When service members return with seen or unseen injuries, all family members are affected. Children may need special preparation to understand and cope with the injury. Older children may have a lot of questions and want all the information available. It may be helpful to arrange for a member of the medical team to talk with older children to answer questions. Reassurance is a key response to balance with information. It may be wise to keep a first visit brief and ask them if they want a second visit. Adolescents may be able to write letters or Facebook to support their parent if a face to face visit is not possible.

Traumatic brain injury (TBI), an unseen injury, has been called the “signature injury” of recent conflicts. Even mild brain injuries, 90% of TBIs, can cause memory and thinking problems and affect how a person feels. Family members are often the first to notice changes. With more severe TBI, families may experience grief and loss because the loved one is not same person he/she used to be. Children may think they are to blame for an injured parent’s irritability or withdrawal. When possible, protect children from outbursts.

Teachers may be a good resource to tap into as they may see signs of distress in children before parents and schools may have links to local resources. Caregivers are often stretched thin caring for their wounded hero and providing extra support for children. Asking for help can be difficult, but caregivers also need support to cope. Internet sites such as the Wounded Warrior Project or Give Army Parents a Break may also offer support.

Supporting Children after a Tragedy

When tragedy strikes close to home, we are left reeling, trying to understand. Children are especially vulnerable, and need protection and reassurance. Here are a few tips to help children cope with tragedies:

- Start with asking how much they know about the event. Provide additional details about what happened and what is being done to recover from the event.
- Avoid graphic media coverage.
- Take cues from your child in discussing the event, and listen carefully to their feelings. If you feel overwhelmed with your own feelings, get some support for yourself before talking with your child.
- As much as possible, maintain daily routines.
- Be patient with children who may be more whiny or clingy than usual. Children need to feel safe and reassured. Stay close to your children; even teens may want physical reassurance such as hugs or cuddling before bed.
- Children, like adults, may feel helpless after a tragedy. Help them find a way to do something meaningful to help others affected by loss.

Your Teen-Aged Child:

Reactions to trauma in preteens and teens:
- Irritability, moodiness
- Anger, fighting
- Numbness, withdrawal
- Resentment, guilt, shame
- Depression, anxiety
- Acting out, substance abuse
- Physical problems (headaches/stomach aches)
- Social problems
- Academic decline

Parent Tips:

Here are some materials that may help pre-teens and teens process:

- Big Boss Brain: Learning about traumatic brain injuries—Shannon Maxwell, author and Liza Biggers, illustrator
- Finding My Way: A Teen’s Guide to Living with a Parent Who Has Experienced Trauma—Michelle D. Sherman, Ph.D. & DeAnne M. Sherman
Resources for Families Dealing with Injury

The Wounded Warriors Project
http://www.wwphighcap.org/programs/family-support.aspx

The Veterans Crisis Line
http://veteranscrisisline.net/

“The Caring Bridge” is a support website for those with a loved one who is ill or injured.
http://www.caringbridge.org/

“Our Hero Handbook” was put together by spouses of injured service members
http://militarymedicineissues.info/on-line-resources/our_hero.htm

Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury
http://www.dcoe.health.mil/

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.

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