



Force Health Protection & Readiness  
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# TBI & PTSD Quick Facts



## Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

If the head is hit or violently shaken (such as from a blast or explosion), a “concussion” or “closed head injury” can result. Concussion is seldom life threatening, so doctors often use the term “mild” when the person is only dazed or confused or loses consciousness for a short time. However, concussion can result in serious symptoms. People who survive multiple concussions may have more serious problems. People who have had a concussion may say that they are “fine” although their behavior or personality has changed. If you notice such changes in a family member or friend, suggest they seek medical care. Keep in mind that these are common experiences, but may occur more frequently with TBI. If in doubt, ask your doctor.

Common Symptoms of Brain Injury	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Difficulty organizing daily tasks</li><li>▶ Blurred vision or eyes tire easily</li><li>▶ Headaches or ringing in the ears</li><li>▶ Feeling sad, anxious or listless</li><li>▶ Easily irritated or angered</li><li>▶ Feeling tired all the time</li><li>▶ Feeling light-headed or dizzy</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Trouble with memory, attention or concentration</li><li>▶ More sensitive to sounds, lights or distractions</li><li>▶ Impaired decision making or problem solving</li><li>▶ Difficulty inhibiting behavior – impulsive</li><li>▶ Slowed thinking, moving speaking or reading</li><li>▶ Easily confused, feeling easily overwhelmed</li><li>▶ Change in sexual interest or behavior</li></ul>

## Recovery Following TBI

Some symptoms may be present immediately; others may appear much later. People experience brain injuries differently. Speed of recovery varies. Most people with mild injuries recover fully, but it can take time. In general, recovery is slower in older persons. People with a previous brain injury may find that it takes longer to recover from their current injury. Some symptoms can last for days, weeks, or longer. Talk to your health care provider about any troubling symptoms or problems. For more information, go to [www.pdhealth.mil](http://www.pdhealth.mil).

To Promote Healing & Manage Symptoms	
<p>Things That Can Help</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Get plenty of rest &amp; sleep</li><li>Increase activity slowly</li><li>Carry a notebook – write things down if you have trouble remembering</li><li>Establish a regular daily routine to structure activities</li><li>Do only one thing at a time if you are easily distracted; turn off the TV or radio while you work</li><li>Check with someone you trust when making decisions</li></ul>	<p>Things That Can Hurt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Avoid activities that could lead to another brain injury – examples include contact sports, motorcycles, skiing</li><li>Avoid alcohol as it may slow healing of the injury</li><li>Avoid caffeine or “energy-enhancing” products as they may increase symptoms</li><li>Avoid pseudo ephedrine-containing products as they may increase symptoms – check labels on cough, cold, allergy, and diet medications</li><li>Avoid excessive use of over the counter sleeping aids – they can slow thinking and memory</li></ul>

## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is a condition that develops after someone has experienced a life-threatening situation, such as combat. In PTSD, the event must have involved actual or threatened death or serious injury and caused an emotional reaction involving intense fear, hopelessness, or horror. People with PTSD have three kinds of experiences for weeks or months after the event is over and the individual is in a safe environment.

Re-experience the event over and over again
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>You can't put it out of your mind no matter how hard you try</li><li>You have repeated nightmares about the event</li><li>You have vivid memories, almost like it was happening all over again</li><li>You have a strong reaction when you encounter reminders, such as a car backfiring</li></ul>
Avoid people, places, or feelings that remind you of the event
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>You work hard at putting it out of your mind</li><li>You feel numb and detached so you don't have to feel anything</li><li>You avoid people or places that remind you of the event</li></ul>
Feel “keyed up” or on-edge all the time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>You may startle easily</li><li>You may be irritable or angry all the time for no apparent reason</li><li>You are always looking around, hyper-vigilant of your surroundings</li><li>You may have trouble relaxing or getting to sleep</li></ul>

People who have PTSD have experiences from all three of these categories that stay with them most of the time and interfere with their ability to live their life or do their job. If you still are not sure if this is a problem for you, you can take a quick self-assessment through the Mental Health Self Assessment Program at [www.militarymentalhealth.org](http://www.militarymentalhealth.org).

Most Service members do not develop PTSD. It also is important to remember that you can experience some PTSD symptoms without having a diagnosis of PTSD. PTSD cases often resolve on their own in the first 3 months, but even without the full diagnosis, if you have symptoms, you can benefit from counseling or therapy.

The good news: PTSD is treatable. You do not need to suffer from the symptoms of PTSD alone. Therapy has proven to be very effective in reducing and even eliminating the symptoms. Medication can also help. Early treatment leads to the best outcomes. So, if you think you or someone in your family may have PTSD, please seek treatment right away.

***If you or a loved one experiences distress associated with combat trauma, see your primary care manager. If you need counseling or help locating services, call Military One Source at 1-800-342-9647.***





# Combat Operational Stress Continuum

READY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Good to go</li><li>▪ Well-trained</li><li>▪ Prepared</li><li>▪ Fit and tough</li><li>▪ Cohesive units, ready families</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Distress or impairment</li><li>▪ Mild, transient</li><li>▪ Anxious or irritable</li><li>▪ Behavior change</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ More severe or persistent distress or impairment</li><li>▪ Leaves lasting evidence (personality change)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Stress injuries that don't heal without intervention</li><li>▪ PTSD</li><li>▪ Depression</li><li>▪ Anxiety</li><li>▪ Addictive disorder</li></ul>

**Chaplain & Medical Responsibility**

**Leader Responsibility**

## Erin's Rules of Six

Hi. My name is Lieutenant Commander Erin Simmons. I'm a clinical psychologist. I work at naval hospital, Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, North Carolina. I've also been stationed in Okinawa, Japan; Camp Fallujah, Iraq; and Camp Ramadi, Iraq during OIF; in 2004-2005 for Fallujah; in 2008 for Ramadi.

In the course of my work I have come up with Rules of Thumb that I believe greatly help us all; including myself, have a successful return and reunion from deployments. So, I'd like to share those rules with you.

**Rule Number One:** Beware the fairytale. When we come back, we always like to think that everything is going to be perfect. Our spouse is going to do and say everything we want. We're going to have that perfect romantic evening, or maybe just relaxing evening. The house is going to be fixed. The children are going to behave. The finances are going to be in order. And the extended family is not going to be calling off the hook. But as we know, the fairytale almost never happens. So, we need to be ready for that and beware when our expectations start getting the best of us.

**Rule Number Two:** Beware of unrealistic expectations and to be patient. Sometimes when we are expecting the fairytale or just expecting life to go a certain way when we get back, or when our loved one gets back from a deployment, we start assuming that's the way things are going to go. And, then, when they go differently, even if it's not bad, we feel disappointed. We feel resentful. Sometimes it starts lots of fights that we really didn't need to have. So, what I recommend is to plan your homecoming as much as you can so everybody has those realistic expectations. If your significant other doesn't say that perfect thing you wanted them to say when you get off the bus, because you didn't tell them to say it, you can't really blame them. Now, if they didn't say it, and you did tell them, that's a different story. But try to plan ahead for the way you want things to go. Do you want your wife and kids waiting for you at the bus? Do you want everybody you know on base or in that area waiting for you when you step off the plane? Do you want a big family party that first weekend? Or do you want a couple of weeks of relative quiet when you get back just to figure out your bearings? Plan that in advance with your family and friends and significant others so they know. By the same token, the people waiting for you at home will have their own expectations. Don't be afraid to ask them what they are, and I hope that spouse or family member at home isn't afraid to tell you what they'd like to have happen, that perfect thing for you to say or do when you get home so that those expectations are fulfilled. It will take some time for everyone to get to know each other again, and for whatever expectations you have to be made conscious and to come to pass. So, everyone needs to be patient, everyone.

**Rule Number Three:** Avoid the pissing contest. You all know what I mean by "pissing contest." These are the conversations that go something like, "Well, I had it worse, because I was out there in the desert, and people were shooting at me." "Well, I had it worse, because I was home raising your three children and taking care of the house." "Well, no, I had it worse, because I was working every day seven days a week with no

break.” “Well, so was I, because I was home taking care of the kids, and raising your family, and taking care of the house.” And it goes on and on and on. And no one ever wins those contests. So, one of you has got to be the person to say, “Wow, you did have it pretty bad.” It only takes one person to stop that kind of argument, but if you don’t do it, it will go on and on and on, and no one wins.

**Rule Number Four:** Timing. Be careful of it. One of the most important rules of communication is to say things when the other person is listening, when they are in a frame of mind to listen. When a sailor, soldier, Airman, or Marine gets back from a deployment after being gone for seven, nine, 12 months, after a week-long trip in multiple airports, without a shower, feeling exhausted, that’s not the time to tell them that the roof needs fixing, and the car needs to be taken to the shop, and the kids need more discipline. They are not listening. And if you push it, they may get mad, and rightfully so. They’re not really on that wavelength with you at that point. By the same token, the family members waiting at home for their loved ones to come back, looking forward to nothing else but seeing their face and hearing their voice in person, at that point is not going to want to hear about complaints about them, and problems the service member has with them. And maybe even plans for the future at that point. It’s very much in the present. So, think about the timing that you bring things up in when you come home. It’s very important to say things when you know that other person is listening and can hear you.

**Rule Number Five:** Avoid the stupid questions. Number One: Every combat veteran’s most-hated question is, “How many people did you kill?” Or, “Did you kill anyone?” It brings back bad memories. It makes them think of things they may not want to think about. And it makes them think of things they don’t want to talk about even if you ask them directly. They may feel you are trying to start gossip, or asking out of a perverse curiosity, and they may feel that you just don’t need to know, don’t want to know, or you may look at them differently if they tell you. So, they may eventually answer that question, but if you ask it first, in your first conversation back, it is not going to go over well. Other questions are things like, “How was it?” That’s too general. You might get an answer like, “Fine.” Need to ask more specific things like, “How was your trip back?” “How did you feel during the deployment?” “Did you do what you wanted to accomplish?” “How did you feel about the trip over there?” “How did your job go?” More specific things that’s going to encourage them to talk about it. And the service member should know that he can tell you, “I don’t want to talk about it right now.” He needs to have that much control over the conversation, and neither one of you need to be hurt or resentful at that response. This is part of being patient, letting the adjustment settle in, and figure out what each person is comfortable talking about. Other questions are things like, “Was it hot in Iraq in the summer?” “Did you see any camels?” Well, the answer is most likely to be, “Yes.” But is that really what you want to know? Is that really relevant to this deployment experience?

**Rule Number Six:** Remember to thank each other. Each person involved in a combat deployment has it rough, has a very hard job whether you are the one going, or you’re the one staying behind and worrying. Remember that somebody has got to keep the house

standing while the other person is fighting for our freedom to have it. Each of those people deserve, and will appreciate, our thanks. So, remember that people on both sides of the ocean, both sides of the conflict, should be appreciated and thanked for what they have done during this difficult time.





# COURAGE TO CARE



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## BECOMING A COUPLE AGAIN

### *How to Create a Shared Sense of Purpose After Deployment*

Coming together as a couple after war deployment isn't always easy or something that happens naturally. It requires effort, and an understanding that each person has grown and changed during the separation. A positive way to think about this is that both of you, service person and spouse, have developed your own sense of purpose coping with new experiences while apart. What's important now is to come together and create a "shared sense of purpose", that is essential for your well being as a couple, that of your children and your life in the community. This won't happen overnight; it will take time, mutual compassion and a desire to do so. Here are four steps to help you create a "shared sense of purpose".



#### **STEP#1: Understand Each Other's Sense of Purpose During Separation**

The returning service member's sense of purpose has been shaped by:

- ❑ Traumatic events that can be difficult to process and talk about.
- ❑ Identification and closeness with their military unit and comrades who have shared similar experiences.
- ❑ Regimentation in the form of highly structured and efficient routines.
- ❑ Heightened sensory experiences including sights, sounds and smells.
- ❑ Expanded self-importance and identity shaped by war.

*The spouse's sense of purpose has been shaped by:*

- ❑ *New roles and responsibilities.* Many spouses have assumed new or more taxing employment, oversight of finances and child rearing.
- ❑ *Community support trade-offs.* Some spouses and children left the military base to stay with parents and in-laws for various reasons, but will have experienced loss of connection with their military community, its familiarity and support.

- ❑ *Emotional changes.* Some spouses may have experienced growing independence and thrived on it; others may have found this a difficult time leading to depression, anxiety, increased alcohol or substance use and abuse, and other symptoms of stress.

**STEP #2: Recognize that the following concerns upon return are common, often shared or felt indirectly, and will require mutual adjustments and time:**

- ❑ *Home.* Life at home does not have the edge and adrenaline associated with wartime duty, which often leads to let down, disappointment and difficulty shifting gears.
- ❑ *Children.* Reconnecting with one's children is an anticipated event by service member and spouse. Children react differently depending upon their age, and can be shy, angry, or jealous as new bonds are reestablished. Discipline will now be shared, often resulting in conflicting opinions and styles.
- ❑ *Relationship.* Concern about having grown apart, growing close again without giving up individual growth and viewpoints, issues of fidelity, and being able to discuss these issues without raising more anxiety or anger challenge many couples.
- ❑ *Public.* While there has been widespread support of the service member, the public has mixed views of the war. Protracted deployment and an upcoming election may polarize the public, promoting media coverage that can undermine the pride and purpose military families feel about their involvement.

**STEP #3: Relationship Breakers: Most couples argue about three things: sex, money and children.**

Understanding the potential of these issues to divide rather than unite is key to reestablishing a shared sense of purpose. These issues involve:

- ❑ *Intimacy.* Intimacy is a combination of emotional *and* physical togetherness. It is not easily reestablished after stressful separations creating an emotional disconnect.

Partners may also experience high or low sexual interest causing disappointment, friction or a sense of rejection. In due time, this may pass, but present concerns may include hoping one is still loved, dealing with rumors or concern about faithfulness, concern about medications that can affect desire and performance, and expected fatigue and alterations in sleep cycles.



- ❑ **Finances.** During the deployment, most service members and families received additional income from tax breaks and combat duty pay, as much as \$1,000 extra/month. Some families may have been able to set aside appreciable savings; other families may have spent some or all of the money on justifiable expenses and adjusted family budgets. This may create disagreement that can hamper the important work of building *shared trust* and financial planning as a couple essential to moving forward.
- ❑ **Children.** Children have grown and changed during deployment. Some returning soldiers will see children for the first time. It is important to build upon the positive changes in your children, and work as a couple to address issues of concern that need improvement or attention. Discipline of children will now be shared and should be viewed as something that can be built together rather than criticized or ignored.

#### **Step#4: Relationship Makers. Here are some thoughts and tips for building a shared sense of purpose and stronger family.**

- ❑ **Expectations.** Remember that fatigue, confusion and worry, common during this transition, often lead to short tempers. In that frame of mind, it is easy to revert to the relationship breaker issues listed above. If this happens, suggest taking time out and return to discussions when both parties feel more relaxed.
- ❑ **Enjoy life.** Find and do activities that are pleasurable such as a movie, a family picnic, bowling or shopping. Create time in your weekly schedule to do something as a couple, as a family, and one-on-one activity that is shared between returning service member and his/her child or children.
- ❑ **Give thanks.** Together, thank those people, family, friends, co-workers and new service member buddies, who have helped you and your family during this deployment. Showing appreciation through writing notes together, calling people or visiting them will bring a sense of fulfillment that reunites each other's experiences.

- ❑ **Communicate.** Talking together builds a shared sense of purpose. Desire to communicate is more important than details. Service members often prefer to discuss war stories with military buddies to protect their spouse and family from traumatic memories. Spouses should not be offended. Other ways to communicate involve physical activity. Take walks, work out together or engage in a sport. Healthy communication involves processing feelings, new information and relieving stress. Read, draw, paint, dance, sing, play an instrument, volunteer at church or in the community to keep a sense of perspective and individuality as you grow together as a couple.

- ❑ **Let time be your friend.** Time may not mend everything, but it is often one of the most important factors in healing and solving problems.
- ❑ **Be positive.** A positive attitude is one of the most important gifts you can bring to each other and your family during this time. Appreciating what one has gives strength and energy to a family and a couple. Special circumstances such as physical injury and psychological problems are not addressed in this fact sheet, and require additional support, information and resources.
- ❑ **Know when to seek help.** Both service member and spouse have endured a level of stress, uncertainty, worry and lonesomeness that can affect one's health and mental health. If either spouse or service member suspects they may be suffering from a health or mental health problem, it is essential to seek help. Many service members do not want to seek help for mental health problems from the military for fear of damaging their career. However, the consequences of letting a problem linger untreated can be much more damaging. There are excellent treatments including medications that can help people reclaim their lives and enjoy their families, as they should. You owe it to yourself and your family to be in good health.

We hope this fact sheet is helpful and something you will hold onto and refer to in the months ahead. Service members and spouses should feel proud of the important contributions both have made to our nation. Now it is time to reunite with loved ones and enjoy a shared sense of purpose and togetherness.

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