

Helping Students Understand Their Options

Background

School guidance counselors are in a unique position to help students explore their post-high school options. Given the increased access of military recruiters to students, it is important for guidance counselors to be aware of some of the realities that surround military advertising, recruitment and enlistment.

The military recruitment process sometimes leads young people to enlist without adequate information.

Recruiters naturally emphasize the positive benefits of military service in order to secure enlistees, focusing on money for college and job training. This often excludes serious discussion about the stresses of military life and the trauma of combat, providing only a limited picture of what they are about to face.

Since the stakes in this decision are high, it is in everyone's interest for recruitment to be as truthful and transparent as possible.

Army officials report that only 30% of 17-24 year olds could actually qualify for military service.

Obesity, gang connections, mental health concerns, moral issues and a host of medical conditions are all potential reasons for disqualification.

According to David S. Chu, Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, roughly one third of recruits across all service branches are discharged before completing their first 3-4 year term of

duty. Of those who leave early, half of them do so within the first year.

Obviously many young people who enlist are able to qualify and complete one or more tours of duty. The cautions presented here are simply reminders that not every potential enlistee will succeed or qualify for the advertised benefits.

Delayed Entry Program (DEP)

Most young people enter the military through the DEP. This allows them to sign up while they are still in high school, but not report for boot camp until some months later. A significant number of young people change their minds before going to boot camp. This is not uncommon, as young people make and change plans quickly in response to their own growth, the influence of peers, or new opportunities.

It is important to note that enlistees who have not yet reported for boot camp can withdraw from the program.

Military regulations consider enlistments a binding commitment, but are very clear that enlistees who change their plans and decide not to report to boot camp, are to be released.

a. The official procedure for withdrawing from the DEP is simple. Enlistees in these circumstances should send a letter to the Commanding Officer of their recruitment station, and state their reason for withdrawal.

b. Reasons for withdrawing from the DEP are many and varied, including: marriage, pregnancy, medical or psychological problems, drug use, personal hardship, plans to attend college, failure to graduate from high school, conscientious objection to war, failure to report to boot camp, etc.

c. Following receipt of a letter from an enlistee who is withdrawing from the DEP, many recruiters will counsel the enlistee not to withdraw. This is normal procedure, and part of the recruiter's job. In some cases, however, recruiters have threatened legal action or jail. For this reason, it is important that young people not meet with military recruiters alone. **Military regulations clearly state that if an enlistee persists in his or her desire to withdraw from the program, they shall be released.**

Also, according to military regulations, **military recruiters are not permitted to threaten those withdrawing from the DEP with legal action or other negative consequences.**

Army regulations state:
Members of the recruiting force must respond positively to any inquiry from DEP members concerning separations from the DEP. Under no circumstances will any member of this command threaten, coerce, manipulate, or intimidate DEP members, nor may they obstruct separation requests.

See: http://www.usarec.army.mil/im/formpub/REC_PUBS/R601_56.pdf (Chapter 3: FSP Separation Procedures)

d. Enlistees who wish to withdraw from the DEP even without a clearly defined reason, and who fail to report for basic training are to be released.

To view U.S. Army Recruitment Command regulations related to DEP, and withdrawal from the program, go to the following website:

<http://www.girightshotline.org>

Enlistment Contract

It is important for all enlistees to be aware of the following language in the military enlistment contract: *Laws and regulations that govern military personnel may change without notice to me. Such changes may affect my status, pay, allowances, benefits, and responsibilities as a member of the Armed Forces REGARDLESS of the provisions of this enlistment/reenlistment document.*

DD Form 4/3, Oct, 2007

<http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/infomgt/forms/eforms/dd0004.pdf>

While the above language does not mean that the contractual agreement between the enlistee and the military will be broken, it does mean that a recruiter cannot guarantee a young enlistee a certain job or placement. Young people whose desire to enlist in the military depends on specific promises or offers made by a recruiter should be sure to read and understand this part of the contract.

Mental Health

Some military recruiters urge young people to hide mental health issues such as depression or anxiety in order to meet enlistment requirements. Enlistees who follow this advice, sometimes suffer severe difficulties during the rigors of basic training.

Guidance counselors will do students a great service if they help them withstand this kind of pressure from recruiters. Military regulations exclude people with certain mental health concerns for a reason. For their own long-term health and well-being, potential enlistees should be clear and open about their physical and mental health history.

Education Benefits

The military has long promoted education benefits as a way to encourage young people to enlist. It is clear that educational benefits or the stability of a job and health care are significant motivators for enlistees.

The new Post 9/11 G.I. Bill provides attractive post-high school education benefits to enlistees based on their length of service in the military (after 9/11). High school students who are considering military enlistment because of education benefits may want to consider the following:

- a. Education benefits are only available to those who receive an honorable discharge.
- b. An early discharge from the military will result in a lower education benefit.
- c. The education benefits offered by the military should be weighed alongside the hardships and risks that soldiers must endure. Hope for educational benefits may not be enough to sustain them in a combat setting.

It is the school counselor's challenge to help young people find the opportunity for education and training that fits their long-term needs and interests. The fact that the military education benefits are generous addresses only one part of this challenge.

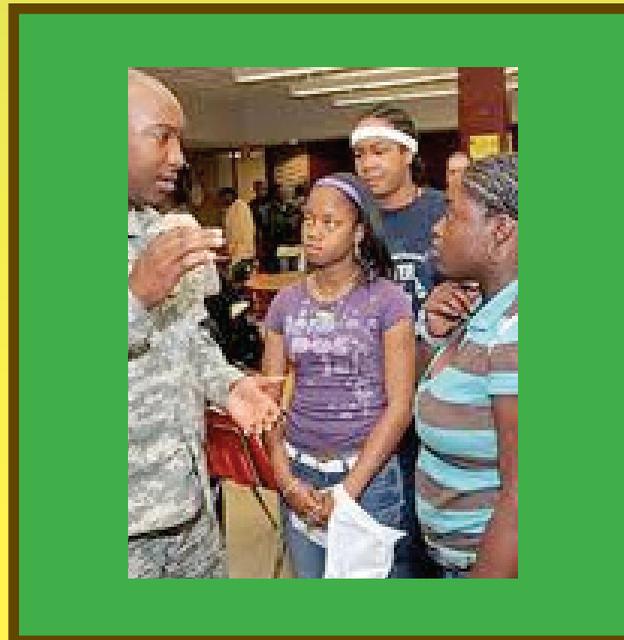
Combat

Given our post-9/11 context, it is hard to imagine that any young person might assume they can enlist in the military and never risk being called to serve in a combat environment. However, the G.I. Rights Hotline receives many calls from young people who enlist for the advertised

education benefits, only to discover later that they do have deep misgivings. It is not uncommon that they realize they are morally against potentially taking the life of another human being.

Young people should understand clearly that the military is not a program designed to meet the individual needs of the soldier. The U.S. military mission is to protect and defend the United States. Almost all *enlistees will be trained to kill and may be called upon to serve in a very harsh and deadly environment*. Education benefits or job skills training, while aggressively advertised and promoted by the military, should not be a young person's only motivation for enlistment.

Even soldiers who remain fully committed to the military mission throughout their enlistment may experience emotional and psychological trauma or physical injury from combat. These realities are not presented in military ads or readily discussed by recruiters, yet very important for would-be enlistees to consider.



Quitting

Enlistees should understand that many of the assumptions about life and rights in the civilian world do not apply to life in the military. One of the most important realities is that once an enlistee reports to boot camp, giving two weeks notice of one's intention to leave is not an option. While there are military discharges available in cases where they are warranted, each discharge involves a process of interviews and paperwork which may require some months to complete.

Counseling

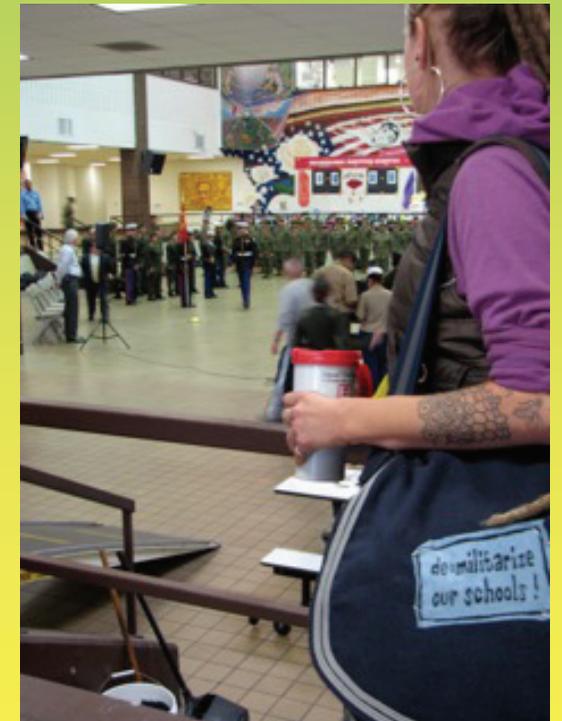
When talking with young people about post-high school service with the armed forces, it is important to consider motivation. It is important that guidance counselors remember military training is very rigorous, even dehumanizing. Serving in the military can place young people in harsh, combat environments. Fleeing a difficult situation at home only to encounter more difficulties in the military/war environment is usually not a good recipe for success.

Counselors who have the opportunity to speak with students about their reasons for enlistment should counsel students not to do so on impulse, or because they are angry at their parents.

All information taken from Military Recruitment: Information for School Guidance Counselors by Titus Peachey, Director of Peace Education, Mennonite Central Committee U.S., co.mcc.org/us/co/

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MILITARY RECRUITMENT



Information for School Guidance Counselors