

For School Counselors (01/23/23):

ADVISING STUDENTS WHO ARE CONSIDERING THE MILITARY

By Amanda Jordan-Starks

After giving presentations at conferences and schools, we are often approached by high school counselors who converse daily with students interested in joining the military after they graduate. School counselors want advice on how to talk to young people about this life-changing decision. Here are some ideas for them to consider when discussing the military with students:

- Ask, “Is this your dream job?” For many students, the military seems to provide opportunities like paying for college and a potential structured community that students crave after graduating. Some students, due to family members being veterans or other reasons, are dead set on joining the military. It’s important to understand where students are coming from when they say they want to join. Is it their dream? Or does it seem like there are no other options for them?
- After finding out what the person's specific motivations are for considering enlistment, respond to those and include alternatives for meeting the person's needs/goals. Be non-judgmental.
- Point out the enlistment agreement loophole that allows the military to ignore all promises made in writing or verbally. Recruiters are paid to get students to join, and they will do what they can to get students in.
- Strongly encourage viewing “Before You Enlist” (www.beforeyouenlist.org)
- Organize an event with an after-school club or sympathetic teacher and show the “Before you Enlist” video. Also invite a member of Veterans For Peace to share their story.
- Many students wait until their senior year to consider their options—counselors should be visible to students in after-school programs and in classrooms as early as freshmen year, presenting after-high school options.
- Emphasize the lack of ability to change one's mind once she/he reports for basic training, and the consequences for quitting the military (a bad discharge or jail, both of which can



harm chances of civilian employment later). Contrast it with the freedom to quit a civilian job or college.

- Encourage visiting www.peacefulcareers.org for information on many alternatives.
- Keep on hand copies of the brochures "What Every Young Woman Should Know about the U.S. Military" and "The Military's Not Just a Job . . . It's Eight Years of Your Life." Available from War Resisters League's online store <https://www.warresisters.org/additional-store-categories/counter-recruitment-resources>.

You may not convince every student to learn about alternatives to the military, but for many students, counselors have the opportunity to empower students to see themselves with a positive, peace-making future after high school. For more information, contact Project on Youth and Non-Military Opportunities (Project YANO), info@projectyano.org, 760-634-3604.

Amanda Jordan-Starks is a board member of the [Project on Youth and Non-Military Opportunities](#). Her activities include speaking along with military veterans to young people in high schools and at youth conferences.

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