4-H. Encourage military youth and their families to join 4-H in their county.

### **Sample letter to a military child**

Dear Child,

Thank you for supporting our country. I really appreciate all of the services and sacrifices that you are making while your parent is gone. I made this Hero Pack for you because you are one of my Heroes. Yes, you and your parents are heroes for making such a big contribution to our country. I hope you can use some of the items in this Care package to keep in contact with your parent while they are gone.

My 4-H club made this Hero Pack for you. As a member of, 4-H, which is a youth organization open to everyone ages 5 to 19 years, I take part in lots of fun activities. My favorite part of 4-H is 4-H Camp. Each summer I get to go to 4-H Camp for five days with my friends. We spend time dancing, swimming, doing a high ropes course and making things to take home. One year I got to make a lamp out of wood and marbles to take home and give to my parents. My favorite part of 4-H Camp is my counselors. 4-H camp counselors are high school kids who are lots of fun. 4-H is in every county in Ohio. I encourage you to join 4-H in your county. It is a youth organization from The Ohio State University and I hope you will join in the fun.

Thanks for being a hero!

## **Reflection**

### **Wrap-up Activity**

To help 4-H'ers reflect and remind them on what it may be like to be a military kid, pass out the activity sheet titled *Walk This Way* to all members. Follow the directions on the top of the sheet to complete the activity. Stop the activity after one person has completed it. This activity is similar to the beginning set of activities. It helps youth to think about what it would feel like to be a military kid. After the activity is completed, discuss with the children how they feel in some of the situations listed on the bingo card. Have them imagine what it is like not seeing a parent for several months. Encourage them to appreciate military kids for the sacrifices they make while a soldier is deployed.



## WALK THIS WAY

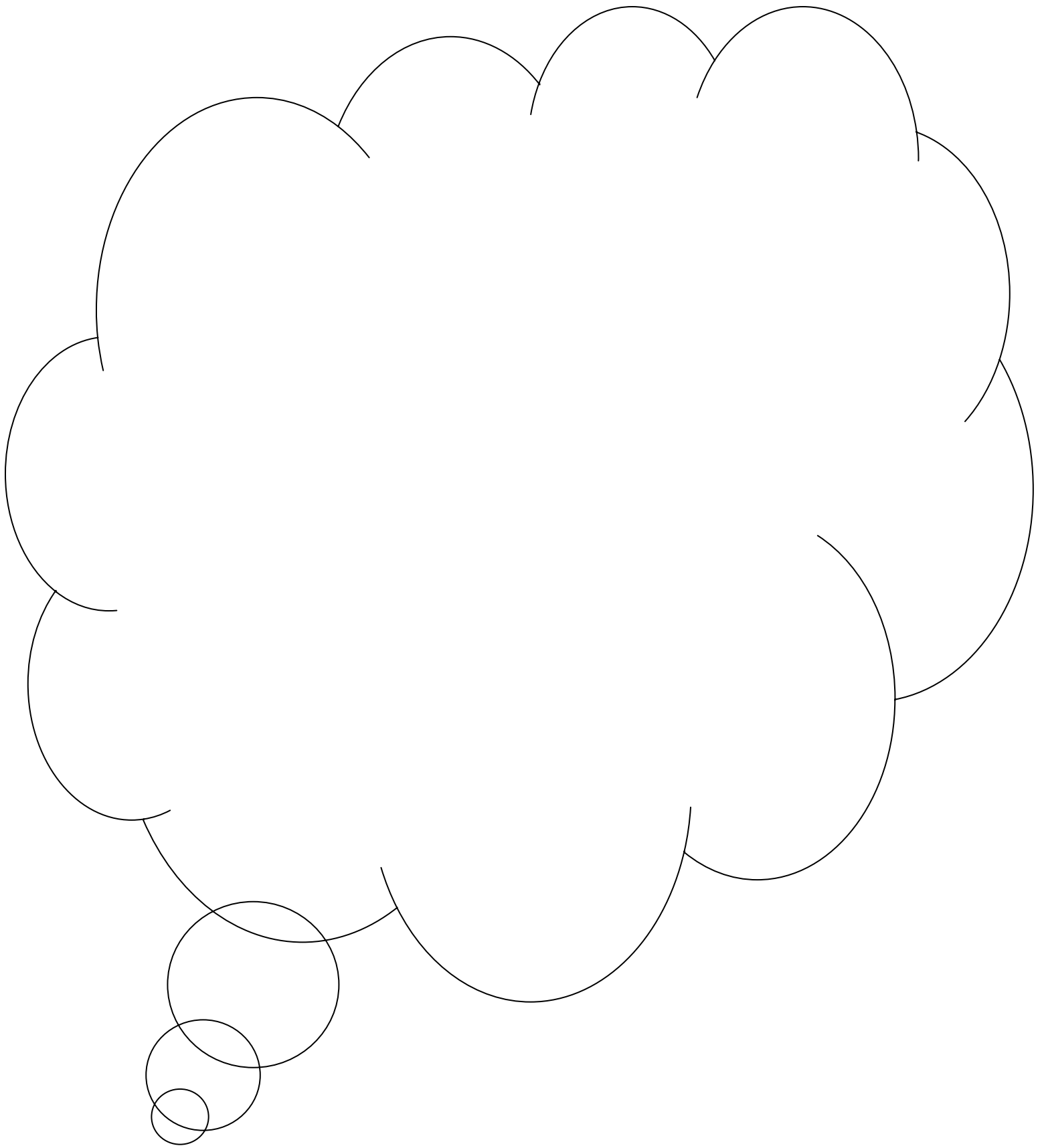


Have you ever heard of the expression, “Walk a mile in my shoes?” This activity will help you understand the challenges that military youth face.

**Instructions:** Find someone who has personally experienced these situations. Get their signature on the line. The first person to get a “bingo” gets a prize!

<p>...ever had to move because of a parent or guardian’s job</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...ever had a sudden major reversal of family income</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...ever known the joys of a flexible schedule because you have to live life “spur of the moment”</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...felt upset or angry because you do not get enough time spent with your parents or guardians</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...communicates frequently with friends by either letters or emails</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>...had the fear of a sibling or parent or guardian getting a serious disease or illness</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...experienced stress or anxiety over the last year</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...ever had to quit a sports team or a club because you had to move away</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...born outside of the state you are currently living in</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...ever felt like your parent or guardian has missed a major milestone in your life</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>...had a Pen Pal outside of the United States of America</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...ever enjoyed spending time with others who share similar experiences</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>FREE SPACE!</p> <p>OMK Makes a Difference!</p> <p>FREE SPACE!</p>	<p>...had to stay with family members or friends while a parent or guardian went away for an extended time period</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...not had communication with a parent or guardian for over two weeks when they were away from home</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>...ever been confused as to where “Home” really is</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...attended more than two different schools</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...gotten a letter or email from a parent or guardian while they were away from home</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...had to complete the housework by yourself</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...has a parent or guardian who is currently enrolled in the military</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>...has traveled internationally</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...listened to taped stories from parents or guardians because they were away from home</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...dreaded listening to the news or reading the newspaper for fear of bad news</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...had to celebrate the holidays or birthdays without parents or guardians</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>...ever lived outside of the state that you are currently living in</p> <p>_____</p>

Name \_\_\_\_\_



## **A Blanket Community** (Activity)

An exercise in building teamwork; recognizing the strengths of all community members; understanding the importance of communicating with community members, and recognizing how we need to support the youth and families from our military units.

### **Supplies**

Blanket/tarp/tablecloth

Several objects to represent various aspects of the community

- Balls, beach balls, empty plastic water bottles, other lightweight objects with different shapes textures

Nametag holders

### **Procedure**

Ahead of time, prepare nametags that list common careers in a community (for example: postal worker, firefighter, police officer, teacher, business owner, banker, doctor, and so forth).

Give each participant a nametag. Each participant holding the blanket will assume the community role on his or her nametag.

Place the blanket or tarp on the floor.

All participants align themselves on the edges; each member picks up an edge of the cloth; hold the blanket tightly.

Add objects to the center of the blanket.

As the objects are added, a group leader will describe a situation where several of community members have been called to serve in their National Guard or Reserve unit. When the person wearing this nametag is called, they move away from the blanket.

The remaining participants/community members will try to keep all the objects on the blanket.

### **Debriefing**

- Who or what did the objects represent? (The military children)
- What happened as people started leaving their spots on the blanket?
- How did you feel in trying to keep all the objects on the blanket?
- How did your role/responsibility change as others left the blanket?
- What implications does the activity have for how we respond for how we respond to the “military” youth and families in our community?

*Adopted from the Operation: Military Kids Ready, Set, Go! Training Manual*

## References

U.S. Army Child and Youth Services and USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (2005, March). *Operation: Military Kids Ready, Set, Go! Training Manual*.