

SIGNED UP FOR THE MILITARY?

If You Change Your Mind, You May Not Have to Go

Getting out of the Delayed Entry Program is easy.

Most people who enlist are signed up into the Delayed Entry Program (DEP), also called the Future Soldiers Program by the Army. DEP members have up to a year before they report for active-duty training. "Sign now, pay later." It's a popular way to sell cars, stereos and military enlistment. The DEP is particularly attractive to high school seniors who are unsure about what to do after graduation. A lot can happen in a year (especially for teenagers!), and many young people change their minds about what they want to do with their lives.

During the time before reporting to begin military training, people who have changed their minds can legally drop out of the DEP and cancel their enlistment.

How does someone get out of the Delayed Entry Program?

One way to drop out of the DEP is to simply not report on the date they are scheduled to leave to begin military training. If you are planning to not report, there is no need to notify the military ahead of time. People are released by the military whether or not they have given prior notice. It is the most common way people leave the DEP.

Some people think they need to contact their recruiter before their reporting date and ask to be officially released from the DEP. They are not required to do so, and if they do let the recruiter know ahead of time, their recruiter will aggressively try to pressure them into going through with their enlistment. Recruiters have been known to lie and tell the person if they don't go through with it they will be punished with a bad discharge. Recruiters also may falsely tell the person that they must first report to a military base or facility in order to be released. If they do this, however, they can then be kept on active duty and it will become much more difficult to get released.

According to the GI Rights Hotline, "Sometimes recruiters will insist that a person who wants to get out come to their office to fill out forms or paperwork. Often, this is just a tactic to get the recruit into the office to resell them on enlistment. Sometimes after meeting with the recruiter, people are told that someone higher up did not approve the discharge. In reality it is not necessary to fill out any additional forms or paperwork to be released from the DEP."

If a letter is going to be sent, the DEP member should first consult with the GI Rights Hotline for free counseling on what the letter should say. According to the Hotline, after it is sent, the recruit might be asked to appear at the recruiting station for a brief interview but this is not necessary, and, in fact, is not recommended.

What happens if the person joined the Reserves or National Guard?

According to the GI Rights Hotline, "People who join the Reserves or National Guard are not put in the DEP. These people are eligible to attend paid drills usually in the Recruit Sustainment Program (RSP). Recruiters for these components sometimes try to use this difference to confuse people into thinking it is much harder for them to get out than it is for people in the DEP. Similar to the DEP, members of the Reserve are also separated when they do not report for basic training. This is typically true for members of the National Guard as well, **however because National Guard members are also subject to state jurisdiction, they can face penalties at the state level.** While most states simply release people who don't report, there are a few states that have punished some people for not reporting to basic or for missing drill. Anyone who has signed up for Reserves or National Guard and not yet gone to boot camp can call a GI Rights counselor to discuss their situation and issues in their state: 877-447-4487."

[Important note: According to the Hotline, **"The Army currently has a . . . separate program called the Future Soldier Preparatory Course, in which people begin their active-duty training in a unit designed for improving substandard fitness/bodyweight or for improving a substandard ASVAB score. This program precedes basic training and people in that Army program have already begun active duty and are not members of the DEP."** They cannot withdraw from it by simply not attending it.]

Where can I get help or more information?

The GI Rights Hotline provides free counseling and can be reached by calling 877-477-4497. Online information is also available at girightshotline.org.

Information on non-military career alternatives can be found at peacefulcareers.org

(Project YANO, 6/26/2025)