

Military Children and Adolescents Program Transcript

MICHAEL WILKINSON: My daughter Brittany who was born with respiratory papillomas was the main reason why I joined the military. She was actually having surgery every four weeks to take care of her condition. That was the reason I joined because the medical bills for that would just be outrageous.

So when I joined the Air Force at the time, the doctor at the hospital where I was stationed, he was the leading doctor for that field. He wrote books about it and everything like that. So she got the best care at Lackland Air Force Base's hospital.

The impact of my military life on my children, specifically my eldest, Brittany, was probably more towards her later years in high school because she had to realize the moving around part, dealing with making new friends, which was the hard part on her. For somebody with her condition, not able to speak as much, it was very hard, so she didn't make friends as fast.

In the beginning, I think she enjoyed it because Dad would send stuff home from every port that he went to, so she enjoyed that. But after I got married again, she had a little bit of a hard time. The one stable person, which was me, wasn't there the whole time, and I was gone for so long. She wasn't sure if she could talk to her step-mom.

But when I was deployed, I tried to make it a point to call and talk. The good thing nowadays with emails and stuff like that on the ships, you can actually talk almost instantaneously. Me and my daughter have a good relationship. We talk to each other. She's been through a lot. I listen to her a lot. We have a good father/daughter relationship, and when I was deployed, I think she missed that.

KRISTIN WILKINSON: In the beginning, it was extremely hard because we were just newly married, and I was fearful that, well, if I really made my stepdaughter angry and we really had a bad relationship, what's it going to do to our relationship because we're so newly married and we're in this deployment situation and we have this brand new baby. When Michael would come back from the deployment, he always wanted things to be fun. He wanted to enjoy the time with the kids. He wanted everything to be happy, everything to be wonderful.

But he came back during a time once where Brittany was grounded, and he didn't want her to be grounded anymore. So he says, well, it's OK. Well, let's go ahead. I just got back from deployment. Let's go ahead and all go out to dinner, and let's all go together. It's OK. How about we end her grounded two days early?

And it didn't help her grow as an individual, and it was keeping her from learning the responsibility which she needed. And for Bella, she was a baby. But still,

babies still needed to have their routines, and he wanted to break some of the routines sometimes because he just wanted to spend time with her.

I had to be the disciplinarian. No matter what, I had to be the disciplinarian, I had to be the bad guy, and I had to be willing to be that. And sometimes, it just was really hard when he'd come home and he'd want to do things very differently.

So how we ended up coping with it was I started emailing him when he was on deployment, and I started telling him, this is what's going on, this is what the rules I set in, and I need you to follow it when you come home. And once we started really getting into that cycle, it started working much better. And so it really helped our relationship and it helped keep things consistent for Brittany and for the girls.

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