

APPENDIX B

Secondary PTSD Symptoms

Rosie Williams

As the wife of a Combat Trauma sufferer, you can actually mirror many of your husband's (or wife's) symptoms. In this section, I will be listing two secondary symptoms of PTSD in six different areas. Keep in mind, this is just scratching the surface of a complicated and individual issue. For a complete explanation of secondary PTSD and symptom list, I would recommend you get the handbook by Cru Military Ministry, *When War Comes Home, Christ Centered Healing for Wives of Combat Veterans*.²⁰

Going through this book with a "battle buddy" is suggested, as well as seeking guidance from a military chaplain, pastor or counsellor. This manual will not only help you to identify what is going on within your home, it will guide you to practical ways to deal with it. The companion handbook, *Combat Trauma Healing Manual*, is recommended for those with primary PTSD. Sometimes it is difficult to find the right person with the skills to understand issues specific to military families, but don't give up. Keep looking until you can find the right kind of help and support.

Secondary PTSD Symptoms (partial list)

When War Comes Home

Chris Adsit, Rahnella Adsit, and Marshele Carter Waddell

Cognitive Symptoms

Diminished concentration

Preoccupation with the trauma

Emotional Symptoms

Powerlessness

Emotional roller coaster

Behavioral Symptoms

Sleep disturbances

Elevated startle response

Physical Symptoms

Rapid heartbeat

Gastrointestinal distress

Interpersonal Symptoms

Loss of personal control and freedom

Isolation from friends

Spiritual Symptoms

Feeling angry or bitter toward God

Feeling God is punishing me

Let me give you some examples of how this plays out on a day to day basis.

If your spouse is **avoiding crowds** of people, you may be affected by that and also find yourself lonely and isolated.

If your husband is being triggered by an anniversary date and responds with being on edge with people and family members, you may feel like you have to **walk on eggshells** to keep from upsetting him further.

If he becomes depressed and withdrawn, you may feel he doesn't love you like he once did, and you may get **depressed** as well.

Because denial is such a strong symptom of PTSD, you may tend to **lose hope** if your spouse does not accept or seek help.

Because you want to ever be the peacemaker, you may internalize your feelings and your **marriage relationship may begin to deteriorate**.

I am fortunate that my husband was able to get past his denial and get the counseling help he so desperately needed. Some of the counseling issues were not even related directly to combat stress. For many vets, there are layers of emotional issues from childhood that need attention. In Steve's case, the professional help he received from the VA combined with meeting with other Christian veterans was an important part of his healing.

Your spouse may not be able to verbalize what is going emotionally, but you can sense it. You may get frustrated as you **don't even understand the problem**, much less be able to fix it.

“Whether it's the veteran who has lived in the lonely isolation of combat memories for decades, or young warriors just returning from their first combat horrors, the power of God, the power of God's written word, and the community of God's people around our nation can become powerful resources in this healing process. And this healing can certainly extend to military families and many others impacted by these mental, emotional and spiritual wounds of war.”