



# 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.



# UNDERSTANDING RISK-TAKING BEHAVIOR

## 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



# UNDERSTANDING RISK-TAKING BEHAVIORS

CONTINUED

**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



# UNDERSTANDING RISK-TAKING BEHAVIORS

CONTINUED

## 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

CONTINUED

- 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

CONTINUED

- 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



# SURVIVING POST-COMBAT

CONTINUED

## 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



# SUMMARY

- 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







**QUESTIONS?**



# RESOURCES

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







**THANK YOU**