

MY CHILD WANTS TO JOIN THE MILITARY. **NOW WHAT?**

The decision to enter the military service is monumental and needs to be given the time and attention it deserves. Unlike choosing a college or heading out into the workforce, the choice to join the Armed Forces comes with a commitment that is not easy to retract.

This document is intended to give parents a place to start in helping their child make this decision.

Why join?

This is a question that every potential recruit needs to answer. There are many excellent reasons for joining, including patriotism, job training and education. There are also poor reasons for joining, like not knowing what else to do after high school or pressure from a parent or family member to serve. A clear goal and desire to serve will set the foundation for a successful experience at basic training and beyond.

Selecting a Branch

Each branch of service is unique. They have different lengths of commitment, different jobs, different locations for training and posts, and different promotions schedules. Encourage your child to look at and talk to recruiters from each branch.

Delayed Enlistment

All of the branches recruit heavily at high schools. Recruiters consider students the ideal recruit because they are generally physically fit and accustomed to both a schedule and authority. High School seniors who enlist before graduating can receive preferential treatment or special benefits. These seniors go to MEPS (Military Entrance Processing Station) and sign their contract, but their report date to basic training is deferred until after they graduate. There can be real benefits to delayed enlistment that are worthy of consideration, like early promotions, enlistment bonuses, and job guarantees.

Not all recruiters are equal

Recruiters have a great deal of perceived power and authority over a young person seeking to join. A good recruiter will prepare your child for service, mentally and physically, and will help them make decisions about the contract that will be in your child's best interest. Sadly, the stereotype of the recruiter who misleads is real.

Your child needs to do their due diligence and understand what they are committing to and above all, read and understand any paperwork they are signing. Basic training is not like summer camp and they cannot just quit if they decide it is too hard, no matter what a recruiter may say. Your child should fully understand the terms of service they are signing up for and should always be ready to respectfully walk away from a contract that does not fulfill their goals.

It can be very helpful to speak with an active-duty service member who does not have an agenda. Western Slope Blue Star Mothers can help connect your child to an active-duty service member of the branch they are considering.

Disclosing personal history

Your child will be asked to disclose personal information that will be used to assess their fitness for service. Unfortunately, not every person who wants to serve is able to. Physical fitness, medical history, criminal history, and school history can and will be checked to ensure they are eligible to serve.

It is not uncommon for recruiters to advise a young person not to disclose a piece of historical information that the recruiter believes will be a problem. *Approach this with great caution.* Not disclosing required information can negatively impact your child both at basic training and in their military career. These disclosures are required for good reason. Failing basic training (sometimes called "washing out") can be traumatic for both the recruit and the family.

Your child will be required to sign a document at MEPS that is a legal affirmation that they have disclosed everything required and that no one, including a recruiter, has advised them otherwise.

What is MEPS?

MEPS, or the Military Entrance Processing Station, is where your child goes to complete their assessment for service and sign their contract. This is usually a 2-3 day trip to Denver that will require your child to be excused from school if they are a high school student. Transportation and travel expenses will be covered for their trip to MEPS.

Basic Training Preparation Programs

Each branch has a pre-basic training program to prepare new recruits for heading off to boot camp. It is our experience that participation in this program increases success in basic training. Though high school students have busy extra-curricular schedules, taking part in these training sessions are worth their time not just for the physical training, but to prepare for what basic training will be like. Encourage your child to make time to participate.

More Questions?

For some families, a child's desire to serve may be scary, particularly if your family does not have a history of military service or you have a family member that had a negative experience. And even experienced families can have questions! Western Slope Blue Star Mothers would be happy to connect with you. Please reach out, we are here for you!

