



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.mil
- Behavioral Health Services
- Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE)
 - <http://www.dcoe.health.mil/>





THANK YOU

