

# *Strengthening Military Families*

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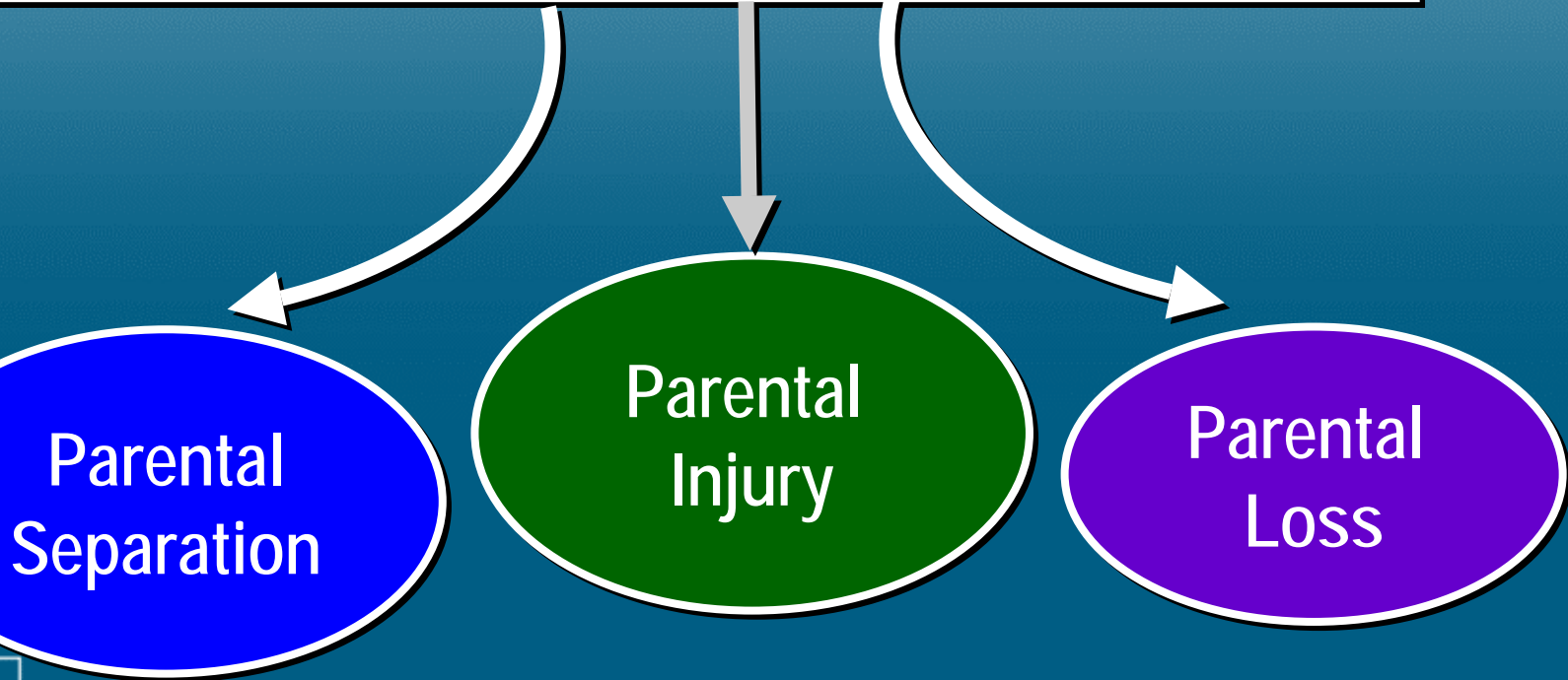
NCTSN

The National Child  
Traumatic Stress Network

UCLA

# COMBAT / OPERATIONAL STRESS

Wartime Deployment and Families



Parental  
Separation

Parental  
Injury

Parental  
Loss


# What are the challenges facing military children and families during wartime deployment?

- Extended separations from a primary caretaker
- Altered family roles and responsibilities
- Increased stress on non-military parent/caretakers
- Missed developmental opportunities
- Impact of combat exposure on returning parent
- Possible parental mental health problems, physical injury, or loss





## What do we know about the impact of parental deployment families?

- Prior studies of deployment are mixed – Moderate levels of emotional distress common in children (anxiety, depressive and somatic symptoms), but severe or long-term adjustment problems have not been demonstrated
  - Risk factors for problematic adjustment include male gender, younger age, prior mental health problems, and caretaker/family distress
  - Limitations of literature (single deployment, better longitudinal follow-up, wartime context)
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## What is the impact of parental combat-related mental health problems on children and families?

- Parental emotional distress and child adjustment
- Non-combat traumatic stress and parent and child adjustment
- Parental wartime exposure and child adjustment
  - Israeli war veterans
  - Vietnam war veterans

# Parental Combat Operational Stress: Impact on Parenting

- Avoidance/Emotional numbing
- Difficulty controlling aggression
- Highly authoritarian/overprotective parenting styles
- Increased Risk Behaviors: Substance Misuse and Domestic Violence
- Decreased monitoring of children
- Increased mood irritability








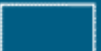
## Impact of Parental Combat Injury on Children

- No identified literature examining the impact on children due to injury of parent during wartime
- May extrapolate from studies done in other injured/ill parent populations
- Unique child responses based upon combat related parental injury are possible
- Traumatic Brain Injury sequelae to parenting










# Initial Observations about Injured Soldiers and their Families

(Cozza S, WRAMC)

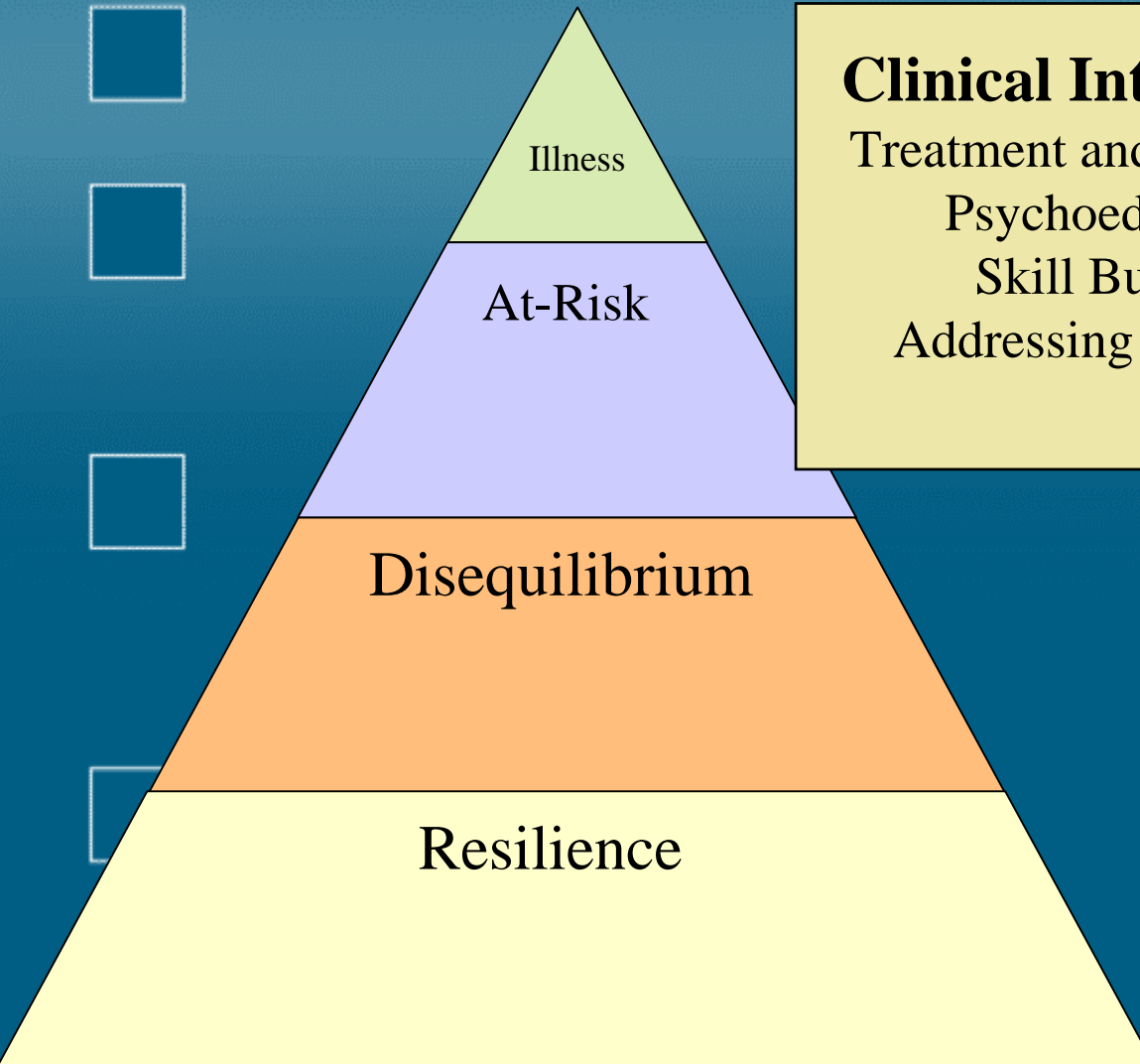
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- The impact of parental injury on children is often under appreciated
  - Parental injury is likely to lead to disruptions in children's lives (school, home, peer relations)
  - Parental injury often leads to decreased availability of parents
  - Parents may not have spoken with them about injuries
  - Children are likely to have fears/concerns about the nature of the injury and whether or not to see it
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# Parental Death in Military Families

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- Family and child grief reactions
  - Potential loss of military community support
  - Probably family relocation
  - Change of schools
  - Services typically shift to the civilian community
  - Early parental death is a known contributor for compromised child outcomes.

# Tiers of Intervention



## **Clinical Intervention**

Treatment and Prevention

Psychoeducation

Skill Building

Addressing Adversity

## **Community Intervention**

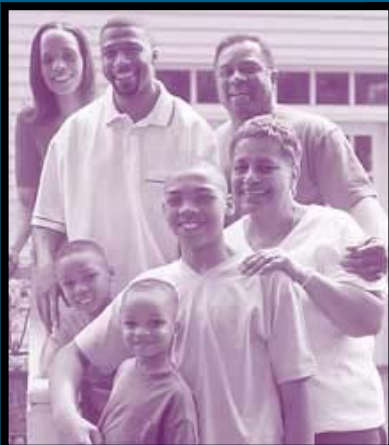
Support Services

Public Education

Self-Help

# The Importance of a Family Approach

- Important gateway to mental health services-given multiple barriers to care in the military/elsewhere
- Opportunity for both intervention and prevention
- Supporting readiness and recovery





## Adapting Family-Centered Interventions

- Children with a depressed parent
  - (Beardslee et al, 2003)
- Children with an HIV positive parent
  - (Rotheram-Borus et al., 2001; 2004, 2005, 2006)
- Children traumatized by war
  - (Saltzman, et al. 2001)







## Project FOCUS

(Families Overcoming & Coping Under Stress)



### Core Intervention Components

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- Trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate psychoeducation
  - Family skill building (coping, problem solving, and emotional regulation)
  - Family deployment timeline
  - Addressing adversities
  - Enhancing social support
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# Project FOCUS

Parents only



Children only



Parents only



Family Sessions



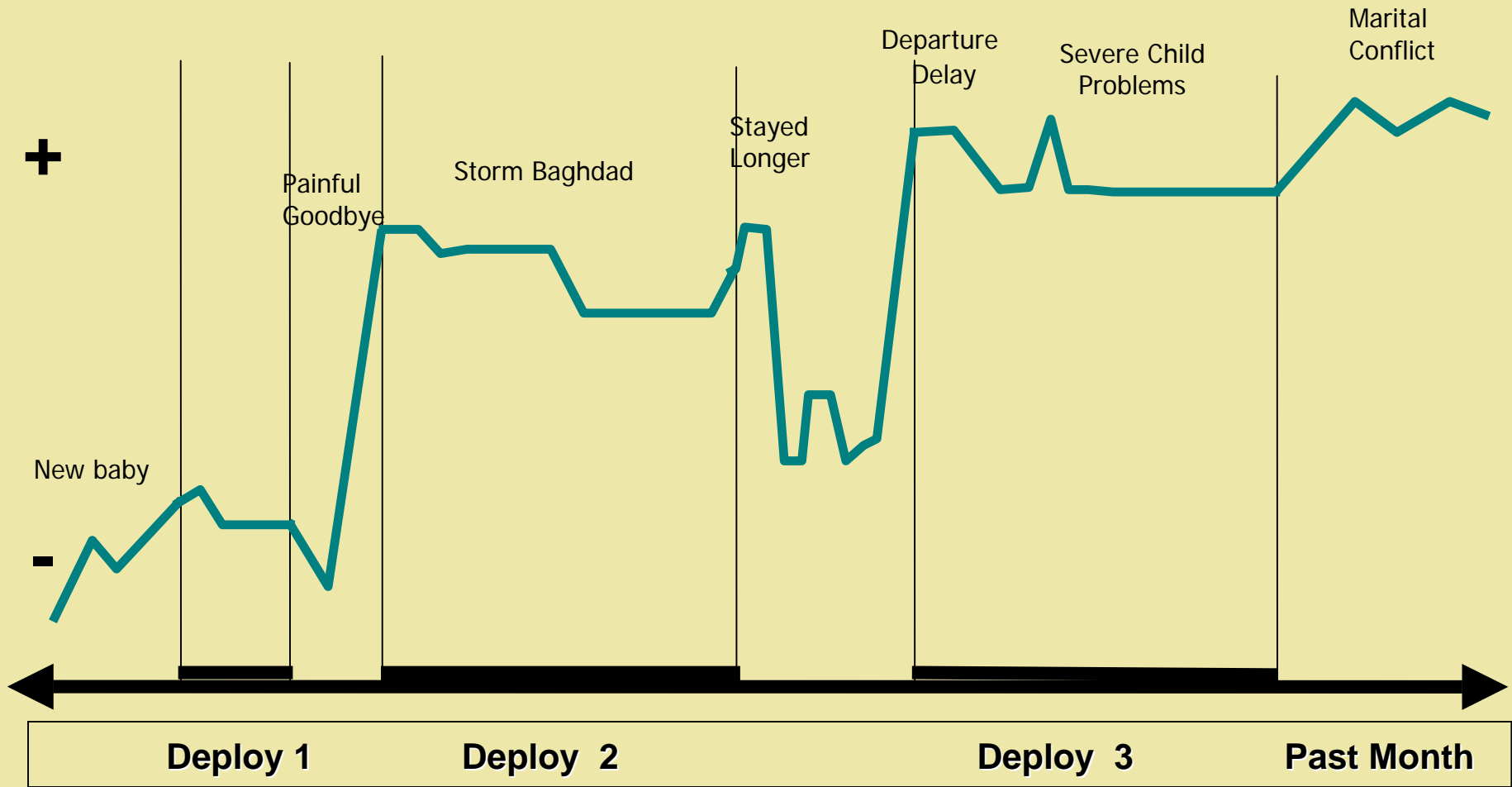
Sessions 1 and 2

Sessions 3 and 4

Session 5


Sessions 6 – 8

# Parent Timeline

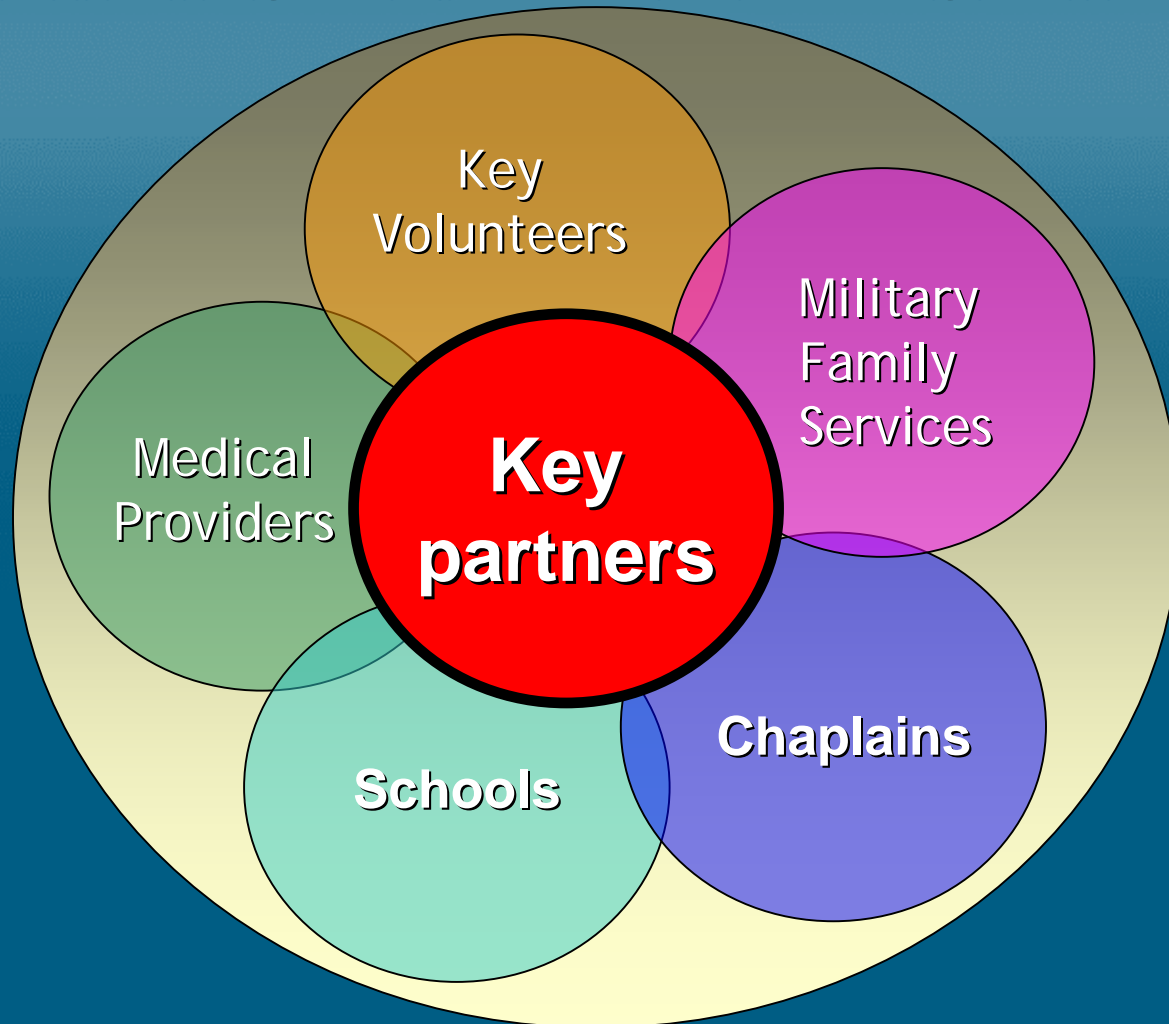




# Therapeutic Outcomes


- Appreciate individual experiences
  - Support more open communication and sharing of worries and fears
  - Address ongoing interference of trauma or loss reminders on parenting and family life
  - Parents work together to monitor interactions and maintain consistent routines
  - Develop positive coping skills to address challenges, build resiliency and enhance readiness
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# Building and Sustaining Services





# Next Steps

- Military Family Program:
    - Project FOCUS Training & Dissemination
    - Adaptations for Families of Physically Injured
  - Assessment Research: The Impact of a Parent's Wartime Deployment of School Age Children (NICHD)
    - Camp Pendleton, Ft. Lewis, Washington State Guard
  - Project FOCUS for First Responder Families Post Disaster- (Robert Wood Johnson)
  - Project FOCUS for Physically Injured Children
    - UCLA Trauma Psychiatry Program
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National Child Traumatic Stress Network