

'PANICKING ABOUT BEING DIFFERENT' — REBECCA'S STORY.

FORCES
CHILDREN
SCOTLAND

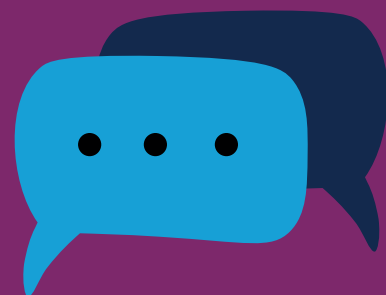
Hello! My name's Rebecca and I'm a 26-year-old student. My dad was in the Army and when I was younger I moved around a lot. At the age of 10 I was sent to military boarding school because the schools I attended could never keep up with my records or my studies. I also found it really difficult to fit in with peers who didn't experience the same lifestyle as me. I always found it really unfair how my life was so different from everyone else. I also struggled to make new friends and always felt anxious that I was too different. Here are some of my top tips and things I've learned that helped me cope with military life and anxiety.

"I struggled to make new friends and always felt anxious that I was too different"



Tip 1: Being different isn't bad

So many people in the places you move to won't have been nearly as many places as you, or done all the cool things you have done. A lot of people are interested in the places you've lived or travelled! Use it as a talking point.



Tip 2: Find a hobby you can do anywhere

Finding something you can take part in regardless of where you move is a great way to settle into a new place. I loved reading and my friend loved football. It meant that wherever we moved, we could find 'the reading club' or 'the football club' and immediately have something to get involved in.

Tip 3: Feel your feelings and know they are okay

I wish someone had told me that it was okay to be frustrated and upset about moving all the time. Moving was great sometimes, but not all the time. Leaving friends was hard, as was not having a say in where we went. So, it's totally OK to feel all of these things. But you have to talk about them, share them, feel them. Easier said than done, I know!



Tip 4: Try to find things to be grateful for

I found it really helped to keep a track of the things I was experiencing that others weren't – the things that made me feel unique and special. It helped me to be grateful for the weird lifestyle I lived. By the time I was a teenager, I'd already been to more than three times the number of schools that my peers had attended. I'd already met double the amount of people and I was good with change!



“It took me a really long time to figure out how to make friends in a meaningful way”

One of the hardest things for me was making friends. Friendships can be one of the hardest parts about military life. They can be hard to make, hard to keep, hard to find. Did I always make friends? Yes, eventually. Were they always my best friends or my childhood friends I'd stay in touch with forever? No. It took me a really long time (not until I was in my 20s!) to figure out how to make friends in a meaningful way and not just because I had to as 'the new kid'.



So here are some specific tips about this side of life.

Tip 1: Learn what it is you like about friends

Do you like people who do the same things as you? Do you like people who are sporty? Or maybe they read? Do you like people who are nice to others? Think of things like this and look for people who you really want to be friends with. Learning who it is you like and why can really help. It can also stop you being friends with people 'just because' and falling in with people who aren't very nice.

Tip 2: Keep in touch with old friends!

Use Snapchat, TikTok, WhatsApp and more. Depending on how far you move, you may still be able to see them. But if you can't, that's OK. You can FaceTime and do things online together, such as have a movie night or play games. Tell your parents how important your friends from your old home are and ask them how they can support you to stay in touch. Maybe you can arrange a visit! Never underestimate the power of good friendships.



Tip 3: Remember, friendships won't always look the same

If you've moved a lot, you might not have childhood best friends, or friends you grew up with. But that's OK, friendship doesn't have to look a certain way. Finding your friends can take years, even if you don't move. It's important to remember that friends come and go.

Sometimes it can just feel harder when you move around. Everyone else has the same problems, they outgrow certain friendships and find new ones as they get older. You may just already have an additional bit of experience with losing touch with friends. But know that you aren't alone, and you will absolutely find your people.

“I really wasn’t used to all of the freedom and responsibility”

Moving away from home or out of a military-focused lifestyle can be a big shift. You can go from having lots of routine and little control to having lots of control over your own life and very little routine! This is one thing that threw me when I started university and moved to a big city. I really wasn’t used to all of the freedom and responsibility that came with it.

So here are some specific tips about this side of life.

Tip 1: Find your own routine

After a lot of trial and error, I learned that because of military life, I need a lot of routine. Sometimes we get that externally (from school or work) but other times we need to create our own routine. My favourite routine is one I can create with other people, such as always going to the gym with a friend at the same time every week or picking a specific day of the month to go for coffee and lunch with a friend. Lots of little things you can plan in advance and put in your diary help you feel organised and in control.

Tip 2: Take some time to learn about you

This is probably my biggest tip and the hardest one. Take some time to learn who you are and what you want. As a military child, you spend a lot of time being told what to do and where to go. Now that you are in control of your own life, it’s time to really get to know yourself. Do you like travelling or do you want to stay put? It’s time to find your home and learn what you love about it. You have a voice and now it’s time to learn what you want to say with it. Learn what you’re passionate about and how you want to make a difference. It can be hard leaning who you are outside of military life, so take this slowly and know that all of us are going through the same thing.

