



WELLNESS

Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

May 2009

This Month's Topic:

The Battle Within

Understanding Combat-Related Stress Disorders

Combat-Related Disorders

When a service member returns from deployment, it's a time of joy, excitement and relief. But, it's natural to experience a mix of feelings including anxiety, stress and uncertainty. It's also possible to see signs of combat-related stress. These tips can help you recognize and cope with symptoms during your loved one's readjustment to life at home.

- **Realize that this is a period of transition.** Give your loved one time to become reacquainted with you, family and friends.
- **Talk and listen to each other.** This is important to reestablish trust, intimacy and support in your relationship.
- **Understand that expectations may differ.** It's common to expect family life to return to the way it was before deployment. But, change at home is natural. Talk about expectations, and try to be open and flexible.

Combat Stress Reactions

Service members may have taken part in operations that exposed them to very stressful or disturbing situations. Lingering stress can create difficulty after returning to civilian life.

- Everyday stress may feel overwhelming at times. The service member may become irritated more easily or react more strongly to common issues at home.
- Deployment can sometimes complicate pre-existing budget difficulties. Money concerns can add to stress for everyone in the family.
- Men and women may react differently. Men may isolate themselves to cope, while women may need to talk about their experiences.
- Stress and memories of combat situations can create sleeping problems. This can impact daily activities and well-being.
- Aggressive driving is common. While it may have been crucial in a war zone, this can be dangerous at home.

- The veteran may have difficulty concentrating. During combat, he or she had to juggle many jobs at once. At home, it may be hard to focus on one task at a time.
- Returning to work can be a challenge. Changes may have happened at the veteran's job, or the job may seem boring after the stimulation of combat. Feeling "on edge" or irritable may make returning to work seem impossible.

Coping and Seeking Help

Combat-related stress reactions can cause difficulties in relationships. Don't ignore these problems and assume they'll just go away. Here are some tips that may help:

- Give returning veterans the chance to talk. Your loved one may want to share with you what happened to him or her at war. But, he or she may feel more comfortable sharing these experiences with a fellow service member or friend. Be patient. He or she will open up when ready.
- Understand some of the emotions a veteran may experience upon returning home. Be genuine, loving and supportive during this time.
- Express your own needs and expectations. Try not to hide your concerns or feelings.
- Watch for warning signs. If the service member adopts harmful coping mechanisms, such as drinking, drugs, withdrawal and isolation, encourage him or her to seek assistance. If he or she refuses, reach out to a trusted friend, relative, physician or clergy for help.
- Encouraging a loved one to get help is not always easy. It's important to know that effective treatments are available, and early treatment can prevent more serious problems from occurring.
- Consider seeking help for yourself, too. Couples counseling can help make the needs of family members clearer.

Many qualified resources are available for both service members and their families. These include chaplain services, behavioral health services, primary care physicians and family assistance programs. United Behavioral Health is here to help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges.

Helping Children through the Transition

Children of returning service members may need time to reconnect. They may feel resentment, abandonment, sorrow or anger when a parent leaves. Homecoming may bring back the child's normal fears of separation.

It's important for the veteran not to take these reactions personally, but instead to reassure the child. Communication within the family — at home or in counseling — is key to helping the whole family.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Any traumatic life experience, such as combat, can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The symptoms can include combat-related stress reactions. And, if those reactions continue long after deployment, it can become PTSD.

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PTSD has three main types of symptoms:

1. **Re-experiencing.** A service member may continue to think about combat or feel as if he or she is still in combat.
2. **Avoidance and numbing of emotion.** Service members may not want to discuss the traumatic event, feel detached from others or shut down emotionally.
3. **Arousal.** After returning home, it may be hard for the veterans to “let their guard down.” With jumpy nerves, they’re easily startled and unable to sleep or concentrate.

Other common symptoms of PTSD include depression, suicidal thoughts, anger or aggression, substance abuse, and self-blame or guilt. Note: If your loved one has expressed thoughts about hurting him- or herself or others, seek emergency help immediately. Many effective treatment options are offered for PTSD. Remember, just like any other injury sustained in combat, healing and recovery may take time.

Sources: HealthDay
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Resources

Employee Assistance Program (EAP): United Behavioral Health (UBH)

Toll-free number: 1-866-248-4105 (7 days/24 hours)

Access code: 61570

www.liveandworkwell.com

The information and therapeutic approaches in this article are provided for educational purposes only and are not meant to be used in place of professional clinical consultations for individual health needs. Certain treatments may not be covered in some benefit plans.

Check your health plan regarding your coverage of services.