

FOR FAMILIES OF COMBAT VETERANS SUFFERING FROM PTSD

PTSD is a physical condition and it is real. It is not “in your head.”

You can't talk someone out of it, or ignore it and assume it will just go away.

Partners of people with PTSD may be faced with a number of stress factors that go along with caring for and living with someone with PTSD. These include financial strain, managing the person's symptoms, dealing with crises, or loss of intimacy.

This puts a large burden on you and as a result, you may experience tremendous strain and stress.

You may reach a point when being there, and nothing more, is hard to do.

What is PTSD?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a medical condition. It is a specific alteration in brain function due to experiencing something real, shocking, and profoundly disturbing.

Some Combat Veterans **may** and some **will not** develop PTSD after very similar traumatic events, but once the circuits in the brain are affected by the PTSD pattern, a survivor will most likely suffer from the following:-

Uncontrollable Intrusive Memory

First, their memory is seriously impaired.
This is not amnesia: in fact, it is almost the opposite.

The trauma comes back, bursting into awareness, when it isn't wanted or welcome. This “hot memory” lasts minutes to hours and may be clear or altered, like a dream. It is very disturbing for two reasons.

The person with PTSD becomes flooded with something frightening or tragic, leaving them feeling entirely out of conscious control.

Unwanted mental experiences can also include nightmares. The worst memory symptom is the waking nightmare, the flashback. This is so vivid, it may actually seem like reality.

“I wish someone would write an article just for family members and friends that helps them to understand PTSD and directly addresses their roles and responsibilities.

Often I have some pretty good days only to be sabotaged by those I love most...

At least it feels that way.”

(Combat Veteran)

Emotional Anaesthesia

A person with PTSD feels like a shadow of their former self. Some say they have no feelings - they are distant and detached. They wish they had more zest for life and they know they disappoint those who want them to be interactive and lively.

They can find it hard to make a simple decision, or carry out a simple task – almost as if they have “switched off” to their surroundings. Short-term memory can also be greatly affected, whole periods of time and events, conversations are lost.

Remember, Veterans with PTSD are far more anxious. They have too much adrenalin and it makes them less efficient, less effective, less able to control their behaviour. They aren't sleeping restfully. They cannot concentrate fully.

It is important to try and keep things as level as possible. They can not cope with their own problems never mind anyone else's. It can lead them to feeling great distressed, inadequate and useless.

They may or may not be depressed. Being depressed is feeling helpless, hopeless and worthless, and having no energy.

This second element of PTSD is often called "being numb and avoidant." Your loved one just isn't fully alive. You, the caring partner, can't make this medical symptom go away.

Anxiety

Finally, PTSD makes a person anxious. Anxiety affects each of us differently. The usual pattern includes irritability, impaired concentration, sleep disturbance, being "jumpy, and worried about threats and threatening individuals, or unable to cope when a simple thing goes wrong.

Sex Is Often Sacrificed.

Lack of interest, or inability are quite common with PTSD Veterans. This can leave you feeling unwanted, unloved without this intimate closeness. When partners can't communicate easily and effectively about sex and other private, personal subjects, matters inevitably grow worse. Your loved one may be embarrassed and inhibited, or you may be the one who would rather not discuss "touchy" issues.

Walking On Eggshells

"When you're living with a veteran who has PTSD, you become his caretaker. You slip into a role, without even noticing it, constantly watching for people or circumstances that might "set him off."

You become over-protective to make sure everything stays in line - that nothing aggravates or upsets him - that everything is "perfect."

Despite your best efforts, you're snapped at or ignored by the person you're trying to help on a much too frequent basis.

He is no longer "there for you", physically or mentally. When you're upset or happy, angry or sad, you have to deal with your emotions on your own. You begin to feel ignored and unloved and at times resentful for the impact it has on your life.

You're also probably handling all household chores and finances etc. You get little or no help from anybody.

Everything feels like it's up to you. It is a 24/7 job at which you constantly fail.

Your once orderly life becomes chaotic... no day is the same.

But you carry on, because you love them."

You may feel guilty if you feel stressed out as a result of caring for someone, especially when a loved one is struggling with a serious diagnosis like PTSD. However, it is important that you realise that you too need time to "recharge your batteries." Living with and caring for someone with PTSD is stressful in its own right.

The more you can learn how to care for yourself, the better you will be able to care for them.