When a service member struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), other family members feel the effects. An extra layer of stress is added living with someone who startles easily, avoids social situations, and experiences nightmares or flashbacks. Parenting may be affected as parents’ emotional resources are stretched thin. Research also shows that veterans who have PTSD also have lower marriage quality and more likelihood of violence within their home. The detachment of feelings that comes with PTSD affects relationships with loved ones.

Mixed feelings are common when someone is trying to support a family member with PTSD. Your heart may ache with sympathy and love for your partner, but you also may be feeling some strong negative emotions. Waves of anger and guilt may come when a partner drinks too much or can’t hold a job. Also, feeling depressed is not uncommon, because sometimes the struggles feel endless.

Caregivers may shoulder a heavy burden, paying the bills, doing more housework, and trying to protect their partner. Getting the support you need from others is a crucial step to staying healthy. Having a someone who can be a listening ear can make a big difference. Also, learning more about PTSD symptoms works best when it is a person’s own choice. Avoid making demands or threats to get your partner to get help. Instead, talk about choices with them and offer your support.

Tips on Helping Loved Ones

Avoiding the problem is a common response to PTSD, but often negative patterns get worse when they are ignored. Instead, try addressing the issues head on by following these suggestions:

- Learn more about PTSD by going to the resources listed on page two of this newsletter. Search for keywords such as: post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, family reintegration, combat stress, alcohol and drug use.
- Talk about how you feel to build understanding. Be careful not to sound critical, by using “I” statements. For example, instead of “You always…”, say “I know things are hard, but I’m feeling…”
- Getting mental health support works best when it is a person’s own choice. Avoid making demands or threats to get your partner to get help. Instead, talk about choices with them and offer your support.
- Taking care of yourself will keep you strong to deal with your challenges and will provide a good example for your partner. This may include getting help from friends, exercising and eating well, or seeing a therapist.

Your Pre-Teen/Teen:

- Children may question their parents love when they have PTSD. Some may try to take on the adult role of a parent while others may emotionally back away. Others may show some symptoms of PTSD themselves as they try to identify with their parent.
- Adolescents may have lower creativity, a negative attitude toward school or higher depression and anxiety when a parent struggles with PTSD.

Parent Tips:

Help your teen understand in simple terms the reasons why their parent is experiencing trauma. It is important for them to know they are not to blame. Consider family or individual therapy.

This book is a resource for parenting when times are tough at home: Back from the Front: Combat Trauma, Love, and the Family by A. Matsakis
Resources for Combat Related Stress

Coaching Into Care: (888) 823 - 7458
Coaching into Care is a free and confidential coaching service to help callers discover new ways to talk with their Veteran about their concerns and about treatment options. http://www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching/index.asp

Director of Psychological Health (DPH): (715) 684 - 9719
The DPH can provide mental health assessments, case management, 24 / 7 consults and referral services. All service members are eligible for the DPH program regardless of branch.

Vet Centers / Readjustment Outreach Centers:
Brooklyn Park (763) 503 – 2220, New Brighton (651) 644 – 4022, Duluth (218) 722-8654
The Vet Centers are open to any service member or their families if they served in any combat zone and received a military campaign ribbon. Services offered at no cost include individual and group counseling, family counseling for military related issues, and mental health issues including TBI, depression, etc.

National Center for PTSD, Department of Veterans Affairs
http://www.ptsd.va.gov/
Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress
http://www.centerforthestudyoftraumaticstress.org/

ADAPT is gearing up for the next wave of the project. You can help us better understand reintegration in military families and have a say in future resources and services provided to reintegrating military families!

If you live in Minnesota, are a parent of a 5-12 year old, and have been deployed (or your spouse/partner has been deployed) since 2001, we want to hear from you!

To learn more about the ADAPT project, go to www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/adapt. For more information, you can call us at 612-624-4830 or e-mail us at adapt@umn.edu.

"Like" us on Facebook!
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Upcoming Topics Volume 13
Back in School

http://www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/adapt