

## Appendix A PTSD Symptoms

### The Forgotten

War affects our lives like no other phenomena. It generates a sense of anxiety that can destroy our peace of mind and it can create fears that wake us in the night and intrude on our thoughts during the day. It can break our ability to concentrate while we work and while we play. War's effects can turn small problems into huge issues. For the survivors, the ravages of war have a profound impact on their lives, and it robs them of their personal sense of control and security. In short, war creates a tremendous amount of stress. If it goes unrecognized, and unmanaged, this stress can severely damage a person's mental and physical health.

Throughout history, the general costs tallied from war are things like lost territory, number of cities destroyed, and governments toppled. Little interest is shown about the after-shock soldiers go through. Rarely are their stressful reactions understood. Millions of individual soldiers around the world continue to be in need of emotional and psychological help because of their wartime experiences; theirs is the "human factor" of war. Unfortunately, this always seems to be the last casualty remembered when counting the cost of wars.

War stress lives in the soldier's history of war. It's a history that until recently has been hidden from view and poorly documented.

The individual soldier's system of reporting the historical facts and how he felt after the impacting circumstances of combat, has not been easy to record. War experiences are generally held in quiet confidentiality by most soldiers and have been a puzzling secret kept from those who were not there to also go through it with them. These experiences have presented a great question for war historians over the years.

Within the great and special "secret" of war exists the darkest corner of all; war's essential feature--Combat. Only the individual soldier, who has lived through it can really tell with accuracy what it is like to survive the emotionally rigorous circumstances that arise from the field of combat. It is likewise, extremely difficult for the soldiers to relate these experiences to anyone who was not there; making therapy and remedies from the professional communities almost impossible. Unless the therapist is himself and ex-soldier with relative experiences, he will usually find the veteran unwilling to open himself up to significant treatment.

Traditionally, society has had no answers for the soldier's "strange" reactions to life after war. They generally put him in a hopeless category, and with a degree of pity, try to forget that he is there.

Most soldiers have (believed they) had to find their own remedies, and adopt their own devices to cope with the "diseases of the soul". The time has come to look beyond some of these mindsets and discover some lasting solutions to these "diseases".

## **Unseen Wounds**

We veterans can watch our physical wounds heal up, but the scars on the flesh only remind us of our former pain and suffering that came during the war. With time, the flesh wounds heal and don't bother us too much anymore, but the wounds in our minds is the ones no one can see but us and they afflict our souls as well.

## **Stress**

Stress is a personal response that our bodies and minds go through in order to meet the demands of different life situations. If these situations go beyond the range of normal human experiences (and war trauma is certainly something beyond that range), then we become particularly vulnerable to having severe symptoms of what is known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (commonly called PTSD). PTSD is not a mental illness; it is the residual effects, and the veteran's reaction, to the extreme stress encountered during war. It becomes quite obvious when we find ourselves being unable to completely adjust to civilian life upon returning home.

## **Risky Business**

From the present war on terror we are seeing some peculiar, yet familiar, aftereffects coming home with the troops. "Familiar" because it is not so unlike many of the warning signs which manifested as the troops came home from Vietnam back in the 60's and 70's. Following is a couple of new excerpts that frame the problems:

The "three special operations soldiers" at Fort Bragg" who investigators say killed their wives had been deployed to Afghanistan for the war on terrorism..." Fayetteville Observer July 2002

In a tragic footnote to war, some marines returning from combat in Iraq are losing their lives to risky behavior such as speeding and driving drunk. Throughout the marine corps, thirty-one service members have died in non-military vehicle accidents since late April when troops began trickling back home. The numbers spiked in June, when at least one Marine a week was killed in car and motorcycle crashes. San Diego Union Tribune-Sept. 2003

What is behind this risky business? When people train and go to war, they deploy with a high sense of survival and the adrenalin may run for weeks on end non-stop. This goes beyond a normal human activity (typical of PTS) and when it runs that long, it is hard to turn off. Once the excitement and danger of war is over, and the troops come home, many must continue to behave in a way that keeps the adrenaline line running...if they don't they will "come down" from the high and may have to confront things that the rush is diverting them from.

Here's another excerpt from the Union Tribune article that sums it up:

"The constant pressure...the stress they had to go through to survive the war and get their job done. When you come back, there's no need for that, and yet they are so used to it, 'said Navy Lt. Cmdr. Bettye Burns, chief of counseling at Camp Pendleton's intervention and treatment branch'. They really missed the rush'...Burns counsels base marines who volunteered for therapy because they felt unsettled after returning home from Iraq. She sees telltale signs of

adrenaline-tinged behavior. One group member reported driving his truck much too fast without realizing it, until he glanced down at the speedometer. 'They really don't recognize it as risky behavior,' Burns said. They just know they are feeling good again.

### **Effects on our lives**

When we suffer with PTSD our lives are interfered with, and our ability to lead meaningful and productive lives is significantly hindered. Veterans with this "disease of the soul" may have serious problems identifying with others. They could feel so alienated that they are led into repeated destructive and self-destructive symptoms and behaviors-to include committing relational suicide (destroying personal relationships with other people who have become close).

### **Carrying the Burden**

PTSD is a burden carried around inside the hearts and minds of most soldiers who survive the hard life of wartime experiences.

Soldiers are people trained and conditioned to survive constant life-threatening situations. However, our adjustment back to normal social (civilian) life has been difficult. PTSD is the chief cause of this difficulty. Nearly every situation we face in "normal" life becomes a matter of our survival. "Normal" people do not understand our responses, because sometimes we react in a survival combat mode to "get the job done". We have done and seen things in war that made returning to normal life practically unattainable.

### **Do you have PTSD?**

When many of us discover that there may be a problem which stemmed from our war experiences, it is always good to begin by searching for simple explanations. There are some basic indicators of PTSD that tells us that what we are experiencing is actually a stress reaction. Many veterans have the following PTSD reactions.

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- Sudden memories of the stressful event. "Flashbacks". These flashbacks may last from minutes to hours and may occur months or years after the trauma.
  - Nightmares, or war dreams, causing fear-induced reactions while asleep. Also, veterans may react intensely to loud noises when awake.
  - Some avoid being around people as much as they can seriously affecting their relationships with others, especially their family. It is hard for some for some to feel emotions the way others seem to. If they do not feel them, they wouldn't express them. Many times, people think veterans are cold, and even aloof.
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When we begin to recognize, and sort these things out, finally we may be able to control ourselves in stressful situations. Be encouraged to study these reactions and PTSD symptoms. Our advice would not be complete if we did not also encourage you to pray for God to give you understanding and relief from the stress in your life.

## **PTSD symptoms**

There are a number of primary PTSD responses that soldiers, and veterans exhibit as a result of wartime experiences. Here are some signs and clues that may come up to tell us that we may be suffering from PTSD. Ask yourself the following questions:

### **Depression**

Do you often feel helpless, worthless and rejected? Are you usually feeling insecure? Do you not deserve to feel good?

### **Anger**

Are you unable to identify the things that make you angry? Is your anger unexplainable or inappropriate? Do you take your anger out on your loved ones close to you?

### **Guilt**

Do you regular wonder why you survived when others more worthy died? Do you get into hopeless fights? Do you try to sabotage any successful adventure that you may be on?

### **Jumpy and Nervous**

Do cans popping, fireworks and loud noises startle you? Are you uncomfortable when people walk close behind you or sit behind you?

### **Sleep Disturbances**

Do you try to stay awake because you are in fear of dreams you may have? Do you take drugs or alcohol to assist in keeping you awake or making your sleep?

### **Numbed Emotions**

Do you have trouble feeling love? Do you find it hard to get close to your wife or other loved ones? Does the sight of death not affect you? Are you unable to talk about how you feel?

### **Isolated and Closed Down**

Do you have difficulty talking about your war experiences because you are sure that nobody else could ever understand what you went through? Do you have few friends?

### **Substance Abuse**

Do you use alcohol or drugs regularly? Do they numb your painful memories or relieve guilt? Do others think that you rely on liquor or drugs too much?

**Note:** If you answered “yes” to some of these questions, you may be suffering from PTSD. Also, a few of these delayed stress responses may sound familiar to you, and you may not want to admit it. Sometimes it is easier to deny that the war bothered us than to deal with it, and the effects can prolong any recovery. (edit) This is a common denial response amongst soldiers because we have been trained to become “tough” and never admit our weaknesses. Admitting that the war affected you is not confessing weakness, it is being honest, and that is the first step in recovery.

## **Warning Sign of PTSD**

Stress affects everyone differently. What might indicate negative stress in one person might just be personality traits in another. In most cases, there are warning signs that indicate a need for active stress management. Check off the signs that relate to you:

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- Persistent fatigue
  - Inability to concentrate
  - Flashes or anger-lashing out at friends and or family for no apparent reason
  - Changes in eating and sleeping habits
  - Increased use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco etc
  - Prolonged tension headaches, lower backaches, stomach problems or other physical problems
  - Prolonged feelings of depression, guilt, anxiety and helplessness
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These are just some of the ways that PTSD may be affecting your life. The emotional and physiological stress of war does not go away simply by leaving it unattended. Wounds of this nature do not go away with time, and we should not just ignore these signs by leaving them alone. They need to be addressed.

Never try to go it alone. If you were wounded physically during combat, you would allow a medic to attend the wound, wouldn't you? Well, this is really no different. You need to call for help and allow others to look at the "wounds" and get them attended to.

## **First Aid for Stress**

Just as stress affects everyone differently, each person finds different ways to cope with it. Here are some ways to help you manage negative stress in your life:

### **Talk it out**

You are not alone in this. There are other veterans and soldiers who have experienced similar events in their lives and are feeling some of the same anxieties. Seek them out and listen to them and their personal stories. When you are ready, you also need to tell them about your experiences. By sharing experiences, you will find a genuine relief from PTS and remember, it isn't necessary for the "listener" to be a trained professional either. A lot of inner relief can happen by just talking to someone-someone who is willing to listen and care. Getting together with other veterans for the purpose of having a support group is important too. Talking to men and women who have been through a war experience is healing indeed. It's the right thing to do.

Now-if you don't talk about the experience and you try to hold your feelings inside, you will repress the bad memories without resolving the issue. This can lead to some unsatisfactory results and many undesirable things can happen.

The fact is, you can only hold them inside, or try to forget about them for so long before they explode through fits of rage, violence or self-destructive activities. Like physical wounds, psychological and emotional wounds have to be cleaned out before they can heal.

The best way to cleanse them is by talking and sharing about your pain, sorrow and terror. An excellent way to let it out is to attend a "rap" group (a support group) of peers where veterans and soldiers meet regularly and help each other regain control of their lives. There is a certain sense of security that comes from knowing that every man or woman attending the group has

probably done similar things during their wartime experiences. This will help you be honest with yourself, perhaps for the first time since the war. Talking it out helps cleanse the wound.

### **Try Physical Activity**

Release the tension of stress by developing a regular routine of exercise. If you have a physical disability, consult a physician to determine what kind of exercise is right for you.

### **Avoid Self Medication**

Drugs and alcohol may seem to remove stress temporarily, however, in the long run they generally create problems, or behavior, that compounds the stress. Even caffeine and nicotine, agents that artificially create stress-like reactions in your body, can have a negative effect on your ability to control the sources of anxiety in your life.

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- It is important to note that these are just suggested methods of coping with PTSD. Many veterans and soldiers have found that permanent healing, which goes beyond coping, is possible by developing a personal spiritual relationship with God. Talking symptoms over with a professional counselor trained in PTSD is recommended.
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