Combat-Related Stress Reactions: What Service Members and Families Need to Know

Presented by Military & Family Life Counselors
Objectives

» Defining combat related stress
» Possible ongoing reactions
» How reactions can affect family members
» Coping skills for managing stress
» Communication skills
» How family members can support their service member
» Signs for needing to seek help
What is Combat-Related Stress?

» Military personnel in combat zones frequently have reactions to their combat experiences.

» Combat related stress is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation or event.

» Reaction to continued state of alertness and hyper-vigilance.
Ongoing Reactions to Combat Related Stress

- Feeling nervous
- Feeling emotionally cut off
- Problems with alcohol or drug use
- Problems concentrating
- Problems with intimacy
- Feelings of irritability, anger or rage
Ongoing Reactions to Combat Related Stress

- Startled responses
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares or difficulty sleeping
- No sense of future
- Emotional numbing
- Feelings of shame or guilt
Stress Reactions Can Affect Families

» Military members may feel:
  – isolated and alienated
  – hurt and disappointed
  – apprehensive to discuss combat experiences
  – discouraged and helpless

» Family members may become angry and resentful
Family Members May Feel...

» Emotional and physical exhaustion
» Concern over safety of loved ones
» Reaction to media reports
» Overwhelmed by multiple roles
Coping with Stress

» Recognize that stress reactions are normal
» Share your feelings with your spouse or someone in your support system
» Postpone big personal decisions.
» Remember the basics of self care; diet, exercise and sleep
» Find things you enjoy
» Give yourself time to recover
Communication

» Stressed spouses may easily misunderstand each other
» Own your feelings by using “I” statements
» Earlier relationship problems with intimacy, commitment, and money can be exaggerated
» Be specific rather than general
» Be a good listener
How Families Can Support Their Service Member

» Be flexible and supportive
» Provide companionship and a sense of belonging
» Available to listen when the Service Member is READY to talk
» Be patient and give yourself and your Service Member time
» Have realistic expectations
Remember…

» Service Members and their families are resilient.
» Today, we have more knowledge and resources to help Service Members deal with stress.
» Be honest with yourself about how you are doing.
» If your stress feels out of control, it is time to get help!
When to Seek Outside Help

» Excessive use of alcohol and drugs
» Uncontrollable crying
» Suicidal thoughts
» Continued social isolation
» Lack of self care or personal hygiene
» Sense of hopelessness
Summary

» Combat related stress is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation or event
» Stress responses can affect families
» Be patient and give yourself and your family time
» Seek help if stress reactions persist and interfere with functioning
Questions
Resources

» Military Community Services
» Chaplain and Local Clergy
» Military OneSource  (800) 342-9647
» TRICARE  www.tricare.osd.mil
» Behavioral Health Services