

# 2023 Military Teen Experience Survey: Sports and Extracurriculars

## **Importance of Sports/Extracurriculars**

As detailed in our Peer Connections report (<a href="www.militaryfamily.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-MTES-Peer-Connections.pdf">www.militaryfamily.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-MTES-Peer-Connections.pdf</a>), peer connections are important for youth, and our military youth are no exception. One way to build strong friendships and feelings of social connectedness is through sports and extracurricular activities. Not only are sports beneficial for physical health, but they're also important for mental health, as they foster self-confidence, a sense of belonging and can serve as an emotional outlet. Non-sports activities such as art, music, and social clubs offer many of these same psychological and emotional benefits. Extracurricular participation has been linked with greater peer connectedness and better mental health.

In the context of military life, sports and extracurricular activities are important means for adolescents to form their sense of self, connect with their peers, and have an outlet for their emotions. As such, we were interested in hearing about participation from our military teens.

#### What We Asked

We asked four questions about participation in sports and extracurriculars. Skip logic was utilized to assess the perceived impact of participating in these activities and, conversely, reasons for not participating. Our military youth were asked whether they had participated in any team or individual sports and team or individual non-sports activities in the past 12 months.

If respondents answered "Yes" to any of these questions, they were asked whether they thought participating in such an activity had a positive impact on their life.

If respondents answered "No," they were asked to choose their main reason for not participating. Some reasons included lack of interest, military child status, frequent relocation, and academic standing.



#### What We Found



#### **Team Sports**

A majority (81%) of respondents participated in team sports and 81% of those respondents believed team sports have a positive impact on their life.



#### **Individual Sports**

71% of respondents participated in individual sports and 78% of those respondents believed individual sports have a positive impact on their life.



#### **Team/Group Activities**

80% of respondents participated in team or group activities outside of sports and 79% of those respondents believed participating had a positive impact on their life.



#### **Individual Activities**

A majority (78%) of respondents participated in an individual activity outside of sports and 77% believed participating had a positive impact on their life.

Across the board, the main reason for not participating in sports or activities was lack of interest, and most participants were not limited due to the military lifestyle (i.e., frequent relocation, missed eligibility) or their military child status.

Participation in individual activities outside of sports was more affected by the military lifestyle than sports or team/group activities, though lack of interest was still the main reason for not participating.



# **Participation and Positive Perception**

Sport/Activity	% Participation	Total (n)	% Positive Impact	Total (n)
Team Sports	81	1325	81	1075
Individual Sports	71	1169	78	915
Team/Group Activities	80	1328	79	1043
Individual Activities	78	1277	77	980

### **What We Found**



#### **Sports**

Boys are more likely than girls to participate in team and individual sports, but a majority of both genders participate. Participation is greater for team sports than individual sports across gender.



#### **Non-Sport Activities**

There do not appear to be differences in participation between boys and girls for team/group activities and more boys than girls participate in individual activities.

Across sports and activities, a greater proportion of young adults participate, compared to teens.





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