

Running head: Ethically Taking Care of Families While Completing The Mission?

ETHICS REGULATIONS AND FAMILIES

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Some argue that it is not fair to treat single parents and dual military Soldiers different from any other Soldier. Supervising single or dual Soldier families in the Army create ethical dilemmas. Leaders must accomplish the mission however, they must always ensure that the most precious resource (the Soldier and Family) is well taken care of. Many NCOs complete this balance despite what the regulation state. What is the most ethical thing to do? Ensure the well-being of Families while completing the mission!

Single parents are defined as a parent who cares for children without the assistance of another person in the home. The legal definition of "single parenthood" may vary according to the local laws of different regions. (Wikipedia 2007) Dual military parents are those couples who both serve in the military despite of branch and/or status.

The Army's official stance on single parenthood is direct. Regulation prohibits single parents with custody of their children from enlisting into the Army, with zero exceptions. Army Regulation (AR) 601-210 requires informing applicants that the Army's mission and unit readiness is not conducive with single parents. Soldiers who are single parents may encounter extreme hardships while required to perform all duties that any other soldier would perform, and be required at times to work long or unusual hours. Single parents would also be required to be available for worldwide assignment, which may be dependent restricted and be prepared for short notice mobilization; all of which would place the sole parent in a position of division between their child(ren) and their duty.

To further state the Army's stance on single parents, I have to swing the stick the other direction. The day after a Soldier enlists they technically may become a single parent do to many possible reasons, to list a few; death of a spouse, divorce, and

pregnancy. If a Soldier falls into this category, they are not governed by AR 601-210, but by AR 600-20. This regulation requires that single parents and dual military couples to provide a comprehensive plan (family care plan) to care for the children in case of emergency, duty, and mobilization. This plan must cover all facades of childcare including short term, travel to long term care and long term care to include all financial requirements. Regulation further state that Soldiers in these category will not receive any special treatment, special assignments or exemptions from any duty that would normally be required and expected from the Soldier. AR 600-20 clearly states that when a Soldier enters the single parent status the Commander must provide the Soldier 30 days to complete the family care plan. The Commander may grant an additional 30 days upon the Soldier's request. This plan is subject to inspection and verification at any time. Failure to have an effect plan could result inUCMJ charges and or chapter procedures.

I have a good amount of experience with single parenthood and ARs 601-210 and 600-20. As a First Sergeant (1SG), I dealt with several single parent Soldiers some of which had difficulties with these regulations. I also served as a single parent after I divorced; I had full custody of my three children for approximately six years before I remarried. I credit divine intervention with my military success while serving as a single parent. There were some difficult times however, I was able to overcome them and excel at the same time.

My personal experience as a former single parent makes it is easy for me to relate to Soldiers enduring this hardship. The first hurdle that I want to take on is the family care plan and its time line. 30 days to obtain the required documentation is not reasonable. The typical Soldier is trying to deal with the event in his or her life that made them a

single parent in the first place. This is a big distracter from their ability to complete the family care plan. Coupled with the documentation needed, specifically the notarized acceptance of guardianship forms from the short and long-term providers. Most Soldiers use some type of childcare during the day and hire a short-term provider if daily duty keeps them beyond ordinary childcare hours and a family member (often parents) as long-term providers. Now, the Soldiers must send the required documentation to the providers and wait on the providers to find the time in their schedules to complete the forms, have it notarized and mail it back to the Soldier. A big kicker is the Soldiers who do not have extended family that is capable of providing for a young child, I have encountered Soldiers with elderly parents and even Soldiers with broken relationships with their parents, thus they are reluctant to seek them as long term providers. In cases like these, it is a difficult task to complete the care plan in the allowed time. The point here is that I found myself fluffing on the time line and giving Soldiers more than the AR directed maximum allowed 60 days to complete their family care plan. As a senior Master Sergeant (MSG) I've counseled peers who were active 1SGs with less experience in these matters not to allow the AR to tie their and their Commander's hands when dealing with otherwise good Soldiers when they are trying to construct their family care plan.

The next item that I want to address that brings ethics into question is the unexpected duty, better known as the late day with no or very little notice. I've been in this situation more than once and I feel that I know how to deal with it. Single parent hood can be a very expensive ordeal especially if we are dealing with multiple children. Childcare expenses can be overwhelming. Most childcare centers on and off post close at

1800 hrs. If you are late picking up your child they charge an excessive late charge, normally \$5 per child if you are 1 to 4 minutes late and an additional \$5 per child in five-minute increments. For example if you have three children (like I do) and you are six minutes late you would owe \$30 and thirty minutes late would cost you \$105. Did I mention that you have to pay the fine when you pick up the Children? I am not sure what the childcare facility would do if you don't have the cash on hand. The one day that I was two minutes late I was fortunate enough to have the cash in my pocket, however I had other obligations that I wished I could have used those \$15 for. This policy is in place to prevent Soldiers from picking up their kids late. We understand that but when I encountered this I was a senior NCOs with the ability to inform my supervisor and in some cases subordinates that I needed to pick up my children, then I could deal with the matter at hand that had to be completed prior to the end of the day. Some of our young Soldiers are in the position where they can't break off and pick up their children. That is when that "no special treatment" is erased from my ethical mind. Most of these Soldiers can't afford child care period so they really can't afford this extreme high penalty for being late. This is when I preach to supervisors to get the Soldier to childcare and pick up the children if no one else is available to do so, in some cases the parents have neighbors or friends that can provide that couple of hours of child care while the mission is completed.

Another thought is that many times the absence of the single parent or dual military Soldiers for an hour or two at the end of the day will not hamper the mission from being completed. I also experienced a firm warning from the child development center that they would report me to family advocacy because they open early on days where there was a Division run (0430) to accommodate the Soldiers for the run.

Regulations that govern the day care center state that children can only remain for 12 hours in one day. If your work takes you past the 1630 hrs, you would have exceeded the 12-hour maximum, thus being in violation with the regulation. Now most don't want to admit it but I will. I've excused Soldiers from duty to pick up those kids to avoid the penalty charge or the 12 hour limit. Some argue that it is unfair to the other Soldiers who are forced to stay to complete the mission, but lets face it, "Life is not fair". We are Soldiers and the enemy is not fair nor is war. I have found that most of the Soldiers who are in this predicament really appreciate the care and concern given to their situation and they work that much harder and give the unit that much more loyalty when at work.

Many single parents do not remain single parents their whole careers. For many this is a short-term situation that repairs itself over time, like in my case. Some regulation bandits lose good Soldiers when they fail to show any flexibility when dealing with their situation. I would rather have a good Soldier that may need the occasional special duty or special treatment than not to have the Soldier at all because I chaptered them out of the military. Supervising single or dual military Soldiers in the Army creates ethical dilemmas because leaders must accomplish the mission however; they must ensure that the most precious resource (the Soldier and Family) is taken care of. Many NCOs complete this balance despite what the regulation states. I believe that it is the most ethical thing to do!

Reference List

Single parent. (2007, November 30). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 04:57, December 4, 2007, from http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Single_parent&oldid=174781457