

# Educational Consultants Help Families with Troubled Teens

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Military families experience stressors that are unique to their situation. With parents and young adults being deployed to dangerous parts of the world, their families are left with a hole that often gets filled with worry, anxiety, depression and anger. The emotional toll affects not only the remaining spouse, but the children and adolescents left at home. Children are being raised by 'single parents' while the other parent is deployed. The impact on children and adolescents can be devastating.

Across the country our children and adolescents are depressed, anxious and angry. They are coping through substance use, promiscuity and acting-out behavior. Some are isolating and retreating into the world of computers and videogames, which they seek as an escape from the real world.

For most children and adolescents, the public school system effectively serves the majority of our nation's children. At times, however, children have special learning, emotional or behavioral needs that cannot be adequately served in a mainstream setting. This may be especially true for children with parents in the military who carry an extra burden and level of vulnerability. For these students, something is not working, and a non-public school placement may be appropriate. But where? At these times, a referral to an independent educational consultant should be considered.

Clergy, mental health professionals, and school counselors can provide a certain level of professional support. However, if consideration is being given to placement in a private day school, boarding school, or therapeutic program, the services of an educational consultant can be invaluable. Educational consultants are trained professionals in the area of school and specialized placement. Their professional training and expertise is in matching appropriate schools and treatment programs to the specific needs of children and adolescents.

Educational consultants have a variety of backgrounds including school or guidance counseling, teaching, school administration or psychology. They are well-versed in determining the needs of children, as well as working in conjunction with schools and other professionals who are working with the child. Most importantly, they are extremely knowledgeable about the various placement options around the country, and can provide an unbiased assessment of the appropriate setting.

Educational consultants spend much of their time on the road, visiting local private schools, boarding schools, therapeutic or emotional growth schools, residential treatment centers, wilderness programs, and colleges nationwide. Consultants not only visit programs once, they return frequently to keep updated on programs and staff changes. The goal of an educational consultant is to become a part of the team, working with the child's therapist, clergy and current school in presenting placement alternatives to the family and aiding them in making the decision.

Educational consultants coordinate the efforts of all involved with the child. They facilitate the exchange of information between school, family, and other professionals and the recommended schools or treatment centers; aid the family in making their final decision; and coordinate enrollment. This service can be of great help to stressed military parents who may be making decisions without the support of their spouse.

There are hundreds of educational consultants across the country; however, their training and experience varies. An important resource for determining the qualifications of an educational consultant is the Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA), based in Fairfax, Virginia ([www.IECAonline.com](http://www.IECAonline.com)). To become a member of IECA, a consultant must have extensive relevant experience, be competently trained and have solid recommendations from several peers. IECA makes available complimentary copies of its membership directory so referring professionals and families can identify competent educational consultants in their geographic region. The directory includes information on the specialty of the consultant, such as placement of students with special needs.

IECA members are pledged to maintain the highest ethical standards including not accepting compensation from schools or treatment facilities for placement. IECA member consultants are compensated directly by the families of the students they work with.

How does a consultant work with the family, school and other professionals? While each consultant is independent and operates individually, the standard procedure is for the family and, if possible, child to meet with the consultant for an initial visit. At this time a detailed history is obtained and releases are signed to enable the consultant to obtain information from the school, test results, and any other

information the consultant deems pertinent. If additional testing is recommended, this may be conducted by the consultant or referred to an outside professional, depending upon the background of the consultant and the scope of the practice.

Once all information has been reviewed by the consultant, he or she is able to discuss placement options with the family. The consultant serves as a liaison between schools and the parents, keeping professionals as involved as requested.

After the schools have reviewed all information and feel that the child is appropriate, the family may schedule visits. Schools are carefully selected and checked out prior to a visit by the family, eliminating needless visiting or inappropriate schools or those that are full, preventing the family from going on a "wild goose chase".

When children are placed by a consultant, the consultant receives grade and progress reports directly from the schools and is able to monitor progress. Should there be the need to intervene or recommend a new placement, the consultant has all of the information available.

An educational consultant can provide relief to overwhelmed military families. By bringing unique skills and expertise, a consultant can assist families in making the best decisions for their children in very difficult times.