

HOW TO HANDLE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Difficult questions counter-recruiters often face

Teachers have stated that they are sometimes in an uncomfortable position when students ask them what they think. As representatives of the State, teachers must respond thoughtfully and carefully. Since the issue of military recruiting is laden with emotional overtones and raises the issue of patriotism, it can be a difficult subject to discuss objectively and rationally. How do we handle the difficult questions? Consider this:

Students do not like to be told what to do or not to do. Listen to their feelings and thoughts and respond to them. Encourage them to stay focused on the main issues. Help them check out generalizations or assumptions.

There are many reasons for students to be interested in the military including:

- Money for college
- Lack of options, and financial needs
- Loss of job
- Appeal of free health care, fitness programs, housing and basic necessities
- A history of military service in the family
- Patriotism and honor
- Influence of the media, and glamorized violence (“It’s cool”)
- Appeal of discipline
- Wanting to prove themselves or do something with their lives
- It’s something I’ve always wanted to do (a feeling)
- Not knowing what to do with their lives
- I don’t know why
- Other

Each of these reasons expresses a situation or feeling that needs to be addressed. Avoid being judgmental and making assumptions about what they are feeling or thinking. Try to listen to what they are saying and answer with what you know about the military or military recruitment. When they state, “I don’t know why I want to enlist” help them to explore possible reasons. Encourage the student to find out why, realizing that this is one of the most important decisions he/she will make. Use an analogy to underscore the importance of having a reason for enlistment, such as entering into marriage or a job. We make a decision about those areas of life based on a reason or purpose, don’t we?

How to respond when a student says.....

I am joining the military because I need money for college.

Financial aid is available to 7 out of 10 students without joining the military. Currently it is estimated that more than half of all veterans receive NO education benefits from the military for college, and additionally 23% receive only half their maximum benefit. Bonus money must be paid back if you do not meet the enlistment terms and depends on work being done. It is not a “bonus” in the usual sense of the word. **YOU DON’T HAVE TO JOIN THE MILITARY TO PAY FOR COLLEGE. THERE ARE BETTER ALTERNATIVES.** (See AFSC’s *It’s My Life: a Guide to Alternatives after High School* at https://www.afsc.org/sites/afsc.civicaactions.net/files/documents/itsmylife_0.pdf)

I want to learn a career

There are nonfatal job opportunities. *It’s My Life ...* has both local and national opportunities for job training, apprenticeship programs, and career opportunities. Military training is for military jobs. It is difficult to estimate the actual transfer of job skills into the military, but from accounts given by veterans, the percentage is very low. The Pentagon has already ordered over 55,000 soldiers to stay in Iraq beyond their agreed return dates. This is the only job you can’t quit. **THERE ARE BETTER WAYS TO HAVE A CAREER, CHECK OUT YOUR OPTIONS** at Alternatives on the National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth website at <https://nnomy.org>.

I am doing it so my family will be proud of me.

There are many ways to make your family proud. If you come home in a body bag they will never recover from their grief. If you come home suffering from depleted uranium, post traumatic stress disorder, or life long physical injuries, they will need to spend a great deal of time and money helping you recover and cope with your situation. The primary mission of the military is to wage war. It may put you in a situation where you will have to kill or be killed. Imagine what your family would feel if you were to die in military action. You can make your family proud by loving them, being there for them, going to college without joining the military, and finding a career that will be of service to others and satisfying to yourself. What does it really mean to wear a fancy uniform or have metals on your chest? Look beyond the clothes and tradition, really think about it. It's your future and life. Talk to members of Iraq Veterans Against the War at <https://www.ivaw.org> or Military Families Speak Out at <http://www.militaryfamiliespeakout.com/> or Veterans for Peace at <https://www.veteransforpeace.org/>.

The military is just something that I've always wanted to do.

It's also the most important decision you could make in your life. Find out about the realities of war from those who have had first hand knowledge such as family members or friends and the recent Iraq veterans. Watch the Arlington West Documentary, the Ground Truth or the Winter Soldier hearings or read Road from Ar Ramadi by Camilo Mejia, or The Sutras of Abu Ghraib by Aidan Delgado. A [2016 Department of Veterans Affairs study](#) revealed that 20 veterans commit suicide every day. Perhaps you feel that way because our society glamorizes violence. Movies and television often present the military as a manly choice for men or independent strong choice for women. Know where you feelings come from.

I think the F-16 planes are so cool. I am fascinated by them.

- It's one thing to be captivated by them, another to actually fly them for the purpose of killing others.
- Evaluate the reality of your fascination. War is real; those planes are used for lethal missions that kill defenseless human beings.
- If you want to be a pilot or mechanic that works on planes there are civilian alternatives.

Joining the military will help me get my citizenship.

Immigrants often see enlisting in the military as a patriotic duty. It is important to check with an immigrant rights attorney as this subject is constantly changing. See the document "Thinking of Joining the Military to Gain Citizenship?" at <http://www.projectyano.org/index.php/literature-and-resources/military-enlistment/26-thinking-of-joining-the-u-s-military-to-gain-citizenship>

It will make me a man and give me discipline and strength

Think about it. Does training with weapons make you a man? What kind of man do you want to be? Who are the men that you admire and what are the qualities that you admire in those people? There are many ways to become a man. You must decide for yourself how you will become one. You can be a man by working for peace and justice, by caring for humanity. (See the document "So you Want to Be a Man" at , <http://www.projectyano.org/index.php/literature-and-resources/military-enlistment/27-so-you-want-to-be-a-man>).

I'll get free health care, free housing, and free room and board

It's not free; on the contrary you will give up every right to free choice when you sign the military contract. Even your enlistment contract can change; you could be in the military indefinitely during times of war. Consider the health care, boarding and food you'll have AFTER your service when you return as a veteran WITHOUT adequate veteran's benefits because of the shameful lack of commitment in this country to provide for our veterans. Did you know that approximately 40% of homeless men are veterans? In 2015, [Rolling Stone Magazine reported](#) that The number of homeless Vietnam veterans today is greater than the number of soldiers who died during the war. According to the VA, about 70 percent of homeless veterans suffer from substance abuse problems, and some 45 percent are suffering from mental illnesses, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The recruiter said I wouldn't be sent to a war zone

And what else were you told, that you would be playing in the Marine Corps Band or play soccer in the Army? It's a common joke among veterans to find out who is the most gullible among them and believed the best lie. Military recruiters CANNOT make that promise to you, it is beyond their control. Their job is to convince you to enlist, so that they will meet their quotas.

How to Respond When a Parent says.....

It's a family tradition; my husband and grandfather were in the military

And they may have come out fine, and even benefited from some aspects of the military (such as buying a home, making a decent salary, and having health benefits). Today's soldier is a completely different story. If your child serves in combat, there is a greater than 50% chance that he/she will be infected with depleted uranium. This inhaled nuclear waste is known to cause cancers, birth defects and genetic-related diseases for generations. A family tradition alone is no reason for one to enlist in the military. Your family can gain honor, respect and service in many other ways. Think about how your family may have been negatively affected which was never acknowledged. Many who have gone to war don't come back the same person.

I think the discipline will do him/her good

Maybe it has been difficult these past years and your child needs discipline. There are many ways for you to receive support and help as a parent. Check the resources at your school, community organizations or city facilities such as libraries for parenting classes and support groups. There are also community or school resources available for your child, ask at your local school. True discipline is having inner control, with the ability to make sound decisions and judgments. Military discipline comes down to obeying what you are told, without being able to question or think on your own. In fact, there is a mental breakdown that your child will go through which will force conformity and following orders. Is that what you really want for your child?

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The National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth (NNOMY) <https://nnomy.org>