

Combat Stress in the Family

Meanwhile back at the Ranch

How combat stress impacts the family



PTSD Effects Every Domain of Family Life

- 1. Psychologically
- 2. Financially
- 3. Sexually
- 4. Parenting



The Statistics

- ❑ 30% to 40% of those in combat situations have PTSD
- ❑ Higher divorce rates
- ❑ Higher suicide rates
- ❑ Higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse
- ❑ Higher rates of family violence



Memory Problems

- The spouse becomes the memory for both
 - He or she must organize for both
 - Bill paying
 - Work schedules and appointments
 - Social events



Emotional Numbing

- Distancing of wives and children
- Withdrawal
- Parenting results
- Marital results

Anxiety

- Management with drugs and alcohol
- Avoidance of ‘crowds’
- Results for the family
 - The victim is less effective or efficient/ the spouse and or children must be more so
 - The victim is less in control/ the spouse and children must cover



Anger and Irritability

- ❑ Unpredictable outbursts
- ❑ Predictable outbursts
- ❑ Spouse gets a degree in Anger Management
- ❑ The whole family develops “egg shell syndrome”
- ❑ The rest of the family must discount and suppress their own feelings
- ❑ Domestic Violence



Alcohol and Drugs

- ❑ Self medication in the victim
- ❑ Self medication for the spouse
- ❑ Codependency



Depression

- ❑ Withdrawal and anxiety combined
- ❑ Anniversary reactions
- ❑ Times when even less support is available



Sexual Problems

- A variety of ways it can impact the marriage.
 - Impotency
 - Infidelity
 - Distancing within the relationship
 - Sleep problems



Financial Problems

- Problems at work
- Dual or Triple roles for the spouse
- Chronic financial problems caused by
 - Alcohol and drugs
 - Management deficits



Parenting

- ❑ Overprotection
- ❑ Over reactions
- ❑ Under involvement
- ❑ Parentification
- ❑ Rigidity and Criticism/ the child as a Lance Corporal
- ❑ Stepchildren vulnerability
- ❑ Child abuse



Spousal Reactions

- ❑ Loneliness and isolation
- ❑ Feeling overwhelmed
- ❑ Depression
- ❑ Weight gain
- ❑ Anger (the unacknowledged emotion)
- ❑ Feeling un-entitled to needs
- ❑ The superwoman syndrome



Children's Reactions

- Over identification
- Taking Responsibility for the parents feelings and behavior
- Fear
- Anger
- Enmeshment or teaming with the other parent.



Coping

- Timing Discussions
- Practice not judgmental language
- Couple's Therapy
- Women's Support Groups
- Seek support and back-up systems
- Self validation of feelings and perceptions
- Develop separate goals and acknowledge personal needs.
- Seek help for problems with eating disorders, alcohol or drug usage.



Building Family Resilience

- ❑ Focusing on elements of healthy family life
- ❑ Establishing or re-establishing order and routine
- ❑ Maintaining good communication during deployment
- ❑ Being truthful and open about stress and problems
- ❑ Sharing decision making
- ❑ Developing family rituals and practices that re-enforce a sense of belonging.
- ❑ Remaining receptive to the processing of experience, but allowing the active duty partner to initiate sharing the experience



Coping

- ❑ Understanding that it is not all their fault
- ❑ Learning that conflict is inevitable
- ❑ Acknowledging personal strengths and assets
- ❑ Learning to self nurture
- ❑ Getting outside help
- ❑ Finding outside validation
- ❑ Support the active duty partner's seeking therapeutic help.



Conclusions

- Treating the family unit
- Assessing combat stress that present as
 - Marital discord
 - Child behavior issues
 - Alcohol, drug, gambling, or pornography issues.



Questions and Comments.
