POST COMBAT RISK-TAKING BEHAVIOR

Presented by Military & Family Life Consultants
AGENDA

• Definition of risk-taking behavior
• Statistics
• Understanding risk-taking behavior
• Post-combat invincibility
• Surviving post-combat stress
• Summary
DEFINITION

Risk-taking behavior: Any voluntary behaviors that put an individual in danger of potentially serious injuries or death.

Risk-taking behaviors include:

- Riding a motorcycle at high speeds with or without a helmet
- Driving a vehicle at very high speeds
- Abusing alcohol or drugs
- Driving while intoxicated
- Various extreme sports
STATISTICS

• In some branches of service, more service members have been killed in motorcycle accidents than in combat.

• Service Members returning from combat are 25% more likely to die from post-combat injury related deaths than those who served in the military, but did not see combat.
Combat training:

• Developing new identity – “combat self”
• Creating strong bonds – a sense of brotherhood
• Preparing for the worst case scenario – kill or be killed
• Emphasis on remaining hyper-vigilant and looking at all situations with suspicion
• Conditioned for quick reactions and decision – reacting on impulse or reflex
• Ability to clear mind of other distractions – focus on mission at hand
The Combat Stress Reaction: A normal reaction to the continued state of alertness and hyper-vigilance required in a combat zone.

Fight or Flight Response:
- A threatening or potentially threatening event occurs.
- Chemicals are released in the body causing a flight or fight response.
- Fight or flight increases arousal and intensifies the initial response.
- Endorphins are released.
- Emotional and physical pain are reduced.
The Important Role of Endorphins

- The body’s natural opiate
- Released during an attack – real or perceived
- Numbs the physical and emotional pain
- Necessary for survival

Post Combat

- Endorphins are reduced
- Withdrawal from endorphins occurs
- Possible feelings of letdown or depression occur
- Desire to engage in risk-taking behaviors increase
- Quick to anger, short fuse or low frustration tolerance
POST-COMBAT INVINCIBILITY

Invincibility and the “combat rush”

- A conditioned emotional response to trauma
- Feelings of power and excitement during combat
- Creates a feeling of invincibility – “I survived combat, therefore I can survive anything in civilian life.”

Post combat:

- Civilian life may seem boring
- A desire to recreate the combat rush (this can intensify with multiple deployments and exposure to violence and death)
- The desire to recreate the combat rush can lead to risk-taking behaviors
- The sense of brotherhood disappears as units re-organize and adjust after a return from deployment; i.e. – assignment and unit changes
SURVIVING POST-COMBAT

Service members are especially vulnerable to risk-taking behaviors during the transition to civilian life.

It’s important to have a plan in place while making this transition.

The following slides will provide safe suggestions for channeling the desires for risk-taking behavior.
SURVIVING POST-COMBAT

• Have a plan
• Stay busy
• Find safe and structured ways to exert physical and mental energy
  • Take a motorcycle safety course and join a motorcycle club
  • Engage in competitive sports such as: baseball, football, basketball, paint ball, martial arts, boxing
  • Engage in non-competitive sports such as: Jogging, biking or working out at the gym
• Build a network of friends and confidants
• Have diversity in your life; find that balance
SURVIVING POST-COMBAT

• The powerful role of support

• In combat
  • Bonded with buddies
  • Built in support system
  • Shared experiences

• Post-combat
  • Separation and loss of support from buddies
  • Surrounded by others who can’t relate to combat experience
Finding support:

• On an installation
  • Seek support from others who have experienced combat
  • Approach command about forming support groups for combat vets

Off the installation

• Stay connected with buddies or others you know who are combat vets by:
  • Sending emails or writing letters
  • Contacting others by phone or text messaging
• Realize there is a reason the body reacts by creating the desire for risk-taking behavior
• Repeated exposure to combat creates a continuous fight or flight response and release of chemicals such as adrenalin and endorphins
• Surviving post-combat requires devising a plan, staying busy and engaging in safe and structured activities
• Support should be an important component of the post-combat plan
• If these suggestions don’t work and risk-taking behaviors continue, seek help from a behavioral health professional
RESOURCES

• Military Community Services
• Chaplain and Local Clergy
• Military OneSource (800) 342-9647
• TRICARE  www.Tricare.mil
• Behavioral Health Services
• Defense Centers of Excellence
  http://www.dcoe.health.mil/
THANK YOU