Child Protection, Trust and the Resilience of Military Families

Dr. Becky Powell & Dr. Grace Yeuell
IMCOM-E Religious Education Program Directors

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This brief is based on Child Protection Training (written by Ms Erin Kaberline and Dr. Grace Yeuell) and on research regarding Military Children and Resilience (by Dr. Becky Powell).

The primary reason to conduct a background check is to protect our children. There is nothing more important than the safety of our children. We also conduct background checks to instill confidence in our community members. We want them to know that our facilities and programs are safe for everyone, including children.

Faith Development

- How do children come to know God and respond to God in faith?
  - A Staged Approach
    - Undifferentiated
    - Intuitive-Projective
    - Mythic-Literal

  - A Ringed Approach
    - Experienced
    - Affiliative

The developmental domain we will look at is faith development or how children come to know God and respond to God in faith. We will look at two different approaches to this developmental domain. Both approaches have helpful insights for those of us who work with children in Chapel settings.

TRUST BUILDING IS KEY TO FAITH DEVELOPMENT NO MATTER WHICH THEOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY
THEORIES INFORM YOUR WORK.

1.   In a **Staged Approach** one stage builds on another, as old stages are left behind.
     a. **Undifferentiated Faith**. Here the infant develops basic trust or mistrust in the one's providing care. This lays the groundwork for basic trust or mistrust in God. The quality of relationships at this phase underlies all future faith development for the child.   When the development of thought and language skills begin to open the child up to the use of symbols in speech and ritual play, the child moves on to …..
     b. **Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective Faith** which is typical of children ages 2 through 7. In this stage children are egocentric. Here children's imaginations are formed. Reality is not well-differentiated from fantasy. Anything is possible in life and faith. Miracles happen every day. For this reason, adults preaching about the negative aspects of religion - the devil and the evils of sin - can cause great harm to children of this age, leading them toward a fearful, very rigid, brittle and authoritarian personality as an adult. When children gain the capacity for concrete thinking, they can begin to move toward …..
     c. Stage 2 - Mythic, Literal Faith where children are likely to start sorting out the real from the make-believe. Story becomes the major way of giving unity and value to experience, but the symbols in those stories are seen as one-dimensional and literal. Also, beliefs, moral rules and attitudes are held literally. Thus, for example, God is an anthropomorphic (has human characteristics) being in the sky who wears clothes and does things that normal people do, like eat food.

2. In a **Ringed Approach** faith grows like the rings of a tree, with former stages remaining a part of the whole.
     a. **Experienced Faith** (pre-school & early childhood)— In an experienced faith, "This is what 'we' do. This is how 'we' act." It is a time of imitation. For example, children pray the Lord's Prayer without understanding the meaning of all the words because this is something we do. The family unit is their primary understanding of "we."
     b. **Affiliative Faith** (childhood & early adolescent years)— In affiliative faith, "This is what 'we' believe and do." This is 'our' group/church. It is a time of belonging to a group. It is still a time which centers around the imitation of what the group does. That group is usually a community of faith like a church, a synagogue or a mosque.

We are dedicated to preventing abuse in our chapels. As we have discussed throughout the training, these are the top five actions we take to try to achieve that goal.

TCK

"A third culture kid is an individual who, having spent a significant part of their developmental years in a culture other than their parents' home culture, develops a sense of relationship to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Elements from each culture are incorporated into the life experience, but the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar experience."

Resilience in the Lives of Military Children

The military community is one part of what is called the third culture. Third Culture Kid (TCK) refers to those individuals who are raised in a synthesis of cultures that an individual may encounter. The first culture and second culture are the host and home cultures whereas the third culture is the resulting synthesis of the two. The cultural markers of these individuals contain characteristics of both cultures but are no longer fully either. The term for all populations remains third culture regardless of the number of places an individual might have lived or the number of ethnicities/cultures that the family brings together. An increasing percentage of the world today does not have one single home culture shared by both parents. Many households include multiple ethnicities, multiple religious traditions, and multiple places where the family *could* call home. There are also many members of the third culture population who have lived in multiple locations. Third culture is a quick way to understand the blending of many cultures.

It is a term was coined as shorthand coding by anthropologists, Ruth and John Useem during their study of English speaking, Western men working in India 60 years ago. As they analyzed the cultural characteristics, they noted that India was one culture, and Britain was a second culture. The workers, their spouses and their children were neither fully Indian nor fully British. Looking at cultural markers, this group was a hybrid, a third culture.

The accepted definition of TCK was copyrighted by Dr. David Pollock. His description of the population is in terms of significance, relationship, culture, and belonging. These are facets of life that are addressed for the BRAT culture. Through using these terms, approaches to providing care are manageable for all TCKs.

Soldiers and families assigned to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, have a deep understanding of risk and resilience. These are families who, like all military seek to maintain a resilient spirit amidst the risk of war. However, Kansas is also known for tornados, so their families and buildings are also prepared for the risk of tornado. The local goal is to have the people trained and the buildings structured to experience a tornado but survive with structure and spirits intact. Military personnel at Leavenworth live in the midst of physical and psychological risk.

Resilience is the ability make a rapid recovery from adversity. However, before its use in psychology, the term was long used in architecture meaning the ability of a structure to maintain functional integrity. The other keyword that to understand is risk, the possibility of harm occurring. Danger is a synonym of risk.

Before going further, it is important to understand that all people need resilience and all people experience risk and crisis. This is not a situation exclusive to the military community. Everyone hurts. Everyone struggles. Everyone has times of discontent. Everyone needs support. This is true of all communities, whether or not they are military. In talking about resilience issues, one UK chaplain says "… not just the Soldiers who are dealing with this. Their children are dealing with this".

Resilience in the Lives of Military Children - Relationships are Significant

There are few religious educators focusing on the distinct needs of BRATs and other TCKs. *A Friend Who Teaches Me* was the first PhD thesis to look explicitly at this situation. As of 2014, there are still less than 10 practical theologians focusing on this issue.

BRATs' resilience and development begins with developmental psychology. Jean Piaget's staged model of cognitive development have been applied to other aspects of human development including moral, social, and faith. James Fowler directly applies Piaget's developmental structure to religious education. The staged approaches focus on the issues of individuals .

Lev Vygotsky looked at relationality in development. Vygotsky's research of the mother-child relationship found that the better this attachment, the better the capacity of the mother to transmit language to the child. Similarly the mother's understanding of the language directly correlates to the developing fluency in the child. Recognizing the influences of both relationship and content (fluency), it is easy to see the disruption that deployment or relocation can have on a child's development . Applying this to the resilience of BRATs, a parent's absence effects his/her influence. A parent's own resilience affects the resilience of the child.

Most helpful for TCKs is Reuven Feuerstein who applied the theories of both Piaget and Vygotsky to the situation of children immigrating into Israel. A high percentage of these children had no significant developmental delays in their location of origin but after arriving in Israel demonstrated such significant difficulties that they were institutionalized. Feuerstein included Vygotsky's mediated learning experiences (MLEs) and demonstrated that non-parental adults are influential for adolescents.

With MLEs, trauma can be overcome for health and development. In successful transformation, the adults know the capacities of the child. They also understand the child's needs. There are identifiable methods behind MLEs zones of proximal development (ZPD), the careful introduction of new concepts prior to the child's ability to fully grasp them.

The use of MLEs and ZPDs requires relationship more than academic expertise. They are used through understanding the young person's readiness and their future needs. These methods are being used in many schools around the world for cognitive development, but they are new in application to resilience, religious communities and to BRATs.

As military personnel deploy or as families relocate, the child's ability to learn resilience is crucial. BRATs may find supportive relationships in the community. Feuerstein demonstrated that non-parental adults can influence the resilience of an adolescent. This is also related to ancient theological understandings of community and religion. This presentation will continue to examine at the idea of adults who can influence resilience by their presence in the religious organizations that a BRAT might attend.

Resilience in the Lives of Military Children

- **Relationships are important and require intention.**
- **Shared traditions and opinions make shared identity even when perceived identity is separate.**
- **Third Culture is different from Monoculture but difference does not make a barricade to relationship**

Resilience in the Lives of Military Children - Relationships are Significant

Beyond the disrupted relationships that BRATs experience, it is important to remember the significance of relationships that was just discussed. Even in risk, there is opportunity to support resilience. Many military families experience a sense of despair at the thought of disruptions. After looking at the disruptions themselves, the discussion will turn to the interventions effective for influential relationships. The experiences that BRATs have are not barricades to relationship nor to resilience.

Resilience in the Lives of Military Children

Social Scaffolding

1 – Significant People Can Influence Choices
2 – Significant People Appear *Trustworthy*
3 – Trusted People Relate Intentionally
4 – Trusted People Continue Self-Development
5 – Multilayered Relationships are
 VERY Significant

Resilience in the Lives of Military Children - Ways Religion Supports

Significant relationships and resilience are not automatic even in monoculture settings. The trustworthy reputation is earned. The work of relationships always requires persistent intention. Self-development demonstrates a sense of humility within any adult. Building relationships that involve multiple people and multiple roles requires daily work. Even when four out of the five parts of social scaffolding are present, the absence of one can denigrate the positive influence and impair resilience.

When adults in religious organizations intentionally work to develop positive relationships with each other and with the BRATs who live in their midst, resilience is certainly enhanced. Social scaffolding is more a description of the relationships that have worked than a checklist for a program to be implemented. The unique nature of each religious organization and the individuals therein means that applications and methods for resilience support will vary. The skeleton of this scaffolding is the trust that BRATs might offer to adults. The free choices from each person make it clear that social scaffolding cannot be forced or feigned.
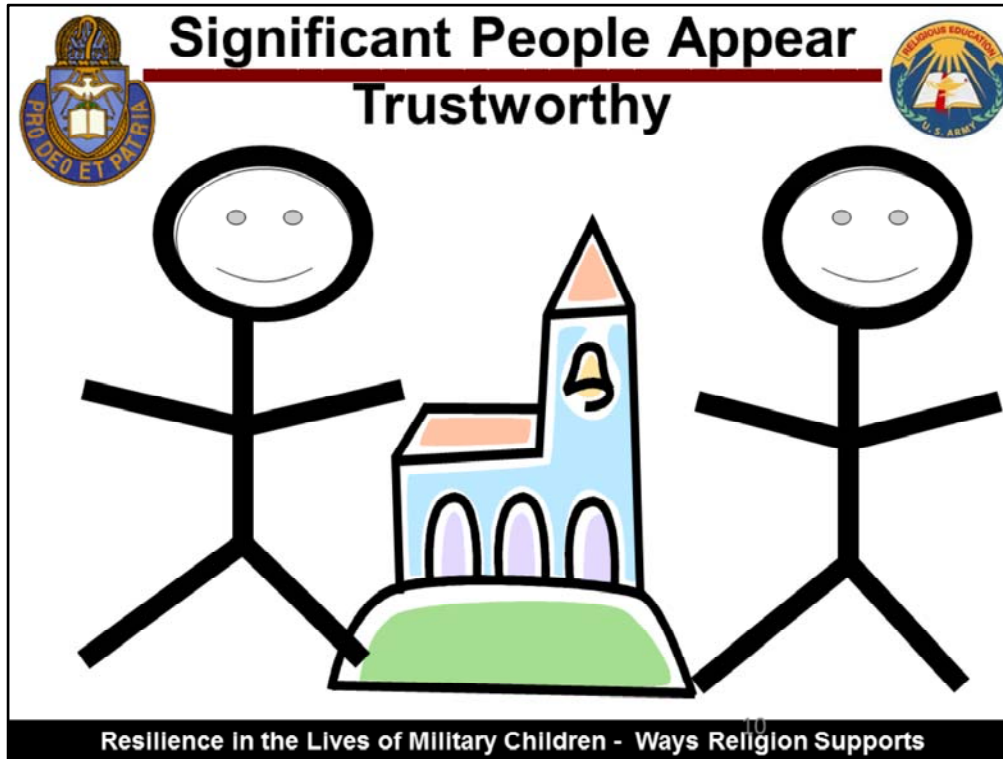
A Friend Who Teaches Me presents the research and findings about social scaffolding and TCKs. It is analyzes adult-adolescent relationships in an English speaking congregation located in a non-English speaking land. Since its completion, its findings have been used with US Army chapels in Europe. The scaffolding theory has been confirmed in comparisons with Army research and in conversations with members of the military community.

The social scaffolding theory as presented in this presentation has been tailored for the specific needs of military BRATs. However social scaffolding is used in wider developmental psychology. There are other resources available to support resilience for the military and other communities that see high rates of crisis. The American Psychological Association has developed materials particular to the questions of resilience and war. They have a pamphlet series that tailors understandings and interventions to the needs of specific age groups. While not addressing the ideas of religion with depth, they feature the concepts of relationships and religion as parts of resilience.

Many military and religious organizations are studying and working to meet the distinct needs of all TCKs. There is much original research that has been done, and many faith groups have developed military specific resources. There are gaps of work that still need to be filled, particularly support for military chapels which are understaffed and for personnel who are located far from an installation.

Frequently upon entering a new community parents do encourage their teenager to join clubs and activities including religious organizations. The social scaffolding model indicates that it is not in age specific activities but in intergenerational relationships resilience is enhanced. Other research on resilience in wider populations is being done and confirms this finding. The implications and strategies for all religious education and faith development programming are the subject of larger initiatives.

Hearing about the social scaffolding, what are ways that you can communicate to Soldiers and Families about Child Protection (background checks and other measures)?

Significant People Appear Trustworthy

Resilience in the Lives of Military Children - Ways Religion Supports

Trustworthiness

The possibility of significance is the foundation of influential relationships. The second way that adult relationships in religious organizations can support resilience of Military Children is in the fact that the appearance of trustworthiness correlates with influence. In other words, reputation is as important as activity. Those who influence have demonstrated a worthiness to receive faith. Influential adults are typical adults who have certain characteristics or experiences that distinguish them.

The earned trustworthy designation is visible when there are particular adults who are named by multiple people as being influential. Adolescents desire relationships with adults, and they appreciate those who protect them. Child protection (training and background checks) is becoming prevalent in community organizations and is an opportunity to gain trust. Visible trust enhancing activities are particularly critical for BRATs and other TCKs.

As part of this trust building, adults can make be present to and find commonalities with adolescents. Part of the presence is a sense of similarity. Many BRATs name adults as present and influential when they share something in common. The words "like me" are used, but the likeness is not merely appearance but includes shared hobbies, career plans, and life experiences (such as the third culture).

Availability and commonality are part of trustworthiness. The scaffolding is formed first by the willingness of the young person to engage in significant relationships, and second from the trustworthiness of the adults. Reputation, availability, and similarity make for a potential relationship which can be fully formed into one that supports resilience.

Child Protection measures are intentional efforts to build trust and protect trust for all chapel participants.

Questions?