

## Speaker Notes

### Post-Combat Risk-Taking Behaviors

#### Page 1 – Title Slide

None

#### Page 2 – Agenda

None

#### Page 3 – Definition

- Remember that your behaviors not only put yourself at risk, but can put others at risk too.

#### Page 4 – Statistics

- This was taken from a report on Marines where it was found that more were killed in post-combat motorcycle accidents than from enemy fire in Iraq. All but one involved riding sports bikes well over 100 mph. [From Larry Shaughnessy, CNN Pentagon Producer QUANTICO, Virginia (CNN)]
- Combat vets are 25% more likely to die from post-combat injury. This was from a report on vets from the Vietnam War through the first Gulf War. It is expected the rates will be even higher with OIF and OEF vets in part due to IED's. (Combat Veterans Face Higher Mortality Rates by The Associated Press)
- Published: 11/11/2008 12:00 AM Last Modified: 11/11/2008 5:20 PM)

#### Page 5 – Understanding Risk-Taking Behavior

- Combat training creates the foundation for the mindset that contributes to risk-taking behaviors post combat.
  - During the preparation stage in basic training, soldiers develop strong bonds with each other, a sense of brotherhood, and a new identity: their combat self. They depend on each other for survival and support, and only other service members can fully relate to their experiences.
  - They prepare for combat, for “kill or be killed” situations in which they must be able to react without reflecting.
  - Service members in combat must be hyper-vigilant at all times to survive. Hyper-vigilance helps to make decisions and react quickly.

#### Page 6 – Understanding Risk-Taking Behaviors (Continued)

- In OIF and OEF, there is essentially no frontline. Even the most benign occupation – a cook or clerk – is under threat. All service members are always vulnerable.
- Fight or flight response is a very necessary reaction and a crucial component for survival in a combat situation. It heightens awareness and enhances physical performance.

#### Page 7 – Understanding Risk-Taking Behaviors (Continued)

- While there is an adrenaline rush which can be addicting, there is also a release of endorphins, which is believed to be a major cause of the desire for risk-taking behaviors.
- Endorphins are a very necessary part of the combat stress reaction. Their opiate-like qualities help lower physical pain and numb emotions. Both of these are crucial during combat.

- Post combat: When endorphins are reduced, the body experiences a type of withdrawal from the endorphins. This can lead to feelings of depression and physical and emotional letdown. It is thought that this is one of the main reasons that risk-taking behaviors occur. There is a mental and physical desire to experience the effects of the endorphins. It helps to reduce the impact of emotions and reduces the feelings of boredom and depression.
- Many times, service members who return from combat become easily frustrated because they try to recreate and experience the effects of the fight or flight response. This may result in an increased in volatile behavior toward others.

#### **Page 8 – Post-Combat Invincibility**

- Even though the combat experience is frightening and traumatic, there is a feeling of excitement and energy. One service member reported, “There was exuberance and a massive rush. ...I never experienced anything like that before. You were scared, but never felt so alive.” (Lori Holyfield, University of Arkansas)
- The adrenaline and accompanying release of endorphins, as well as the constant need for a hyper-vigilant state, become a routine way of life even post combat. The service member becomes conditioned to the excitement of the combat stress response and can find civilian life boring.
- The feelings of the combat rush can be re-experienced through memories and nightmares, creating a more intense desire to engage in high risk behaviors.

#### **Page 9 – Surviving Post-Combat**

None

#### **Page 10 – Surviving Post-Combat (Continued)**

- Have a plan: Focusing on a plan for post-combat life can provide a sense of control and add some immediate structure to your life.
- Stay busy: The post-combat world can seem very boring, and staying busy is a way to avoid falling into the trap of wanting to engage in risk-taking behaviors.
- Find safe and structured ways: You don’t have to lead a sedentary life upon return. Within a structured and safe environment, you can still participate in activities considered to be risky. There are always alternatives to risk taking behaviors. (The next slide addresses the importance of support.)

#### **Page 11 – Surviving Post-Combat (Continued)**

None

#### **Page 12 – Surviving Post-Combat (Continued)**

None

#### **Page 13 – Summary**

None

#### **Page 14 – Questions**

None

**Page 15 – Resources**  
None

**Page 16 – Thank You**  
None

COUNSELOR USE ONLY