



## **Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE) Webinar Series**

**March 19, 2015, 1-2:30 p.m. (ET)**

### **“The Well-being of Military Children: Augmenting Clinical Care with Web- and Mobile-based Tools”**

Good afternoon everyone, and thank you for joining us today for the DCoE T2 March Webinar titled "The Wellbeing of Military Children: Augmenting Clinical Care with Web- and Mobile-Base Tools. I'm Dr. Robert Ciulla. I'm a clinical psychologist and division chief of the Mobile Health Program at the National Center for Telehealth and Technology on Joint Base Lewis-McCord in Tacoma, Washington, and I will be your moderator today.

Before we begin, let's review some webinar details. Live closed captioning is available through Federal Relay Conference Captioning. Please see the pod beneath the presentation slides. Defense Connect Online and Adobe Connect are the technical platforms hosting today's webinar. Should you experience technical difficulties, please visit [dcoe.mil/webinars](http://dcoe.mil/webinars), that's [dcoe.mil/webinars](http://dcoe.mil/webinars), to access troubleshooting tips. At any time during the webinar, please submit technical or content-related questions via the question pod. The event planning team will address your technical questions as soon as possible.

While we encourage you to network and identify yourselves to other attendees via the chat pod, please refrain from marketing your organization or product. The chat pod will be left open for additional networking opportunities ten minutes after the webinar has concluded.

Today's presentation, references, and resources are available for download from the files box and will be archived in the webinar section of the DCoE website. If you preregistered for this webinar and want to obtain a CE, continuing ed certificate, or certificate of attendance, you must complete the online CE post-test and evaluation. After the webinar, please visit [continuingeducation -- that's one word -- .dcri.duke.edu](http://continuingeducation.dcri.duke.edu). That's [continuingeducation.dcri.duke.edu](http://continuingeducation.dcri.duke.edu) to complete the online CE post-test and evaluation and download your CE certificate of attendance. The Duke Medicine Website online CE post-test and evaluation will be open until 11:59 p.m., that's Eastern Standard Time, on Thursday, March, 19, 2015. That's today of course.

Throughout the webinar you are welcome to submit technical or content-related questions via the Q&A pod located on the screen. All questions will be anonymous. Please do not submit technical or content-related questions via the chat pod. I will now move on to today's webinar, "The Wellbeing of Military Children: Augmenting Clinical Care with Web and Mobile-based Tools."

Research on the psychological health of military children indicates that frequent transitions, such as moving, family member separations, and the cumulative effects of multiple deployments, can cause psychological distress, which impacts the wellbeing of parents and children.

Although military children are generally resilient, many are coping with increased levels of anxiety, stress, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and behavioral problems. Age-appropriate psychoeducation web-based programs for children have been found to assist with teaching coping strategies, and as a

result of online community peer support, improve their behavioral health. Discussion will include a review of the Military Kids Connect website, a technology-based resource for preschoolers to teens, which may serve to augment clinical care practices and to improve how health-care providers interact with military children.

Webinar participants will learn to describe the dynamics of separation on the military family system, examine the use of web-based and mobile apps as resources in clinical settings serving military children, and integrate the use of the Military Kids Connect website as a social media tool to improve understanding of the influence of the military culture on military children.

I want to introduce our first presenter. Dr. Kelly Blasko is a counseling psychologist leading the mobile web program for the National Center for Telehealth and Technology. She earned her Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy at Appalachian State University, and her PhD in Counseling Psychology for the Pennsylvania State University.

In the beginning of her career, Dr. Blasko worked for telecommunications companies as an electrical engineer and senior advisor in new product development. As a psychologist, she has worked in clinical settings, including marriage and family clinics, university counseling centers, and community mental health centers. In her current position she applies clinical knowledge to design and develop web- and mobile-based resources for military service members and their families. She is internationally recognized for her work in using technology to improve the wellbeing of youth, including the development of the award winning Military Kids Connect website and the Sesame Workshop, The Big Moving Adventure mobile application. Dr. Blasko.

Thank you, Dr. Ciulla. First, I'm going to start with the disclosures. The views expressed in this presentation are those of the presenter, myself, and do not reflect the official policy of the Department of the U.S. Army or U.S. Department of Defense. I have no relevant financial relationships to disclose and I do not intend to discuss the off-label investigative unapproved use of commercial products or devices.

It is a real pleasure to be here to have the chance to talk to you about my work with military children. In the first part of the presentation I'll be giving you some idea about what I know about the lives of military children, and then in the second part, talking more specifically about how technology can help military children.

I first want to start with telling you why I have one of the best jobs in the Department of Defense. Number one, I feel I get an opportunity to work with military children who have interesting lives and interesting challenges. I get to be able to help them have tools that enable them flourish in their day-to-day life, and I get to have fun, where I get to talk to them, go to Kids Fest, go to hear them in videos and create comics, and all kinds of interesting website things on a day-to-day basis. So it's a lot of fun.

The first polling question we have is how many of you have worked with military children in your practice; and to type yes or no? This is important to note, just to see who is in the community helping military children, and of those that aren't necessarily directly helping them in the practice, it's important to just understand, you know, there are a lot of resources of people working with military children out there.

In currently looking at the poll, I see that the majority of the people on the call today have had worked in the military community with their children. So I hope for all of you that, in fact, at the end of this presentation you will be able to take one thing with you and apply it to your practice as you continue your work or start working with military children.

So here is a slide of kind of the age range of military children, as you would expect, and the demographics. You may have seen this before in other presentations or articles, and what you'll notice is that there a lot of children, you know, zero to five years old, but there's a lot of children older as well. And when you look at this, I want you to think about that almost every child here has gone through some type of transition in the military. For example, they may have experienced a deployment or multiple deployments, or -- and probably extremely highly likely -- moving to at least more than one location. And

now more and more is the opportunity that they move from military life to civilian life, now with the drawdown from conflict.

So you need to understand how those transitions impact these children, and these wide age ranges, also we need to consider that the developmental differences between the different age groups, their reactions to those transitions, and then in terms of technology, how they use that technology so we can deliver services to them.

In 2011 there was a presidential study directive that was released, confirming our commitment, the Department of Defense and the United States at large to support military families. Certainly the main mission of the Department of Defense is to protect our nation, and key to that is, of course, readiness. So service members need to be ready no matter what to meet the mission at hand. But integral to that, more focus is placed on family readiness. Obviously a service member needs to be focused on the mission and it would be very difficult to do that if there are problems within the family, or challenges, and that's possibly so, because of the separation and the concerns about the safety and security of their loved ones. So Mrs. Obama and Dr. Jill Biden have been working very closely with organizations through joining forces to bring services to military families and children. And in the study directive there was specific mention to be [indiscernible] improving access to care through effective -- or cost-effective measures, like using technology, like websites and local applications.

So I want to step back. This is a little theoretical, but I think it helps us understand more about the military family system. So in systemic theory, certainly the family has, you know, the marital relationships, the parenting system, and then children. So what's unique about military families is that the deployed or preparing to deploy parent also has a significant relationship with the military unit that they belong to. They're preparing to deploy, and when they're deployed, will still be with this unit, working closely everyday for a fairly long month to a year, approximately. So that shifts the relationship, not only in the marital relationship, but also making those -- perhaps at-home parent is a single parent or maybe with support from other family members, and then the children as well, separated from their parent, and also having to take on new responsibilities.

And all of this is to remind you that the family is very concerned about the security of their loved one. And certainly technology systems enable them to talk together, like the Skype and whatnot; however it's important to remember that they're both in different worlds and what's going on in their world may not align very easily to discussions when they're talking over Skype.

Now, looking at the system when, actually, the parent comes home and is starting to reintegrate into the family, and you start seeing, you know, this reestablishment of relationships, particularly children. And something that is important to remember is that everybody in the family has changed, whether it's the deployed parent experiencing whatever they experienced while they're were deployed; the family at home; children had taken on new responsibilities, they may have changed developmentally obviously, if it's a year later, and so there's this whole kind of readjustment to the family. And it can cause a lot of anxiety and concern, given that maybe this is the first time -- well definitely the first time that a family, as it spends the day, is coming back together. But then add on top of it the potential for injury.

And when I think about injury, I'm thinking about psychological health issues, most commonly mentioned now are, you know, post-traumatic stress, but also things like depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and then perhaps in the case of the death of a loved one or the physical injuries, and as well, traumatic brain injury. So all of this is something that has to be considered as an impact on children.

And what I've learned -- we've done a lot of videos of kind of documentaries of real military children talking about what this experience is like, and what I've learned is that, you know, they're tuning in to a lot of the behavioral changes of their parent or both parents. There may not be understanding what the parent who is coming home is experiencing, whether it's just to adjust to home life, or if there's other, like, post-traumatic stress type symptoms. And, you know, they may be confused, looking for kind of a cause and effect, particularly around traumatic brain injury, they talk about, well, if I did this, this happened, you know, my parent did that. But it's not necessarily all correlated, so it can be somewhat confusing.

So I believe, in my work, that technology through websites, mobile apps, social networking, can help shed some light for these kids hearing from other kids talking about it, as well as supporting each other and learning to develop coping strategies. Here are a list of some of the risk factors that are commonly cited in the literature. Certainly it's been well established that a parent's wellbeing really influences the wellbeing of the child, and vice versa. So we want to provide resources for both the parents and the children, and my focus is obviously doing that directly with the children.

Also, the cumulative length of the deployments being -- if it's multiple deployments, it's adding up those ones across the whole cycle that they're being deployed, and then, as I mentioned, injury when they return. And certainly relocation can be a risk factor, not always. In fact, an interesting part of military life is that they actually move quite a bit and it's part of their daily life, so I've often heard children say, "Well it's two year, are we going to move?" They're used to those kind of short timeframes.

So now, as I shift into military children and technology, you may have heard of the concept of digital natives, and this is was coined by Prensky in 2001, where it was the idea that individuals who grow up with sort of a particular landscape of technology -- in this case physical technology around computers, video games, and the Internet -- they really have different learning paradigms or communication or supports. Originally it was anybody born after 1980; however, at that time there was a set of technologies, and that's evolved, so children and their parents, military parents are, in a way, new digital natives, and the parents have learned technology in one way, and the children are learning, you know, what's available to them today, so it's really important to meet that particular child, where they are, and use the best technology that they understand, and in the way that they understand or learn.

One really important part of providing technology solutions to children, and in particular military children, is around safety and security. All the work that I've done in developing solutions, particularly on the website, and social networking, is to address major parenting concerns around sexual predators, you know, any potential bullying or harassment, and, you know, not very helpful content, illegal content, or profanities, things like that. So it's important to put in moderation mechanisms to enable to make the community safer for the children.

Also, the federal -- the FTC has actually an Act called the "Child Online Privacy Protection Act" or COPPA, that really replaces a requirement for any electronic or website or mobile app resource to, if you're going to collect any personal identifiable information from children, you actually have to let their parent know that, and it's for children 12 and under. And originally it was around things like name and age and birth dates, things like that.

But in addition to that, now that we have mobile devices and mobile technology, there's been more restrictions in terms of geolocation. If someone can find out where you are, there could be some implications of that, and pictures, you know, the sharing of pictures, what's in the picture, who is in the picture, how it's tied to a name. So it's very important to address this, and it's more specific to the Department of Defense, concerns like offering security information and cyber threats. And many civilians don't understand that Operation Security is really critical. So things like when a parent is -- the date the parent is being deployed or where they're being deployed, or maybe what they hear from day-to-day is really important to be private and can be very difficult to be private when children like teens are wanting support and want to have a discussion about what's going on with them. And more and more cyber threat is important, not to be able to collect information or put military families at risk. So there's been research around behavior health and technology, and not necessarily specific to military children or parents, but the general population at large can be looked at in term of the research there.

So there's been a lot of -- well a number of studies of Internet-based programs that have been found to be effective in improving the behavioral health of children. There have been, like, resources for coping with depression, anxiety, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, things like that, that have been developed in the past that seem to be helpful to children. Another important part is web-based peer support. So there are very many different types of theories about social support, so Bandura, who is looking at social learning and how peers learn from each other, either through role models or directly communicating, and also

social comparisons by looking at peer that may have gone through -- experienced that, the other child is just starting to go through or is going through at the same time, and learning from each other.

But, also, in this bullet, it's also important to notice that there are web-based peer support programs for children that are coping with parental illnesses, such in this case cancer or asthma, and that's pretty important for the military children because they are living with parents who have psychological distress related to different things, but in particular, things that happen while they're on active duty. But, so a lot of the resources and coping types of strategies for military kids are developed to help them deal with this particular unique situation that they are in. And I know we've always -- we've heard a lot about Facebook and Instagram, Twitter, and so on, about how it builds the network, and there's a lot been a lot of skepticism that social networking at large, is it really helping or not helping individuals to receive support?

This particular study looked at Facebook, and they did find, actually, that peers did build relationships geographically disbursed and found it helpful. What's important in this particular study is the fact about the geographically disbursed. So most communities on Facebook are really with peers that are where you see them every day, you know, at school or where you live. But in this case, being geographically disbursed is important because military families move quite a bit, so their friend network actually is fairly large as they move from one place to the other, and can get support from the people they knew where there moved from or where they're moving to.

So in my work, in terms of putting together websites and mobile apps for military children, to start the process, we were looking at, well, where are these type of resources available. And this went back, way back until about 2009, and what we were finding, particularly around deployment resources, there were a lot of parent-basing resources, so quite a bit of websites that talk about how a parent may handle a particular situation, how they talk with their child, how they take care of themselves. But at that time, what was missing was kind of this child-facing or teen-facing, whatever, types of resources that were military specific, and I emphasize "military specific" because certainly there's resources at large for children in general, but what I have learned from talking to military children and their parents is that they really would like kind of this resource that knows them in a way that maybe a non-military resource might not. And also, the desire to have an online community assist of military use. So many of the resources that are developed in the Department of Defense for children certainly pull to provide this type of approach.

I want to also mention that at this time, when we did this, there really was only one major resource for military families, and that was Sesame Workshop had developed a resource called "Talk, Listen, Connect" to be able to have parents have conversations around difficult topics like deployment or physical injuries, and so on. And that material was for ages zero to five, and kids to use for older children as well. However, and it was starting to be put on a website. But what was missing was from ages 6 to 17. And so in my work, that's mostly where I spend my time, particularly important, thinking about the 9 to 12-year-olds, they're kind of in that in between, and there's fewer resources directed towards them. And there then there's teens, there's general teens but not particularly military specific for teens.

So now I want to ask another question of how many of you recommend a website to someone that you're working with, or a parent perhaps, in your work. It will be kind of interesting, because certainly there's a lot of resources out there. Which ones should you use, that's often the problem. And I think the other side of it is being able to use your clinical judgment as to maybe what would be best. So I'm seeing now it's kind of a 50/50, which is kind of interesting. So I hope on both sides that you'll be able to pick up something today that will help you: And one of the things that I'm going to do. I will be spending more time talking about Military Kids Connect. But it will just be one example of how to use websites, but I hope it will provide a foundation so that when you look at other website resource that you'll be able to apply them as well.

So these are the major four websites that are kid-facing that have been developed by the Department of Defense or within the Department of Defense. So I will be talking about Military Kids Connect, so I'll save that for later. On the upper right you see Military Families Near and Far. This is the Sesame Workshop website that provides those same materials on how to connect online. It also provides creative tools for children to express themselves. There are printable activities to help with discussions and so on, and then

there's the videos just of the different Muppets. It's very useful resource for parents, and there's been quite a few studies done on the particular approach with Talk, Listen, Connect to show that, in fact, if the wellbeing and parents feel comfortable about the information they're talk about with their children than, in fact, the children's wellbeing has a better chance of improving or maintaining.

The other website is the focus website, Focus. It was developed jointly with UCLA and UMed, and it is a resource that helps learning -- learning skills to scope within the family, recognizing emotions, knowing how to handle those, and is very well received and used quite a bit on various installations. You'll have to excuse me. And then finally, the Military On the move -- excuse me -- talks about just about moving for all ages.

So here's the next polling question. How many have used a mobile -- recommended mobile app to a child? I see it's kind of interesting. In fact, more mobile apps are recommended than websites, and, you know, that kind of makes a lot of sense in some ways, because certainly children, as I talk about the digital natives, children are used to mobile apps. And, in fact, there's this phenomenon called "pass back," where parents want to put baby in a car, get out a particular app and pass the phone back to their children to use whatever they find or want them to use. And also it's on their phone, so it's portable. More and more websites are becoming accessible via mobile phones or mobile devices like tablets as well, and that's becoming more and more of the norm.

Here's four DoD tip-facing mobile apps, and these generally are focused to younger children. The electric company app, [indiscernible] electric, actually is for ages 6 to 10, and it's intended to children to identify their feelings. I'm sorry. The "Breath, Think, Do" is an app I find to be really, really helpful. It's about deep breathing and helping a mantra to learn about that, and it's really ingenious to help them learn to cope with everyday situations like being dropped off at daycare.

And then the "Big Moving Adventure," which is about helping children learn about the process of moving, like packing their toys, says goodbye to their school friends, saying goodbye to the military base, and so on, has been really well received. And this the Focus app, which is teaching the same skills that you would find in the Focus program on the website or in person, and being able to do it from your mobile app. Not many apps for older children, although there are apps, obviously, out on the market that are not DoD developed, and can potentially be used in your care.

So now I'm shifting to Military Kids Connect. This was launched in January of 2012. It is intended to improve the quality of life for military use. And the two approaches to that is to help them develop coping skills, as well as to connect them with their peers; hence, Military Kids Connect. It's from ages 6 to 17, and I'll talk a little bit more about that in a second. One thing that really has been important to understanding the life of the military child, I talked about the family system, but they also have other parts of their system, and one important part is the educators, and teaching the -- they spend the most time with children, and then the providers are more and more getting involved. But, really, friends and peers are, probably for the older kids, most important. And I'll focus more on the ages 9 to 17. So here is the landing page for Military Kids Connect.

You notice there are three tracks for kids, ages 6 to 8, 9 to 12, and then 13 to 17. There are also two other tracks, the educators, and then the parents or caregivers. Those two tracks are intended to support military children and less about, in the case of parents, improving their wellbeing, there are other resources for that.

Here are a few objectives that we intended to put together as part of Military Kids Connect. They're not intended to be specifically clinical interventions. In fact, they're more about prevention services. So things like helping them to develop coping strategies that when they are distressed or are having a hard time that they now can cope better, and hopefully using those coping strategies as they grow up to have better coping strategies in the long run.

Also, we wanted to create some engagement. You know, it's one thing just to read through text, it's another thing to be able to engage in the content, to learn about, perhaps, you know, by exploring what

feelings you might have when you're stressed or learning -- watching an animated graphic novel to learn how a character might deal with a parent coming home.

We also wanted to provide peer-to-peer support, and we have a message board that helps with that. And now we also have social media channels, and I'll go into that more. There's certainly age appropriate. Age appropriate is kind of two things with this technology, first of all, it's age appropriate developmentally how they can take information, what types of challenges they're having developmentally, and also the type of technology that they're used to or the type of interactions that are common for that age group, and as I mentioned, military specific, and certainly the safety and security of the children.

As I mentioned before, these are kind of the underlying principles. Currently -- and Dr. Leskin will talk about this -- are the doing some evidence-based studies on the actual prevention services provided. So I'd like to mention that with all the activities and approaches to the content that's delivered or the type of content that's delivered is based on evidence-based practices, so it's really translating kind of the psychological requirements or the way prevention is delivered or implemented and to translating that into a technology solution.

So, with peer-to-peer support, there is research that suggests that through peer-to-peer support, military peers do feel a sense of connectedness. So many technologies now enable that connectedness, and so we need to capitalize on that type of technology in order to provide the support that they need. As I mentioned, social learning and social comparison are two approaches to support, and we employ in the website. For example, we have quite a few documentaries of real military children talking about how they're feeling or what they notice in their lives. And then the online community and role models as another way to connect with other peer.

We emphasize stress reduction. At this point, one of the major findings in the literature is that there is quite a bit of anxiety as a result of all the different transitions coming about. So we really wanted to provide some tools where kids could learn about stress and psychoeducation about it, and also, then, figure out maybe how to develop coping strategies given their experience. We also have spent quite a bit of time on normalizing experiences, in the sense that they're not the only ones. So by having other children or characters talking about what they experienced this in this ways, it helps the children using resources to normalize and realize they're not the only one, that is the a common experience.

The other part is around setting expectations. So it's commonly known that, in fact, when individuals or kids, when their parent comes home, there's all this expectation in the homecoming being wonderful and exciting and, yes, it is for a certain period of time. But then you reintegrate as a family and parenting roles get reestablished and getting to know each other, it maybe isn't as exciting or as fun as they expected. So some of the resources we have help them set the expectations, not that everything is going to be negative, but on the other hand, giving them a reality check so, again, they don't necessarily feel like they're the only ones. And certainly through self expression is critical for all these ages.

This shows you an example of a landing page for the what's called the "tweens," the 9 to 12-year-olds, and in the page you'll see there's kind of four groupings of content. One is around coping, one is around connecting, another on deployment, and then also kind of fun and games. Of course, the website or resource would not be any fun without games, obviously. And we really think of them as distracters. There's still a lot of work to be done in terms of providing games that are helpful psychologically, and we tried to accomplish some of that in the games, but a lot them are things that are military specific yet fun kinds of things.

So here kind of lays out some of the coping tools, the kinds of tools that are there. So one thing we have is "Stress Out." We have two kind of major tools under there. One is stress management plan. This is adapted from Dr. Ken Ginsburg and Dr. Keith Lemmon who looked at a stress planning approach for military children. And we put this on the website in a way that older children can learn about stress. And there's various videos about stress and deployment. And then they can also develop a plan, putting in their situation and developing strategies.

Another tool called the “Stress Detective,” it’s actually one of my favorite ones, is about body awareness. This was designed for younger children; however we are considering making it for older children because, in fact, I think for all of us it’s really important to identify the symptoms of stress in our bodies and figure out how to relieve that stress.

We also have something called the “Comic Creator” where kids can create any comic about their particular situation or fun. And I feel it could be used even in a clinical world, in terms of creating a comic related maybe to what they’re going through in that particular time. And being able to share it in session or with parents or even have kind of a back and forth with other kids to talk about some stuff and just in general day-to-day life or maybe specific military.

We also have projects actually that are – we looked at the different deployed countries and we found that a lot of kids when they found out their parents were being deployed they tapped into the negative news, all the bad stuff. What we wanted to do was give them some sense of some culture of those countries, and we created projects, crafts and cooking recipes. In fact, we actually have a social media event going on now for different teen centers or military teens to do one of these projects and post it to our social media. And kids will vote on whose is the best. Kind of have a little competition going on between, I think, Fort Hood and Camp Pendleton.

This is the Connect Peer-to-Peer Support. So, as I mentioned, we have a message board and it’s called “Say What’s On Your Mind.” And before it was – actually I can’t remember. It was a message board. I can’t remember what they called it before. The idea is for kids to have conversations. And what we found was on this message board was that, although we don’t collect demographic information, we knew that the different avatars that the children were making, that it tended to be mostly girls. And we found that they loved giving each other advice. And they were mostly kids ages 9 to 12. And so that was kind of a fun thing to watch back and forth. And the main topic certainly talked about day to day things, but one of the main topics specific to military are moving. There was quite a bit of discussion about moving and how to make friends.

We also have a section called “Crossroads,” which is videos or kind of instructional vignettes where you learn about, watch and find out or comment a dilemma or dilemmas that older children are facing when their parent is deployed. And then they get to pick a potential ending and find out maybe what the consequences might be with that ending or learn a new approach to dealing with that dilemma.

We also have something called “What Would You Do” that really are these kind of “micro-dilemmas,” breaking out little, day to day things like “What do I have, I have practice yet I have to pick up my sister after school” or “My mom’s out for the evening working and I need to make dinner, what do I do” kind of thing. It’s a chance for kids to talk about how they might do it, what would you do. We are seeing dialogue back and forth, in particular “What Would You Do” could be a really useful tool for when talking with a child about the particular dilemma maybe they could go in and seek comments or make comments or receive information back that would be helpful to them.

We just go into social media. And that might seem a little strange but it certainly has evolved and been a big part of connecting with teens. And you’ll notice Instagram’s not on here; it has been a challenge to develop these resources within the Department of Defense, because there are quite a few security requirements, as well as certain agreements about what information can be shared. And, as I mentioned before, pictures are really, really obviously how many of our youth connect. However, pictures have a lot of personal identifiable information. And so it’s very difficult to moderate that. And being on a Department of Defense channel, that would be really important to be able to do.

But we do have a Facebook channel. We have a Google Plus, which is a blog-type channel. We have a YouTube that has various videos that are on the website as well as new ones that we’ve created. And then we have Twitter. We try to post to Facebook daily because we have themes during the month. So this month is – or last month was around volunteering and giving ideas about how to volunteer, give back to the community, get volunteer hours as part of school. And we have quite a big community on the website, about 40,000 different followers, and we know that the majority of them are teenagers, girls and

boys, but the girls seem about 46% of that population. And we don't know specifically that they're military children, but we can tell some ways people are interested and they connect there into the website or to other resources.

We have a weekly vlog and we're trying to recruit teens to write the blogs. Some of the new videos that aren't necessarily on the website right now but they are available on YouTube are we were able to talk to reserve teens, and they talk about what it's like to be a reserve teen and the challenges that they face, and even things that they would like other non-military teens or even active duty teens to know about them. We did do a series teen tours that were made by – we [indiscernible] the teens were integral to those tours at 11 different installations, but the intention that a teen could see the base and what's on there and as well as what's around the base so that when they move there they have a sense of what they're moving to.

And then we have moving micro docs. We have kind of snippets of maybe five or six little short, brief snippets of kids talking about what helped them when they moved and how they meet friends, what were the good things about moving, and what were the challenging things. And it would be really helpful to be able to watch those with kids.

The other thing, as I've mentioned a lot of the videos, I've also found it to be a really helpful training tool for providers, or even educators for that matter, to know more about what children are experiencing, you know, what they're facing from their perspective. It could be very interesting case studies to apply into clinical training.

And then we have several animated graphic novels about different subjects, but we also have the moving ones. There's one about a teen and his family moving, a series of novels. And then we also have one for the younger children and them moving and learning how a family adjusts.

When we first started Military Kids Connect deployments were happening quite frequently. Less and less now, although there are obviously still deployments, and reintegration part of deployment cycle is much more of a focus now. So what we do have quite a few resources about dealing with separation.

Again, the four real videos are for all age ranges and talk about different strategies that they've used to be able to help with their family or themselves to deal with deployments. For example, a young man did a video class, he was a military child and he held classes for younger kids to videotape themselves and learn how to do that and send it to their parents.

We have Deployment Daily, which is actually fairly highly used, about a child talking about a particular subject related to a parent leaving or sibling issues, whatever. We have a "Where Are You Going." Again, as I mentioned, the fact that tuning into negative news, in fact, gives them a chance to learn about these countries where their parents may be deployed and learn more than just all the negative information.

And then finally, also we have Family Perspective. These are a series of videos of families actually talking about how they work together to deal with coming home. And this one that's identified here, "Communication is Key," this family actually developed kind of a family newsletter that they shared with each other on a regular basis to just have an open discussion or something at a family dinner kind of thing.

And then the final part that I'm going to talk about are the tough topics. We created a series of "Tough Topics," four actually. You see three here. But we found that there were very, very few reinforces for children living with a parent that has posttraumatic stress or traumatic brain injury or a physical injury, and in some cases the death of a loved one. So what we wanted to do was to provide resources to children living in those circumstances. It's not children necessarily having posttraumatic stress but living with a parent who had been deployed and returned with some psychological – these types of symptoms. And what we did was we have kind of two major parts to it. One is we filmed actual military children talking about their experience of a parent returning, let's say with a traumatic brain injury, and how things they noticed different from when the parent was before, how they were reacting, things that they did to cope

with their circumstance, things they did differently with their parents, who did they end up talking to, and what kinds of things were helpful to share with that person.

These are really short clips. We call them “micro docs.” And a good way to really tune kids into what other kids are thinking. And, as I mentioned, we have these animated graphic novels. And you see here there’s kind of four, and this PTSD one, and they meet a character like Josh and he talks about his father coming home. And then through the different periods they figure out as a family how to adjust. And so one part of this is not just -- it’s not just a “you feel this way,” it’s sort of projecting on a character and seeing how another person kind of removed from them is dealing with the issue.

I do want to mention that we have those types of resources available for parents with also parenting experts and different areas that can help parents with their children dealing with these situations. And then, finally, we also have a – we’ve made educators track very focus on military culture and understanding children in the school and what they can expect from military children. We have lesson plans that they can use. The website [indiscernible] to teach around things like Afghanistan or different moving things like that. And there’s more to come. We’re making our website web-friendly.

We’re putting in all kinds of interesting things, including an interactive infographics that Dr. Leskin is going to talk about now, the study that he actually conducted to evaluate this content, the [indiscernible] content around PTSD using this interactive infographic.

So it’s my pleasure to introduce Dr. Leskin. Dr. Leskin is the program director for Military and Veteran Family Programs for the University of California, Los Angeles and Duke University’s National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. In this capacity Dr. Leskin directs the National Child Traumatic Stress Network and Military Veterans Families Program to provide education, training, and resources on military culture, screening, assessment, and evidence-based interventions into the military, the VA, and community-based behavioral health [indiscernible] throughout the United States.

Previously, Dr. Leskin worked as a clinical researcher and director of Clinical Training at the National Center for PTSD and the VA Palo Alto Health Care System. He completed a National Institute of Mental Health postdoctoral fellowship at the National Center for PTSD at the Boston VA Medical Center. He is the primary developer of multiple national, state, and local initiatives to provide supportive services for service members, veterans, and their families, for U.S. Marines, U.S. Navy, U.S. Army, and the VA. Dr. Leskin has written, consulted, and lectured extensively on a number of topics, including assessment and treatment for combat-related PTSD, impact of deployment on families and children, and promoting psychological resilience. Welcome, Dr. Leskin.

Well, thank you so much, Dr. Blasko and Dr. Ciulla. And let me just say thank you to DCoE and T2 for allowing me to participate in today’s webinar as part of the 2015 DCoE T2 webinar series. I’d also like to thank all of our service members and family members who are joining us today, and thank you for your service to our country.

My presentation today is going to focus on an evaluation study that we conducted here at UCLA starting in 2013 and concluding in 2014. And we have worked closely with Dr. Blasko and her team to develop and evaluation methodology for supporting military children in a web-based application, Military Kids Connect. Starting in 2013 we conducted – we developed a methodology, a unique methodology to conduct an evaluation study of military children in active duty families in order to determine the effectiveness and safety of Military Kids Connect. So my presentation today will describe those elements of that study. So let me just go to the next slide.

Okay, I do need to disclose that the views expressed today are the views of myself and do not reflect the official policy of the Department of the U.S. Army, the U.S. Department of Defense, or my institution, the University of California, Los Angeles. I have no relevant financial relationships to disclose and I do not intend to discuss any off-label, investigative, or use of commercial products or devices.

So Dr. Blasko, today, described this amazing resource that has been developed for Military Kids Connect for military children and their families. And as part of an evaluation study of that website we created what I think is a truly unique and innovative methodology to ask military children themselves to look at aspects of the tough topics that section, specifically describing materials related to parental PTS, posttraumatic stress, and to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of a web-based secondary prevention approach to help military children with an active duty parent on the topic of PTSD during wartime deployment.

And the areas of interest for the study were really to look at how well military children were able to glean this information from a website to be able to comprehend the written material, visual language as presented. We evaluated the use of technology as a teaching methodology. So even being able to look at how well does a website like Military Kids Connect convey this information? So from a perspective of sharing information via a web-based application, how well does this technology work in terms of children age nine to 17 being able to learn the material, retain the material that's being provided?

We wanted to look at is the information being provided considered positive and non-stigmatizing, "non-pathologizing" in its presentation. We wanted to assure that there were no potential adverse responses as a result of hearing information about parental posttraumatic stress. We wanted the study to be guided by a theoretical and scientific justification. I'll talk about those underlying frameworks in a moment, but our study really has been grounded in the science and understanding of the kinds of impact deployment or parental mental health and parental PTS might have on children. So we'll look at some of those different kinds of frameworks.

And we wanted to determine whether the level of information being provided to military kids between the age of nine and 17 was developmentally appropriate. Were we gauging the language correctly? Are we gauging the presentation and type of information correctly so that it is received, appreciated, and that military children are able to learn from this information and apply it to their daily lives, so being able to link the presentation of psycho-education with potential abilities to problem-solve, some of the cornerstone resiliency components.

And we looked at what was the preference in military children in terms of different kinds of teaching methodologies, learning methodologies that are being presented through Military Kids Connect, and as Dr. Blasko just described, whether they're social in nature, whether they're presentation in an animated graphic format, whether it's interactive in terms of some of the web-responsive technologies that are being rolled out, or other peer-based modeling approaches, so social learning, social comparison approaches. So we wanted to really look at are these appropriate methodologies by which we can convey messages of support?

I see Military Kids Connect itself as a supportive community. It is a resource for military children. It's a resource for military families and their communities. Many of these materials are geared towards providing that supportive, safe community for military children to receive accurate information and opportunities to build skills by which they can problem solve effectively, communicate with others, including their parents, build a support network in terms of a forum with other military peers, and ultimately to be able to adapt well with the types of stressors that they might face throughout deployment and following deployment.

Here are some of the underlying theoretical rationales that we have used to frame Military Kids Connect, the website, the platform, as a supportive community. And they really are drawn from the literature on military children, including the ecological framework. Many theorists have pointed to the military child being embedded across multiple interdependent micro/macro systems that are linked to one another, both the child embedded within the family linked to multiple levels of systems, whether they're schools, community, health care, other supportive communities and families.

So the links between these communities is of great interest, but also understanding for the military child how these systems have been guided and influenced by history, policy, and the mission of the military. So, really, the uniqueness of this ecological system, the military child, is steeped through those nested systems. But also a developmental framework, and that is the military child's growth is shaped by their

experiences through these systems. So not only is the military child embedded but their growth through these systems, the experiences that they and their family have through military life, through deployment, through reintegration, through their experiences in the military and as they transition into the community.

The resiliency framework, as Kelly was just mentioning, is woven throughout Military Kids Connect. And it's based on not only a theory but also sort of an understanding of the mindset of the worldview of military families that they share an interest to maintain successful adaptations in the context of challenging and stressful circumstances. Really a core belief system in many military families is failure is not an option and to continue to grow despite and through these challenging circumstances.

And then of course there's a growing literature and science suggesting and understanding the experience of the military child as they might be impacted both negatively and positively in terms of the risks but also the resiliency, the potential to grow. But we know through the work of many researchers that there are risk factors, including the length of deployment, the caregiver at home's distress, the parental mental health, whether a parent returns with a psychological or physical injury. All of these have the potential to negatively impact the military child's well-being or mental health.

So the goals and aims of our study, and, unfortunately, I don't have time today to present all of our results. I look forward to presenting those results in future webinars. But we're describing today that we have evaluated and continue to evaluate the value of a web-based system providing secondary prevention to military children through Military Kids Connect. We want to determine is online learning an effective and appropriate means for providing accurate information to children to support their resiliency and flexible adaptation.

And the aim of the web-based material is to increase protective factors for the military child, and that's done, as Dr. Blasko just mentioned, through provision of accurate information, psycho-education about trauma and PTSD, peer-based modeling, watching videos of other military children describing their successful adaptation with challenges, so being able to find examples of positive adaptation, or forums by which military children can share and receive guidance and suggestions and support, specifically around issues that are relevant to their day-to-day lives. And an important concept is linking psycho-education and problem-solving approaches. And we see this as a common thread through many secondary prevention efforts by which we're providing information, we're helping children to create meaning, shared family meaning of their events, and in a way helping the children also to think through some additional opportunities for help and assistance if they need it.

So our methodology includes providing opportunities. We interviewed extensively 50 children, age nine to 17, from active duty families here in Southern California, and they viewed a Military Kids Connect web-based material, the "Tough Topics" section, and accessed children's and teen's responses and preferences to these different modules related to military culture and parental PTS. So the important message here is that even Military Kids Connect is taking an evidence-based approach to providing what could be considered a trauma-informed secondary prevention in a supportive community called Military Kids Connect. This is an important resource being provided by Department of Defense to military kids and their communities. And as an academic institution, UCLA, we're working as a partner in this effort to evaluate the effectiveness and safety of these types of methodologies to support our military children. So I'm going to end here. Thank you so much. I've really appreciated the opportunity to introduce this study and I look forward to future opportunities to share some of those results. Thank you.

Thank you for your presentations, Dr. Blasko and Dr. Leskin. If you have questions for Dr. Blasko and Dr. Leskin, please submit them now via the Q&A pod located on the screen. A couple of comments while you're beginning to enter your questions. Our presenters have made the point that the world of the web, in particular, is a common virtual resource for kids. These native speakers go there for social connections, peer support, and even to learn about problems that they may be experiencing.

The presenters obviously couldn't know this as you were presenting, but there was some interesting discussion offline in the chat pod concerning with all of these resources when, in fact, do kids have time

to deal with real humans. I thought it would be a good way to start the questions for our presenters. Dr. Blasko, Dr. Leskin?

Yes, this is Dr. Blasko. It is an interesting question because, well, I think one doesn't preclude the other. Certainly online tools are helpful, but hopefully they extend it to other conversations with the children that are around them. But I would like to mention, for example, with reserve and National Guard, where they may be the only military family in a particular area and not know other military children. So actually making the connection through Facebook or other social network types of activities or resources is a way to reduce their isolation. But certainly these resources are not intended to take away from the direct real time talking to kids; it's to maybe stimulate those conversations as well.

My perspective on this issue, and I completely appreciate the perspective of technology versus one's life in the physical world versus the digital world. My perspective is there's a lot of competition and influences for our nation's children's attention in many different ways, and it's important for us as a helping community to create prosocial, supportive messages and opportunities that exist in many of those domains. So whether it's schools, whether it's community service agencies, whether it's mental health, or whether it's online or media, that it's important for us to think about each of those as opportunities for providing support and positive messaging for our youth who are also competing with many negative messages and negative types of experiences and influences.

So, one is where they go, yeah, certainly. One is the military life is somewhat transitory and digital technology can help support that, their movement and have a place where they can still connect. So there's a lot of advantages. But in terms of to rely on technology, I don't think we're relying on technology. I think we're building on – we're working within the digital realm, and also within all these other agencies as well, both military, community and others to bring prevention, to bring supportive community, to understand the risks, and to address these. And so this is but one of many ways that the military and community are finding ways to support the military children who are parts of our military families who are doing the service of sacrifice for our country.

Thank you both. Another question. Which tools are helpful for our too "adultified" children -- I think what that means is children who have imposed on them adult responsibilities – "adultified" children who are either asked or assume that they have to step up during a parent's deployment? Do you have related guidance for parents on how to deal with or navigate this situation?

Yes. Well, I'll start with the children. First of all, we do actually have addressed that in the three main resources. One is the "Deployment Daily" actually spends a lot of times of different questions that kids have around that or feeling the stresses of that and how they dealt with it. Also, the instructional vignettes like the "Crossroads" and "What Would You Do" almost mainly about that adultification of the children and the challenges that they face. So those present the dilemmas and types of questions and struggles that come up. And then the kids can learn from each other as well as from the information that's presented.

Also, the stress management tool for older children, since it's somewhat adapted for military children, there is a section around that and how it contributes to stress. Now, in terms of the parents and "adultification" I don't think we explicitly provide that type of material, but it is possible for parents to go and review all the material on the website, in particular those different vignettes, to understand better maybe what their child is going through.

Thank you. Another question, this is probably for Dr. Blasko regarding Military Kids Connect, "I noticed that on the "Tough Topics" several of the videos are about changes to dad. Several kids have active duty mothers. Are there videos on the website that address this as well?"

Just to say it's very difficult to find just in terms of interviews. But the physical injuries graphic novels actually worked through a mother who has had a physical injury. So I don't know that we have children specifically – mothers and [indiscernible] docs, but we did try to cover it in one of the animated graphic novels.

Is there a way for parents to monitor that conversations that children are having through these sites?

Yes -- well, actually no. All the commenting is anonymous. So the way it works, it's actually pre-moderated. So when a child or someone using the website puts in a post we have a moderator that reviews it for both not personally identifiable information or suspected bullying or predator type behavior. And if it is, then it gets cleared to be posted. But all -- it is anonymous now because we don't want to share PII. So parents can go out and look at all the posts but they may not know if it's their particular child posting something.

Thank you. This is a question that I can probably answer. If an organization is interested in partnering with DoD to do research with Military Kids Connect, similar to UCLA, how might they engage? And you're certainly welcome to contact Dr. Blasko. I think she'd be thrilled to hear of an interest in doing research, as we would be thrilled here at National Center for Telehealth and Technology. I believe we have her email address available to you, to the audience.

And we'll put it in the chat.

And we'll put it in the chat room to be certain. So that I think would be -- we'd certainly be open to that kind of dialogue with any one of you. Here's another question, "Does the societal labeling of service members as hero status for having served helpful or hindering in the child or adolescent whose parents at home are not coping well for whatever diagnosed reasons?"

I didn't hear the question.

I'm sorry. Let me try it again. "Does the societal labeling of service members as hero status for having service, is that helpful or hindering to a child or an adolescent whose parent is home and not coping well for whatever diagnosed reasons?"

Dr. Leskin, would you like to?

Sure. I think that's a great and interesting question. My perspectives on this is that our service members are in many ways serving and performing heroic acts of bravery and exhibit great courage and sacrifice, as do our military families. Labels though can both help and hinder one's own experience in terms of [inaudible] creating a fuller shared understanding and meaning for what one's been through and how the outcome that that's resulted in in the case of the question may be such as psychological or physical injury. So, in a way, hero confers great status. It creates a sense of appreciation, but it may also limit for the family or the youth a fuller and more richer understanding and a shared meaning and creating a shared meaning about how this has affected the family and their own experience.

So I would encourage folks to think about these issues of use of labels but also if our goal is communication, if our goal is for that parent to share their experiences in a way that the child can appreciate and understand and continue to grow from for what's happened to the service member, what's happened to the family, how that child is understanding those issues, I think then hero can be just the beginning of an understanding of what the family's gone through. So, like many of these concepts, these ideas, I think that it confers greatness to what one's experience has been, but we also as a family and as a community need to continue to develop our narrative, our shared experience and have those experiences continue over time.

Thank you very much, Dr. Leskin. We have just about three minutes left, so I'm going to wind down now. I want to thank, again, the presenters, Dr. Blasko, Dr. Leskin, for your excellent and informative presentation to us this afternoon. Let me just take care of a little bit of admin commentary and we'll wish you all a good day.

After the webinar please visit [continuingeducation.dcri.duke.edu](http://continuingeducation.dcri.duke.edu) to complete the online CE post-test and evaluation, and download your certificate of attendance. Again, the Duke Medicine website will be open through Thursday -- actually open through Thursday, March 26th, until 11:59 p.m. So you do have a

week. To help us improve future webinars we encourage you to complete the feedback tool that will open in a separate browser on your computer.

To access the presentation and resource list for this webinar you may download them from the “Files” box on the screen or at the DCoE website, that’s [dcoe.mil/webinars](http://dcoe.mil/webinars). An audio recording and edited transcript of the closed captioning will be posted to that link in approximately one week. The chat function will remain open for an additional ten minutes after the conclusion of the webinar to permit attendees to continue to network with each other.

The next DCoE psychological health webinar topic, “Security Privacy Concerns with Using Mobile Tech Tools in Patient Care” is scheduled for Thursday, March 26th, from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. And in the next DCoE TBI webinar, Traumatic Brain Injury webinar, “Pediatric Concussion,” is scheduled for Thursday, April 9th, from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m., again, Eastern Standard Time. Again, my sincere thanks to all presenters and thank you all for attending today. And have a great day.

Thank you. This does conclude today’s conference. Participants may disconnect at this time.