

Military OneSource Podcast — Transitional Compensation

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department, with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody.

If you are a military spouse or an active-duty spouse who has left an abusive relationship and your service member spouse has been separated due to domestic or child abuse, you may be eligible for help to get you back on your feet, and it's called transitional compensation.

Joining me today are Marissa Thompson and Dr. Najah Barton from the Defense Department's Family Advocacy Program. Welcome to the both of you.

Marissa Thompson:

Thanks for having us, Bruce.

Dr. Najah Barton:

Thank you so much.

Bruce:

It's good to have you with us. Marissa, let's start with you, but let me just start with something really general. If a victim leaves an abusive relationship, what support services are available?

Marissa:

First, the victim should probably make outreach to their local victim advocate at their installation. The victim advocate can help with safety planning, risk assessment. They can provide information about different reporting options, advocate for the victim for military and civilian protective orders, provide support during medical or legal appointments if the victim needs it, and also link to resources, both inside and outside the gate. The victim can also seek counseling services at their local Family Advocacy Program.

Bruce:

There's a lot of support available, but one of the concerns obviously is money. We're talking today about transitional compensation. What is it, and who should a victim contact if they're eligible and in need of financial support?

Marissa:

Sure. The first outreach that may be helpful for the victim is directly to their victim advocate or their legal assistance. If they're unsure who their victim advocate is, you can go to the Military OneSource page and click the "In Crisis" tab, and there they can locate the victim advocate based upon their current location.

Bruce:

Now, what are the benefits of transitional compensation? Obviously, it's financial support, but do the benefits differ from case to case? What does it cover? What does it provide?

Marissa:

Sure. So, the benefits are a temporary monetary monthly payment. The victim also has access to medical care through TRICARE or their local military treatment facility. They can get commissary and exchange privileges, and other base resources such as counseling and victim advocacy service. The benefits do vary case by case, and that's the length of benefits. And then it does cover compensation, and it can be anywhere from 12 to 36 months long, depending upon your service branch policy.

Bruce:

All right, well, let's bring Najah into the conversation here. So, Dr. Najah, how does a victim become eligible for transitional compensation? Who is eligible? Are we talking only spouses in this case?

Najah:

They would make outreach to their local victim advocate or legal assistance service center. And the individual would've had to have been married to the service member at the time of the abusive incident. And the service member would have to have been convicted of a dependent abuse offense, or the service member was separated from the military under a court-martial sentence. And that is based upon what is outlined in the Uniform Code of Military Justice, or a civilian associated conviction.

Now the person who is receiving compensation cannot actually reside in the same household with the service number as part of their eligibility requirements. And then, if they're receiving transitional compensation for more than 12 months, they will have to ensure to recertify with DFAS, which is the Defense Financial Accounting Services, each year, whenever they receive that form.

Bruce:

All right, so this is really important information. Let me ask the question from a different angle here. So, in what instances might a victim not be eligible, and what other services are available?

Najah:

Benefits can actually vary on a case-by-case basis. If the service member has not been separated from the military, but the victim is no longer living with the service member and there's a history of abuse, then the victim may still be eligible under exceptional eligibility. There are two tracks for this, and it is traditional eligibility, which are the things that are outlined, but then there's also exceptional eligibility, which specifically is at the discretion of the actual military service secretary. If you're unsure, you can reach out to your advocates or legal assistance office to discuss further.

And then, if the service member's still in service, and you're still married but no longer living together, you still have the same benefits using your military ID. These benefits include medical access to the Family Advocacy Program counseling and advocacy resources, financial counseling, commissary and exchange privileges. In terms of Military OneSource, base legal, child development center. And those other people still are applicable as well.

Now, in some cases, if the victim and the service member have separated, if the victim's receiving the service member's retirement, or there is an alimony award that has been adjudicated in the civilian court, then they may not actually qualify for eligibility when it comes to transitional compensation.

There are a couple of nuances that should be accounted for, but we absolutely encourage everyone to reach out, once again, to an advocate at their local installation, or the legal assistance center in order to discuss further.

Bruce:

Yeah, that's right, because we're covering a lot of detail in this episode, and there's even more and, of course, it gets nuanced to the individual. There are links in the program notes to this episode, and through those links you can speak to someone who can really get into the specifics of your individual situation. But relating to that, what would be the factors determining the amount of compensation?

Najah:

So, when we're looking at the amount of monetary monthly compensation, it's actually standardized, and it's determined by the dependency and indemnity compensation rate that's actually set by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The number of children residing in the household at the time of the abuse may also impact the amount of compensation allotted, as well as the rank and time and service.

Those things don't impact the actual compensation; in addition to looking at the taxation associated with, it's actually not taxable. And a really important program to

note that it's separate and apart from the actual pay structure when it comes to a military member.

Bruce:

How long does somebody get transitional compensation?

Najah:

So, transitional compensation, an individual may be eligible to receive anywhere from 12 to 36 months. And this is dependent upon the service branch policy, in addition to the actual circumstances associated with the case, specifically potentially how long a service member had left in terms of time in service. There are a lot of considerations there. In addition, if it's an enlisted individual who committed the abuse in comparison to an officer that committed the abuse.

Bruce:

All right. Included in this is sometimes a move. So, I'm familiar with a household goods move. I think a lot of people in the military are, but there's also something called a safety move. What's the safety move, and what's the difference between a safety move and a household goods move?

Najah:

So, when we're looking at the household goods move, there is the factor of the household goods move, is when your belongings on one vehicle can be moved at the government's expense. And the key factor with that is whether or not a service member actually had an eligibility for that household goods move.

In comparison, a safety move is actually when the commander can request a service member or their family to relocate to another installation due to safety concerns. This oftentimes is called, for instance, an expedited transfer or an early return of dependence when someone is stationed outside of the continental United States. And the prime aspect of the safety move is to ensure that the victim and any associated dependents who may be experiencing abuse is actually able to depart swiftly from wherever they are located, and/or provide separation for purposes of promoting victim care and safety.

Bruce:

I'd like to bring Marissa back into the conversation and talk about some of the links that we're putting in the program notes. So, the first one is a page on Military OneSource, and it's about transitional compensation. Can you tell us a little bit about what people will find if they go to this page?

Marissa:

Sure. And Najah, please feel free to jump in if you have any additional information, but on the Military OneSource page, there is an article, it's a very short article, easy to read, and it kind of gives you some of the basics about what transitional compensation is and

what supportive services are available to you as the victim or somebody that that may need this supportive service.

The easiest way to find that article is actually just by typing in the search bar on the Military OneSource page “transitional compensation,” and it should pop up pretty quickly. There is also the domestic abuse victim advocate locator, and in that you can either just usually put your ZIP code and then it’ll come up with any victim advocates in your local area.

Bruce:

Great. Well, this has been really very, very helpful information, and I do hope that people who are listening to this episode find value in it for themselves, or perhaps would be willing to share it with a friend. I think it’s very, very valuable. And I would just like to get any final words from the both of you. Maybe start with Marissa?

Marissa:

Sure. I just want to reiterate that this is a supportive service for victims of abuse, and the eligibility is for former spouses and children that the service member was separated at the time of abuse. And then also active-duty victims of domestic abuse are also eligible for this. So please, if you’re unsure and you think you may need this support and you don’t know if you’re eligible, just reach out to your local victim advocate, and they can help figure it out for you.

Bruce:

And Najah, you’ll get the final word.

Najah:

Yes. So first and foremost, I think it’s really important to note that there is no time limit. In the event that you experienced abuse in a previous relationship and that individual was separated from service, it is really important to reach out and just have a conversation. Just even as someone who has been an advocate within the military community, I can’t tell you how much it has been assistive to several individuals who’ve been victimized and just did not know about the program.

It’s never too late to actually reach out and just learn whether or not you are eligible. It’s better to ask the questions than to assume that you’re not just because years have passed. We really encourage you to just reach out and get more education associated with transitional compensation.

Bruce:

Thanks to the both of you for joining us today.

Najah:

Thank you for having us.

Marissa:

Thank you so much.

Bruce:

Dr. Najah Barton and Marissa Thompson are with the Defense Department's Family Advocacy Program.

We want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We are a website, we're a call center and on social media, and we are a podcast. Please subscribe to us wherever you listen to your podcasts, because we cover a whole range of topics to help military families navigate military life.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you very much for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.