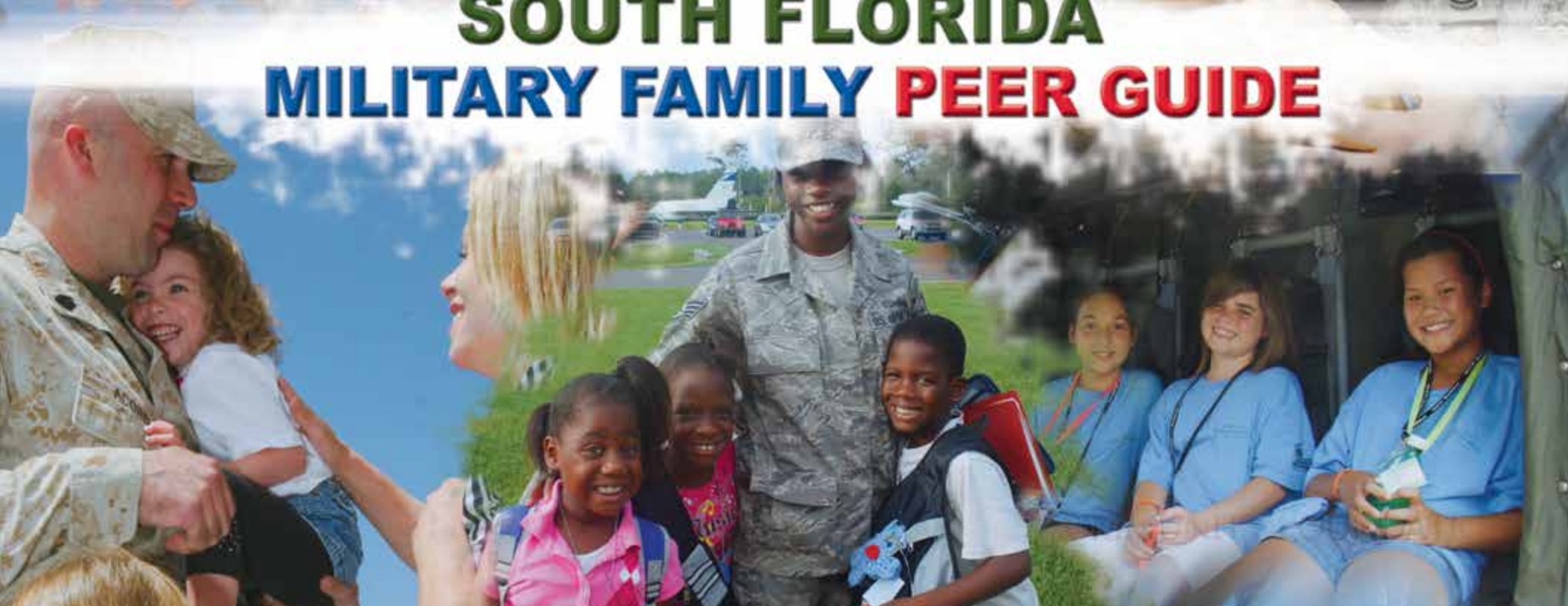




SOUTH FLORIDA MILITARY FAMILY PEER GUIDE





There is no one in the United States who sacrifices more for our country than the men and women of the Armed Forces and their family members. This Peer Guide is dedicated to military family members who give so much to this country so that its citizens remain safe and free.

Interviews were conducted and this peer guide was created and written by 7-Dippity, Inc. (www.7-dippity.com).

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Foreword

In the winter of 2009-2010, numerous military families in South Florida participated in confidential interviews in order to share their experiences and lessons learned from the deployment of a loved one to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and/or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). The family members who volunteered for the interviews were representative of every Armed Services branch and varied in age, ethnicity, gender, and relationship to the service member.

This book is called a “Peer Guide” because the quotes and topics chosen come directly from the military family members interviewed. After all, experienced military families who have been through the challenges and successes of deployment and reintegration are in the best position to help others who are walking in their footsteps.

In order to help families gain a veteran’s perspective on some topics, several veterans were also interviewed for this Peer Guide. **To help distinguish family members’ quotes from veterans’ quotes, we have highlighted family member quotes in BLUE and veteran quotes in GREEN.**

Please note that in the back of the book, we have placed a Resource Guide which includes a list of providers with available programs to serve military families and veterans in South Florida. We encourage you to take advantage of these services if you feel you or your family can benefit.

We are grateful beyond measure for the participation of the volunteers in this project. It is their hope, and ours, that this Peer Guide will provide support and guidance for you and your family.

With Our Best Wishes,
The 7-Dippity Team and Military Family Peer Support Initiative

A young boy in a dark t-shirt and light shorts is fishing by a pond. He is holding a fishing rod and giving a thumbs up. In the background, there is a large house and palm trees under a clear sky.

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A large crowd of people, mostly military families, are gathered at an event. Many are holding up orange balloons and cheering. In the foreground, a man on the left wears a dark blue Air Force t-shirt with a winged pilot emblem and 'AIR FORCE' text. A woman in the center wears a blue t-shirt with 'AIR FORCE LOVE' and 'AIRMEN ROCK' text, along with a yellow star and 'US' text. A woman on the right wears a red t-shirt with 'MY AIRMAN MY HERO' text. The background is filled with more people, some holding cameras and phones.

"The families are precious. Don't ever think that their sacrifices are not inspiring others like me."

U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Desiree N. Palacios

MILITARY FAMILIES

Military families are proud of their loved ones who serve their country.

"It makes me proud. I am always bragging about my kids...My big son...he went in there as a Private and worked his way up...My daughter; she became a Staff Sergeant in three years because she was always competitive. So that is something to be proud of."

"I am extremely proud of my husband, my sons, my friends, and other family members that have service members."

"The positive is, my kids, for instance – they love the military. They wanted to serve their country, and I always raised them to make good choices...It is all about helping them serve their country."

There is a strong bond between service members and their families. Because of this, family members play an important role in a service member's career.

"I am extremely blessed to be married to someone who really supports what I do in the military. Not to say that [at times] there is not some tension there...But without [my husband's] support, there is no way I could do the service to the military."

"The core values of the military...love for our nation...discipline...a bond between each other...inspiration to do something...volunteering...those values I adore."

"I think it is the commitment. It is a tremendous commitment and dedication that [family members] have."

Families support their loved ones in their everyday lives, as well as when they are called to duty.

"It is all of us. It is my whole family, his grandparents, everybody. Everybody is there to support him."

"We are here to support him...[My husband] is protecting us and serving our country."

"Overall, it is our responsibility to support them, and for that reason, I think that the families, whether it be a spouse, whether it be children, whether it be siblings, they should be commended."

"I just think the home front is very important...the kids have to be strong, your wife [has] to be strong; it could be a husband as well who is not in the military."

When service members are ordered to deploy, it is as if family members are called to duty as well.


"There are a lot of battlefronts going on. There is the deployment, you have the separation, you have the warrior in the actual combat zone, but then you have the family keeping it together back home. Everybody is fighting a battle."

"Our hearts go with [the service members]...when they deploy."

"I am very proud of all of the families on the home front, because the troops would not be able to do their jobs over there if they didn't have the support of all of their families over here. That is how we feel. The families over here are just as important as the military member serving overseas."

Like hundreds of thousands of other military families across the country, family members living in South Florida must navigate the challenges of the deployment cycle when a loved one receives orders to deploy.





"I think it starts before deployment. It is almost like a book; you can't understand the ending if you don't understand the whole process."

The combat deployment cycle for military families begins as soon as they receive news that a loved one has orders to deploy. It is common for family members to feel strong and even conflicting emotions upon receiving such news.

"You are afraid for the service members. [There is] all of the acknowledgment of their bravery and their courage and strength, and yet you are still afraid."

"A part of me just didn't want my sister over there. We were always hoping that nothing would happen."

"I felt like [my brother] was brave. That he exuded some strength in his character to go and be a part of something that was so important to this country, and that he had taken on that responsibility...at such a young age...I was really proud of him and being a part of the military family."

While families know there may be challenges ahead, most face the unknown with the same pride and determination as their loved ones deploying into the combat zone.

"To me, that is what family is. It is having one another's back. It is unconditional support. It is the good times and the bad times."

"You have to be strong, loyal, and faithful...In [my husband's] Coast Guard unit, we are strong, loyal, and faithful in our families."

"I found out when my son was deployed...it takes a tribe to hang together...and the way we have each other's back is like how the troops have each others' backs - the family got together."

"I am very proud of my daughter and will offer her any support that I can."

The days and weeks before a service member leaves can be an uncertain time for families, especially those who will be experiencing deployment for the first time.

"Deployment...a lot comes with that. There are a lot of emotions that go through your life and your children's lives. It could be disruptive to your family. At the same time, it is positive and for our country. It is hard."

"On the first deployment, I didn't know what to expect. I cried."

"I think on the home front, they don't know what they are getting into...For example, I know I am going to a war zone. I can accept that. I have already accepted it. I am going. The family that is left behind, they don't understand that."

"The 'first time families' that have someone going away...need to know that it is not easy to have your child or your sister or one of your other relatives

go away...[So] they need to have some type of system or something to be able to [help them] cope...someone [who] is able to understand."

Even experienced families have learned that each deployment has its own set of challenges.

"If you go through [one] deployment or five, it is stressful. Each deployment is unique...because time has gone by and there are different circumstances."

The best way to cope with deployment is to be prepared. Families who don't plan ahead may find deployment more challenging.

"The first time, I was completely blindsided. That would be the word that I would use; blindsided. I was not ready for it at all."

"That had to be the worst because I didn't have any information at that time. It was so quick. No one had time to get in touch with me and let me know what was going on. It was just, 'Goodbye,' and that was it."

"The will, the power of attorney, and all those other things are important...I didn't get a chance to do any of that. [My husband] left within two weeks. So, I didn't have any power of attorney. I didn't even have access to his bank account...I had no paperwork saying what his orders were or where he was going to be stationed. I had nothing."

In general, families who plan ahead cope better with deployment and reintegration than families who do not. The following are some additional key lessons learned by family members:



U.S. Air Force photo/Tech. Sgt. Brian E. Christiansen

Key Lesson Learned:

The Importance of Pre-planning

Perhaps the number one lesson learned by military families is to pre-plan for potential challenges as much as possible while their loved ones are still at home.

“I know I didn’t do it right the first time. The second time around, I definitely gave [my family] enough time, and I talked to them more about it. I wasn’t so self-centered on me because you just can’t do that.”

“As soon as I find out [that] I am tasked to go, I would definitely break it to [my family]...and then...start making plans to make it easier for them when I depart.”

“The biggest thing I think was...having [my husband] have three months of experience [running the house] under his belt before I actually had to deploy.”

Pre-planning will also help secure the home front, which is a safety issue for service members in the combat zone. Knowing their family is okay will allow service members to focus on their mission.

“As a family member over here, nothing else matters but communicating with the soldier and making sure he is okay. But he needs to know on his end that everything is okay at home in order to function over there.”

“My mom would come over to babysit the kids for about a week, and it was great...My brother would stop by to see if [my wife] needed help. They would just reassure her if she would need anything. It was something that I found awesome. That helped me to relax while I was gone...it is great when you know you got that.”

Key Lesson Learned:

Connect With Resources

Families should identify people and organizations that can help with deployment.

"I have family support, and like anyone who has a strong family support, you tend to go to them first. But yet there are organizations that are willing to support the military and their families."

It is important to secure resources and supports before a loved one leaves.

"As a Reservist [family], we see them use that uniform once a month...but it's not until deployment that you realize that you don't know who to go to [in case] of an emergency."

"The problem is, you don't [search for] resources until you need them...If you'd have known about them from day one, then you could have been taking advantage of those services."



This is because it can be difficult to find help if something unexpected and sudden occurs.

"Putting the pride aside and not waiting for an emergency to locate help – I think that is the key thing...because we want to handle things our own way, but sometimes it gets out of hand and becomes a crisis, and that is when we pick up the phone and everything is a process. The support is there, but it takes a little while to get that support...For that individual [who] is already in crisis, every day feels like forever."

"Because everything happened so quickly...I didn't have any information on where to even start to look for [my husband]. I had no commanding officer to call...It was torture."

Even if your family doesn't use any of the resources, at least you know they are there, just in case. This will help prevent stress while a loved one is deployed.

"I just wish people would really try to educate themselves on what is available."

"I don't know if there is any way to educate people other than having them be really proactive by themselves. It is not a hopeless situation. [You] are not totally isolated...you are not totally alone."

Because South Florida lacks many of the supports found on a military base, identifying and securing resources ahead of time is especially important for military families living here.

"South Florida does not have a very strong Naval presence...That was really hard...I think being in South Florida, we felt somewhat isolated from some of the support, some of the networks that are there in Central Florida or...North Florida."

Service members can help their families locate resources. Frequently, family resources are discussed in briefings before deployment.

"As a [service member] preparing for deployment, listen to the briefings...Listen to what they are telling you as far as your family responsibilities. Listen to where your family could get help. You got to listen."

There are supports available for families directly through each service branch.

"Our [Navy] Ombudsman. She was excellent. She was always there, always reachable...When her husband was deployed with my husband, we went through it together. The other spouses, the other wives, we were really close, so we had each other."

"Right before my husband [deployed], they had a Family Readiness meeting, and I decided to go. I really didn't want to go, but I went and it gave me a lot of information. It helped me deal with the process."

"Family Support was such a big part of my life. [They] did so much to help me out."

Families can also find support from extended family members, close friends, and other military families.

"I rely heavily on my family for support and guidance."

"My girlfriend's son was overseas with my husband...I became a confidant for her and she [became] one for me...We would talk and understand what each other was going through...I got to help her and, at the same time, she was helping me."

"A friend of mine moved in with me...within the first few weeks of [my husband] leaving...so I wasn't completely alone in the house."

"All the other nephews and nieces came, so that helped the kids a lot to not think about their dad...For the full eight months he was gone, I was not left alone. Right up until the time that he got back, I always had a family member here. They would always work it out with each other so that someone was always with us."

There are also civilian providers in South Florida that can assist. These resources can be valuable in the months and years ahead – before, during, and after deployment. Some providers are listed in the Resource Guide (Page 51).

Key Lesson Learned:

Planning For Changes
in Roles and Responsibilities

Pre-planning involves understanding and planning for what roles and responsibilities each family member will have while the service member is away. Topics to discuss include who will care for children, pets, the household, and other major responsibilities during the separation.

"When my husband is absent...he basically turns over our home and the responsibilities and all those things

to me, as like the next in the chain of command."

"To have to take on roles as mother and father for the time being - that's difficult. And that is a concern that I currently have now."

"When a soldier gets deployed, it is a hardship for us. I mean, you lose the overtime pay; you don't have that person there to help you...The spouse that is [home] is left to do everything."

Spend time discussing financial matters, including setting up a system to pay bills and planning for financial emergencies. This can lessen the stress and worry for the family at home and the service member overseas.

"Make sure that you guys either share the finances or have things clearly spelled out the way things should happen before you deploy. Because you may not have Internet access, especially around payday, and things may fall through the cracks. Bill Pay really helped us out a lot. So all [my husband] really had to remember was to transfer money into the Bill Pay account every time he got paid, and that made me relax."

"[It helped us to have] separate checking accounts so that [we] didn't have to worry about any emergency at home...or end up having a check bounce for funds not being available."

To ensure a smooth transition, it will help if family members take over some of their new roles and responsibilities before a service member deploys.

"As my deployment got closer, I did less and less and let my husband do more and more, so he could feel confident in his ability to handle whatever came while I was deployed. From the grocery shopping to doing

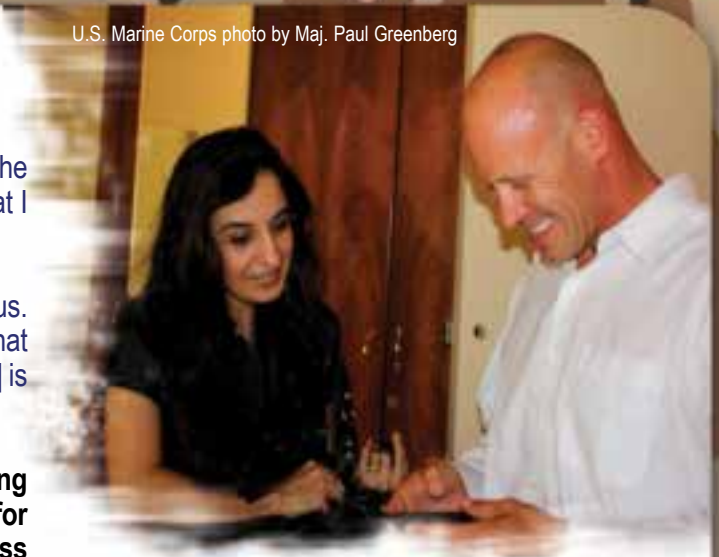
laundry...we transitioned to him paying the bills about three months before my deployment. That was huge."

"As time started getting closer, I started preparing my wife with all the finances, the contact numbers, power of attorney, the life insurance policy, and stuff like that. Preparing, you know? Just kind of getting all of our affairs in order."

Deployments can disrupt normal routines and way of life. Because of this, it is a good idea to identify extended family members or close friends who can help with certain responsibilities, such as taking children to school or assisting with housework.

"[My husband's] nephew who lives in the Netherlands came down. He took leave from his job to help with the situation as much as possible."

"We are handling [deployment] well...We talked a lot about it before he left, and I would just like to do whatever I can to help someone else who may be struggling."



Key Lesson Learned:

Communication

"We always [say] that communication is the most important thing – to tell each other how we are feeling and not wait until the point where you want to give up...I think that if anything, our [communication] got better because [my husband] realized that it had to be better in order for us to be able to make it through all that we had to go through."

Communication is one of the most important tools military families have to help them deal with the challenges of deployment.

"The key to a good relationship is communication."

"It's important to understand what the existing challenges in that family are. The deployment and the return is just an event that happens, but if you have a dysfunctional relationship, the dysfunction will still be there before deployment, after deployment, and in the future if you don't take care of that. And deployment can make that worse."

In addition to talking about the logistics of keeping the home front going, families can use communication to help strengthen their relationships before the separation.

"Talk about your fears and your expectations with each other before you go...Discuss with your spouse or family that you are a little bit nervous about the entire thing. Let them know that you may be sharing some of the same feelings they are sharing. I think it helps build your relationship, which really needs to be strong before you deploy. Because things will happen and when you don't

have that face-to-face interaction, it makes it a little bit harder to tell what the other person is feeling. So I say work on that relationship and that trust and that sharing before you go."

Many families have learned that communication also involves planning on how best to stay in contact with loved ones during deployment.

"It was emails, phone calls, some letters. Mostly, I would say email because of the time difference. They would come during the middle of the night, and often times I would be awake and I would be checking."

For a checklist of other items to take care of before deployment, visit the American Bar Association's Military Family Pre-Deployment Checklist at:
www.abanet.org/legal-services/help/preservists/forms/checklist.pdf

"If you don't do anything, it is a long road, it is a lonely road, and my son can tell you that. There are [service members] that get nothing. They just get nothing. They get no emails. They get no cards. They get no boxes. There could be several reasons why. One of them could be that their family just can't afford that. If so...get your church involved, get your job involved, get other people involved

where they can help you do those things."

Families can look into different ways of communicating and discuss which ones might work best for them.

"The care packages, the letters, the cards, you don't realize how much they mean to the [service members] over there. Pictures. Video. Video as much as you can and send it over so they can feel like they are there with you. And have the [service member] do the same. As a unit, we purchased a DVD recorder, and the guys were able to go into a hut and film messages back to their families. I think that is important."

"Try to rely more on the Internet because that is way quicker and way cheaper for you. If you are going to use the phone, try to get phone cards."

"The guys that [my husband] was bunking with...purchased a satellite phone...They divided [the cost]. He was able to get better reception [and] he didn't have to wait in the lines."

"Make sure you try to get a webcam. The best thing to do is to get a laptop that has it already installed because having to get anything external tends to get very hairy."

"We have Skype (www.skype.com) on the computer, so we can see each other and communicate, which is very nice."

Thanks to the Internet, email, video conferencing, and family web pages can be inexpensive and effective ways to communicate. Satellite and cell phones can also be useful. And don't forget about old fashioned letter writing.

member is deployed to a remote location.

"There are guys who go out to these bare bases...and they have no communication for weeks on end. I did run into some of those guys, and it is hard for them...As soon as they get to any place that has Internet or a telephone, that is the very first thing that they do."

It will help to be realistic and practical when planning how you will communicate.

"You need to be prepared that you won't hear from them for a few days. You need to be prepared that your connection may get cut off, and you are just going to have to wait for it to come back up."

"There is an eight hour difference from Miami to Iraq, and really they are waking up when I am going to bed, or vice versa."

Key Lesson Learned:

Decide On Information Sources

Receiving news about loved ones or the progress of military operations overseas can be difficult. It will help to decide in advance which trusted sources your family can rely on for up-to-date information.

"The single most important information to have when your soldier is deployed is a valid contact person

who is affiliated with your soldier's unit, [including] their phone number and email address. The person will more than likely be the FRG leader or the command element that stays behind to support the deploying unit. It's important because you have an actual person you can speak to who...will help if you have a problem."

"I was on the...Fort Drum family website, which is a wonderful website... I found it very helpful because they have blogs and [information] on what's going on and where the soldiers are."

"I would get in touch with the chaplain...to see if he had heard anything."

Sometimes watching the news on television or on the Internet can be upsetting.

"I guess the worst of it is when you come home at night and you see those pictures on the news where you see that someone is killed, and that is not good. It gets to the point where it starts eating away at you, especially if you are waiting for that email."

"It didn't help to look at the news all the time, like absorb and take all that in."

"The hardest thing was that we always heard about the bad stuff that happened, but we never heard about the good things that the soldiers did over there."

One way to reduce stress is to switch channels or websites or turn the television or computer off once you have gotten the information you need.

Military Personnel: Please leave this behind with your family for quick reference.

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1-877-273-4838
www.floridabrave.org

Helping Families Reunited by
Connecting to Afghanistan & Iraq

Military Member's Name: _____

Birth Date: _____

Branch of Service/Rank: _____

CO's Name: _____

Military Address: _____

Enlisted Date: _____

Deployment Date: _____

Put your social security number in a safe place and tell your family members where to find it.

NOTES: _____

Magnets like the one above can provide important information in an emergency.

"I didn't realize how much letters meant to the [service members]. I didn't know that when the mail came, it was important for [my son] to get something from me, anything. He said, 'When the mail comes and you get nothing and you are over there, it's not a good feeling.'"

"[My husband] wrote us a lot. Even if it was short little postcards and things like that; just keeping the communication open."

Communicating with loved ones in a combat zone can be a challenge, especially if a service

Helping Children Before Deployment

Pre-deployment can bring about a unique set of challenges for families with children. Even before a family member leaves, it is important to prepare children for what is to come. Preparations include talking with children about the upcoming deployment, planning ways to stay connected while a loved one is away, and letting school staff and other caregivers know about the deployment.

"My son and I had a strong relationship. When I left, it was difficult for him, and I understood that."

Family Communication

Communication within the family is important. Talking with children before a loved one leaves will help them cope better during deployment.

"Don't try to hide anything, because the kids will know. They are smarter than you think...Talk about everything with your spouse and your children."

Some children may not want to talk about the deployment right away. In particular, young children may not understand what deployment means until the family member actually leaves. Children can be very sensitive, especially if they have separation problems or had problems with an earlier deployment. If a child becomes upset at the news of a loved one's deployment, parents should reassure the child that he or she will be cared for while their loved one is away.

"I know for the oldest one, she is so sensitive, she cried...She would be the one that you would think would understand because she was the oldest, but she couldn't understand why her mama had to leave again."

Many families build strength and resilience during deployment. Children may become more independent and responsible. Parents can encourage children's responsibility by giving them age-appropriate roles like helping to take care of a younger sibling, taking care of a pet, or doing helpful chores around the house.

"I told my son to be the man of the house. He is only 10, but he took that to heart. He took that as an honor. I told him, 'Take care of...the dog and take care of your mom and your sister.' And he said, 'I got it!'"

"The 15 year old...she begins to think, 'Well, I got to take care of my baby sister.' So she would get up, she would braid her hair, she would make her lunch [and] would add in little love notes...She became the mom."

Planning Ways to Stay Connected

Planning ways to stay connected with children should be a part of the pre-deployment planning. For families with young children (infants, preschool-aged children), making videos or DVDs of the deployed family member can help children remember their loved ones and "feel connected." The content can vary depending on the child's age. For young children, parents might read stories or sing songs. For older children, parents can tape messages for special occasions that they might miss like birthdays and holidays, or tape a special message to let the children know how much they are loved.

"The night [my husband] was leaving, I had him read bedtime stories into a video camera and I played that DVD on the way to daycare every morning for my son. He knew that was Dad...It made him remember."

U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Elyssa Quesada

Informing Others about the Upcoming Deployment

As part of the pre-deployment process, it is also important for families to let any organizations that care for their children know of the upcoming deployment.

"The people who spend a lot of the time with our children need to know what is going on, because...if they would see any change in the children, then they could let us know right away."

This includes informing daycare and/or the school system, as well as extra-curricular groups in which

the children are involved (such as Scouts, 4-H, sports teams, service clubs, etc.).

"It is very important to call the educators...and counselors...to let them know that [a loved one] is being deployed...just in case there are any signs that something may be going on. If they know this, then maybe they could relate it to that child's parent being deployed."

With this information, school personnel and other caregivers will know to pay extra attention to the children.

"I believe they need to reassure the student or periodically just check up on them and ask them how they are

doing. 'How is everything going? Are you guys doing okay? Is there anything we can do for you?'"

In addition, if problems arise with a child's behavior, an understanding about what the child is experiencing can help caregivers give better support to the child.

"Being a substitute teacher, I have had several children whose parents have been in Iraq or Afghanistan. They can [have] behavioral problems in the classroom, and I feel a lot of it is because they have anger and frustration and they are afraid...I think [teachers] need to know about separation with families. I would think that they would need to know about how children act out because they are angry that their parent is away."

Service members can help their families learn more about their job and military culture.



U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Daniel Gay

"I believe that the schools need to know if either the mother or father is deployed, because there is going to be a lashing out. I also think their counselors need to know about that."

Some schools may be used to working with military children. Others, however, may not have any systems in place to support military families. It will be helpful for parents to speak to school administrators about what support the school can offer the child and family during deployment.

"Your children may go to school where there is not a single military child. I think one of the biggest things in Florida, as far as challenges right now, is getting our education system to understand what

these military children are going through...I personally am having a really difficult time with my 5-year old. Dad comes home for a couple of days and then he is gone, and his teacher does not understand why his behavior becomes disruptive."

If the deploying service member is a child's parent or primary caretaker, it is important to work with the temporary caregiver(s) to make the transition easier for the child. This can include discussing the child's likes and dislikes (such as favorite foods, hobbies, and activities) and creating a plan that matches the child's normal routines as much as possible.

"We did have a lot of discussions about...the chil-

dren and the things that they liked and didn't like and the [activities] that they did."

"The needs of a 6-month old or a 1-year old are not the same as a 2-year old. It is...then trying to figure out, 'Okay, what are you supposed to be doing, and what is expected of me?'"

It will help to go over these plans directly with the child. The deploying service member should also talk to the child about rules and expectations during the time they are away.

"If I was a kid going to another home...I [would] have to know the do's and don'ts for that house. It may not be the same as my house...different sets of rules."





"I think families need to know that you can get through deployment, and that there are strengths that you have within you that you don't even realize."

Deployments are almost always challenging for service members and their families.

"We had just gotten married...and then he deployed...I felt like he was kind of ripped away from me."

"Definitely, the family goes through so much...One part of it is the soldier over there in Iraq or Afghanistan or wherever, risking their life, but a whole life has to go on back here, and you gotta continue to go on."

"Being away and separated from our families is

emotional for anybody. Even though we have to set our emotions aside sometimes to focus on the mission and to accomplish the mission, it doesn't mean that we are not feeling everything they would if they had to go."

In fact, deployments can be just as stressful for family members as they are for service personnel in the combat zone.

"I can only speak from a wife's perspective...we feel like we are left behind and we have to continue life without them. It was hard for me having to do everything."



"The serviceman or woman is deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan or wherever, but that family is owning their deployment as well. You feel like you are on a mission, too. I felt like I was in the service sometimes. I am like, 'Where is my uniform?'"

"Separation is the biggest thing...There is a loss that comes with that."

"[During] deployment, I watched the man I love very much leave, and there are just so many fears going through your mind - for him, for me back home. You question, 'Can you make it through that?'"

Yet, military families are resilient and often overcome many of the challenges deployment brings.

"I know I can do it. I know I can do everything. I have learned to do stuff around the house because I do not like to call for help...I have done hurricane shutters...I have changed windshield wiper blades on cars. I have taken care of a flat tire."

"I am a hell of a lot stronger than I ever imagined that I was. Not just physically, but mentally. I have always known that I can perform really well under pressure, but I was extremely tested during this last deployment, and I [now] know that I can handle a lot more than I give myself credit for."

Many families find that the time spent pre-planning pays off during deployment.

"Preparing three to four months before I deployed and having my husband take over all of the major responsibilities at home really helped...At the halfway point of my deployment, when I was really worried about how things were...[he] reassured me that, 'Remember, we went over this before you left.' I felt confident."

"I really think [my husband] appreciated [the pre-planning]...He could stay more focused on staying alive, keeping the other guys alive, staying in control, rather than worrying about 'Do I have to call her to see how [my son] is doing?'"

The path to overcoming challenges may not be easy. The stress of separation and worry about the safety of loved ones can take its toll.

"My logical side understands completely why they can't call sometimes...they are working hard over there. They are at war. I totally get that. But, my heart doesn't get it. The mom side is like, 'Why aren't you calling me? Can you call your mother every once in a while?'"

"You don't hear from them for one or two days and you are ready to freak. I had several times where I just lost it because I hadn't heard from [my husband] in days, and knowing what his job description was, which is clearing the roads for bombs, that doesn't help."

"Because I was separated from [my husband] for his birthday and for Christmas, Thanksgiving, and all of the really big holidays, the holiday season was extremely challenging for me during this deployment."

"I was very tired. I had a hard time...I would usually hear from [my husband] around 5:00am, and then I would feel okay to go to sleep. But then I had to get up at 6:00am to get ready for work. So I would only have an hour of rest...it affected me at work."

Positive coping strategies can help families deal with stress and worry.

"I realized that I needed to just be patient with myself and with him, because I knew that there would be

times that I wouldn't hear from him for whatever reason, and I just couldn't let myself get hysterical. So, I...paced myself a little better than I normally would. Not being so anxious, trying to meditate a lot. I know it sounds silly, but it works."

"I would go on the Internet [and] look at the different things out there related to deployment and read whatever little things that they had that would help out. I got a lot of information from that."

Taking time to relax will help you deal with stress.



"Become a volunteer in your soldier's unit to support other military families. It will be one of the most rewarding and comforting things you can do while your soldier is away."

"[At] church...we support each other with whatever; it could be marital problems, could be raising children problems, and we [draw] strength from each other."

"I talked with my friends and my family. My neighborhood that I lived in, a lot of my neighbors are cops and firemen...just awesome, amazing people...always

inviting me over for dinner or if they were going out I was always invited...so I wasn't alone and secluded."

"I would make care packages and mail it to [my kids]. Every other week I would mail them. I would send them pictures and coconut bread and different things that I knew they liked."

"I have a journal, so I would write down my feelings, which I think really helps you put things in perspective when you go back and read it. It makes you realize what place you were at and that time [will] pass."

"My way to deal with stress and worries is to exercise."

Sometimes, events happen that can be difficult to plan for ahead of time.

"The personal sacrifice for my family, I don't think you could ever measure...The tree falls during the storm when he is gone, the bathroom plumbing breaks, the teenagers are becoming girl crazy when Dad is gone, and Mom has to sit there and fight all of that. So there is a lot of hardship on the family back home."

"This last deployment was probably the hardest, because it is the first one where we were parents...that hit home a little bit more...that really resonated with my husband. It added to his stress."

"Dealing with the family issues was very difficult because we were taking care of [my husband's] elderly mother at the time...it was not until [the deployment] actually happened [that] she basically fell apart. It was very difficult, because I am the daughter-in-law, and we tried our best as a family unit to give her support, but it was so difficult."

Even the most resilient families may need help to get through a difficult period.

"I needed someone to be there for me...to guide me."

"I am pretty strong, so I will try to get through anything, but sometimes when you don't have that strength for your kids...that makes it hard."

Though the culture of military families is to be independent, there are supports in place in case families need help.

"People need to not be afraid to ask for help."

"There are resources out there you might tap into that will help you get through deployment easier."

"There was a woman at the Family Readiness Group...she was very supportive. She would email, she would call or you could call her."

"Believe it or not, the person I reached out to was my pulmonologist...He would give me exercises to help calm myself down with my breathing...it was kind of like meditation...I was able to relax through that. It is crazy. People are like, 'Who helped you?' And I'm like, 'My pulmonologist did.' You never know."

Just as service members look out for each other, military families must do the same. It can be helpful to talk to other military families who are going through or who have gone through similar challenges. They understand how you feel and may be able to help.

"It is the key. Your experiences are the same. You are sharing what another person went through."

"You are seeing it through the same eyes. You feel it through the heart."

"I went to my peers. They were very helpful to me. You need someone to hold you, day by day."

"It really helped to have people that had been through that before [because] they remember what it was like their first time being separated from their children or their spouse, and how trying that was...The veteran families embraced us...and really helped us."

"I see myself involved by trying to empower young families to seek help if they need it. If they are in distress...there should be someone they could talk to."

If you have not connected with other military families or feel like you do not have enough support, now is the time to find that support! Please go to the Resource Guide on Page 51 for providers who can assist with deployment challenges.

The following are some additional tips to help families during deployment:

Understanding Changes During Deployment

It is common for changes to occur on the home front while a loved one is deployed.

"For me, the more difficult thing was making certain decisions without [my husband]. We are so used to making decisions together, and a lot of them needed to be made right there on the spot without him saying, 'Go for it!' or him saying, 'No, I don't think you should do that.' There was no second opinion."

"The situation where you [become] a single parent...did more to make it a difficult situation than any other hardship I had during the whole [deployment]."

"Our daughter will be 15...and she is going to get her [driver's] license. [She] wanted her daddy to...teach her how to drive...and he is not going to be here...That is a big one with [my daughter]."

"Being alone was a big change. We used to go out on dates like every week...I had fun times with girlfriends, but...it is not the same."

Learning to cope with changes can help you navigate the difficulties of deployment.

"I remember spending my time...on the Internet with Marine Moms (www.marinemomsonline.net), so we would have that communication. I was reading their emails and I was saying to them how I felt and then they would return calls."

"That is why you need a support group. I needed a support group...If you have support, it makes it a whole lot easier to deal with the changes."

"It [was] very important...not to isolate myself...The family events...to be able to continue going to my brother's house for Super Bowl night and not stay at home...that helped me."

"In my case, it was going to church, lighting a candle, talking. Talking is important."

"I learned that I have to have faith and I have to trust God because...the mind is a battlefield."

"I just didn't think I was gonna be able to make it...So I drove us to Texas to go see my mother-in-law for

Thanksgiving and then my mom for Christmas...It was nice to have them to take care of [the baby] or kind of defer the load a little."

Some changes during deployment can be positive.

"I learned to be more independent without [my husband] there. I didn't realize how much I depended on him...until it was kind of changed around."

"The house stayed much cleaner. So when I would clean it, it would stay that way."

"Before I got married, my parents and I had a tradition where I would rent movies and eat pizza, so we reconnected that way."

"I became more mature, and so did my brother."

"I paid more attention to taking care of me when my husband was gone...I would exercise. I lost weight."

One of the lessons learned by military families is that deployment can be a time of exploring one's self and reinforcing strength of character.

"Even after you say you can't do something and you don't know how much more that you can take, there is a lot more that you can take and you can do it."



A United Through Reading (UTR) coordinator records a family reading a book to a deployed parent.

"I learned that I was stronger than I thought. I could handle more than I thought I could handle...I never thought I could be separated from [my husband]. And then, having to read in the newspaper that their unit was under attack and five were killed, and not knowing who the five were...until hearing from him...To know that I could be pushed to a point and still not break was just unbelievable."

"One of the things it taught me [was] that I could be there for [my son]...He called one time, in the middle of the night, and said one of his friends had been killed and he was so scared...So, I could be a mom

and stand up and be strong for him...even though I was afraid for him."

"I learned to be stronger than I used to be...I always wanted to be there for my daughter. I am glad I am able to help [take] care of [her] kids, because I know what it is to be bringing up kids without a father."

"I am a really, really strong person and I am a very compassionate person. I already knew those things. I knew I could keep putting one foot in front of the other and do what I had to do...[But] I learned above and beyond what I already knew."

Communication Tips During Deployment

Communication is an important tool that connects families with their loved ones overseas.

"Because [my family] didn't keep in contact that much...I would suffer. I would say, 'Hey, just write me back so I know everybody is okay.' And if nobody wrote back, then I started to get worried. I would go on a mission for two or three weeks and not call anybody because you really couldn't do that. So a lot of people automatically went from speaking to me every day to not speaking to me for weeks, and that made a lot of people scared, too. If you have communication, then all your fears are kind of settled."

Depending on the job, some service members are able to regularly stay in contact with their families.

"[My daughter] is a specialist, so she was on a computer 24/7. She was able to communicate with me all the time."

"The communication was great. We were lucky."

Other assignments make communication more difficult.

"[My son's] second deployment was a little better because he did have an opportunity to email. We were able to communicate at least every other day...However, there were times that I would go a week without hearing from him. That was the most difficult."

"I didn't hear from him like other wives did on a regular basis. I heard from my husband every three weeks or once a month, if I was lucky."

Many families use several different methods of communication during deployment. If something isn't working, try to find new ways that may work better.

"If you feel like you are not communicating, even while they are deployed, get help for yourself and learn how to communicate."



U. S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Mike Andriacco

"There was a Haitian woman that barely spoke English, and [I] reached out to her through another friend who spoke [Creole]...She didn't know when her son was coming in. She didn't have email. She wasn't getting the information that we were getting...Even though the letters were getting to her, she wasn't able to read them, and [her son] wasn't getting letters from her. So we would send care packages and have her sign them so that he would realize that they were coming from her...I think that it's something that the...soldier himself has to say, 'Listen, my mom or dad has this problem,' and they have to...reach out [for help]."

When families are able to connect with loved ones, it will help to keep conversations positive.

"When your loved one calls, you need to talk about positive things. Because if you don't, they can't concentrate and now you jeopardize the rest of the soldiers that are around them."

Here are some additional tips about talking with loved ones while they are deployed.

"Communicate as much as you can. [Service members] need to know that you are still there for them."

"I don't think you should hide what is going on back home, but it is almost like the whole work attitude. If you are gonna bring a problem to the boss, make sure you bring a solution. Don't dump all your problems on them overseas, because there is nothing they could do and it just frustrates them that they are not back home to be able to fix it. So one thing I try to teach to my families is that there are resources. If your pipes are breaking...talk to the plumber [and] set up a payment arrangement and then tell your husband, 'This broke, but I took care of it, and this is what we are gonna do.'"

"You have to come to the reality that your son or daughter is in a very dangerous place. However, you have got to be able to reach out to them and let them know that it is going to be okay...because we are here supporting you."

"Sometimes you have to listen and not say anything. Sometimes you have to be a sounding board and let them say everything that they want."

Helping Children During Deployment

When a parent or other family member deploys, that is when the reality of the event often “sinks in.” Children may have many emotions about the deployment, including the following:

- Feelings of loss and sadness.
- Missing the family member, including missing their participation in activities (e.g., attending sports and significant school events together).
- Worry about the service member's safety.
- Mixed feelings – such as angry that a parent had to leave, but sad that the parent is gone.
- Anxiety about being separated from the deployed family member (young children may cry, whine, or become very “clingy” and not want to be away from a parent or caregiver).

“My granddaughter...every morning I would take her to school, she would cry. She would say...‘I am not crying because I live with you, I miss my mom.’ ”

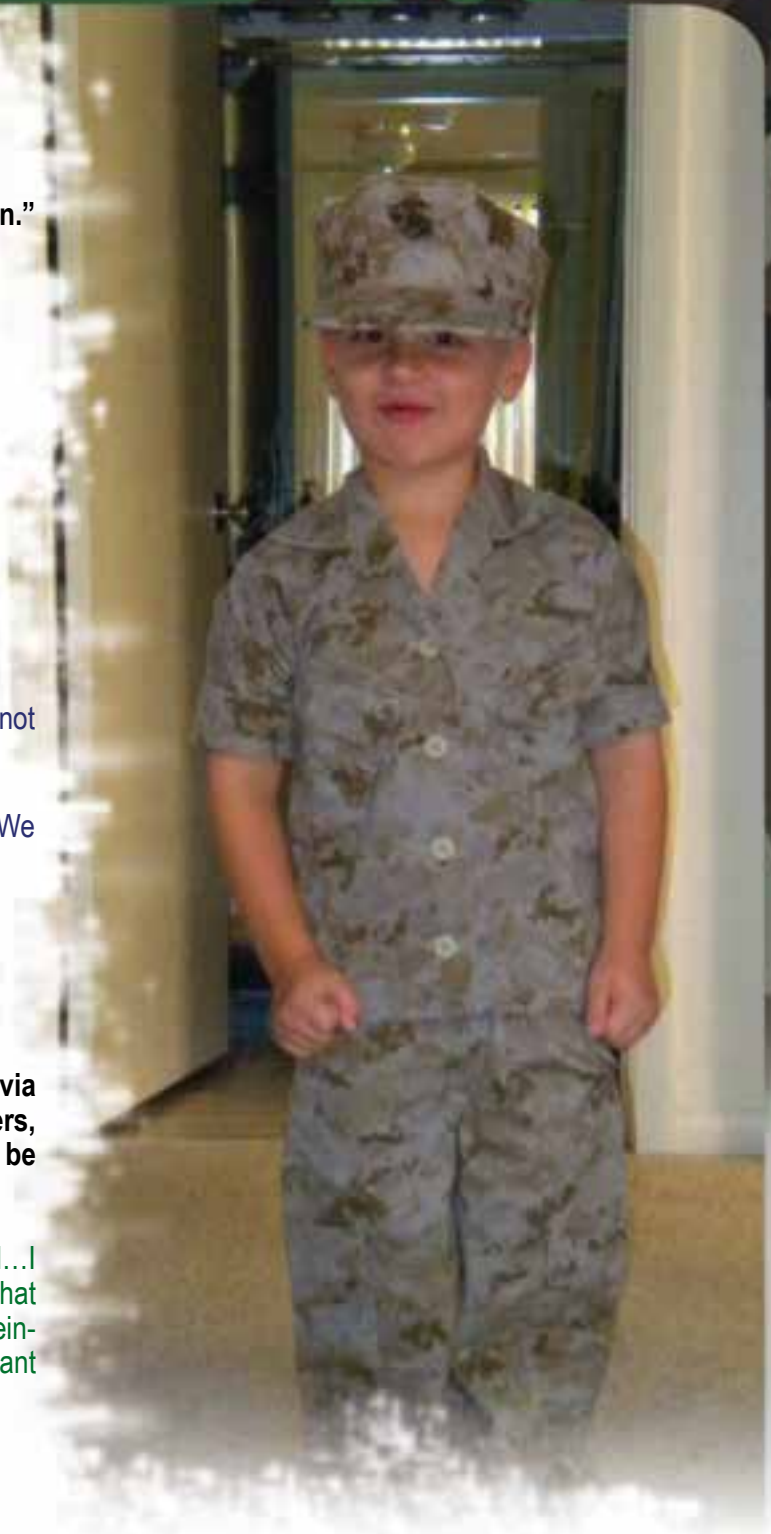
“The oldest one...would wake up in the middle of the night and say that she would have bad dreams. We would sit down and talk and then I would come to find out that it was all around her missing her mom.”

The following are several strategies that can help a child cope with deployment:

Staying Connected with the Deployed Family Member

It will help if children can stay in touch with the deployed family member. Communication via computer, phone, and “snail mail” can keep families in contact. Children can also write letters, send DVDs and photos, or start a family web page where messages, photos, and videos can be posted for the deployed parent.

“There was a service where I could pick any book and I could read to my son while being videotaped...I would send him a DVD of me reading different books, and the books would come home with him, so that he could read through the book while I was reading it on the videotape...that really helped me in the reintegration process...When I came home from the airport...he recognized who I was, and that really meant a lot to me.”



If possible, families should try to celebrate birthdays, holidays, and other significant events in children's lives with the deployed family member.

"We actually celebrated [our daughter's] birthday...over the computer...We had cake, we sang 'Happy Birthday'...and she absolutely loved it."

Talking and Listening To Children

It is also important for caregivers and family members at home to *speak with children and listen to their concerns*. Caregivers should keep lines of communication open so they know how a child is feeling. Additionally, it may help to find a special adult (such as an aunt, uncle, cousin, grandparent, or teacher) who can provide some extra support. Children can be on an emotional roller coaster at times, and the extra support can be very helpful to them.

"Be there for the kids...because it is very stressful on the kids."

"I would give them a hug and we would sit down and talk about it."

Helping Children Manage Their Stress

Most children are resilient and able to meet the challenges of deployment. Still, parents and other caregivers can do several things to help children cope with stress. See the chart below.

<i>Strategies that Help Children Manage Stress</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Maintain normal roles and routines	Children should have regular school and after-school schedules, assigned chores appropriate for the child's age, be able to see their friends, and enjoy fun activities.
Keep healthy and fit	Have children eat healthy foods, get regular exercise, limit TV and computer use, go to bed at a regular time, and have a bedtime routine that encourages sleep.
Share fun activities	Find ways for children and family members to have fun together, like going on special outings or playing games at home.
Avoid media that covers war or violence	Keep children away from violent TV and video games, especially any programs or newscasts about war. These may really upset children.
"Take care" of the caretaker	Parents and caregivers on the home front need to take care of themselves in order to help children. This means managing your own stress levels, getting support from other adults, and keeping healthy and fit.

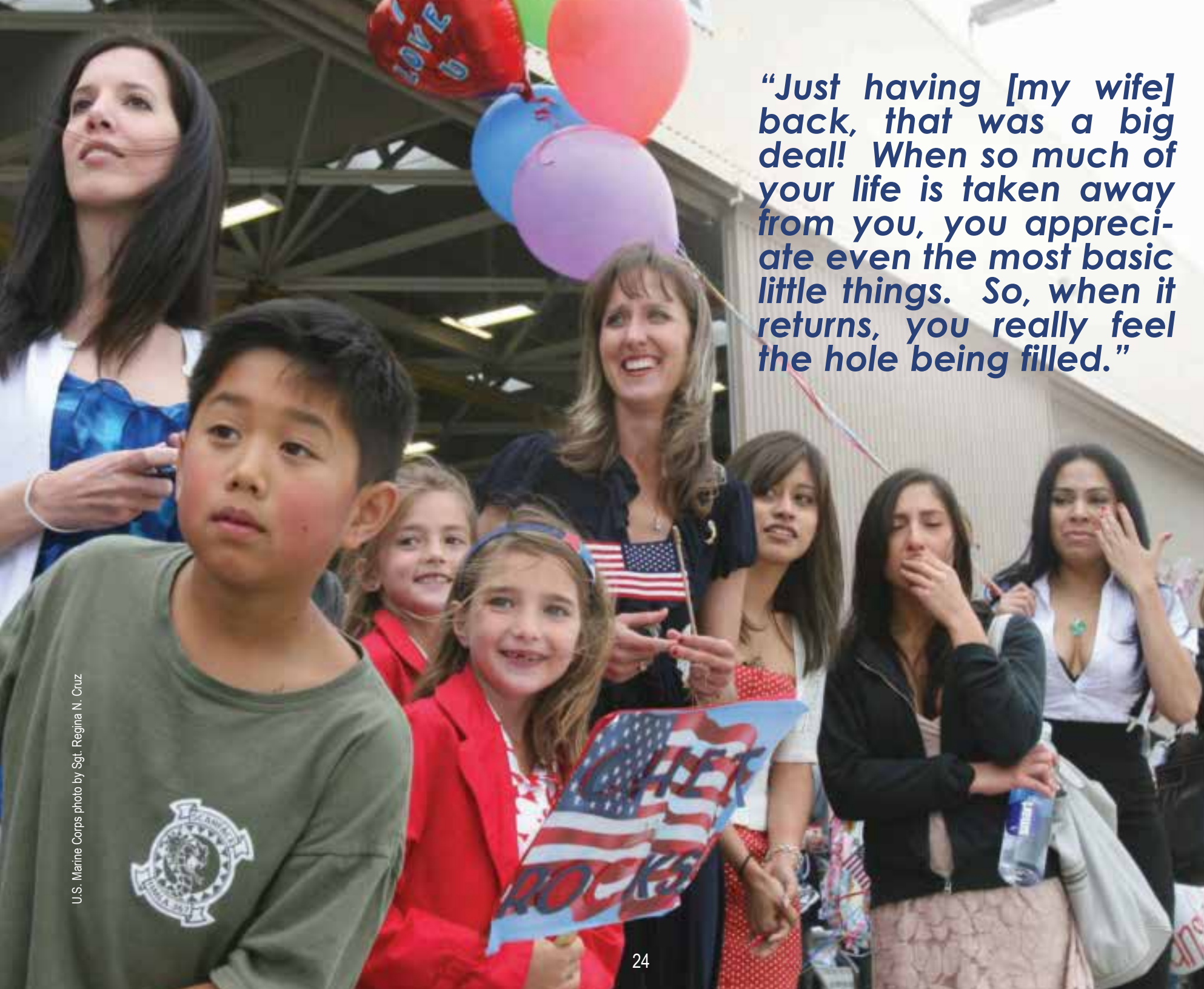
Separation Problems & Other Concerns: When to Seek Help

Sometimes feelings of loss, fear, anger, anxiety, or worry can continue for a long period of time and interfere with a child's daily life. For example, young children may develop separation anxiety. Such children fear separation from a parent or caregiver and they may refuse to attend school or spend time with friends. Preparing children for a parent's absence can reduce separation anxiety, as will having a predictable routine and a consistent caregiver. Whenever children's problems persist or interfere with their daily lives, consider seeking professional help.

Keep the Child's School and Teachers Updated

Parents and caregivers should keep teachers and other caregivers informed as to the progress of the deployment. It is important to let a child's teachers know about any significant events that happen during the deployment, so that they can also support the child. It is also a good idea for parents to reach out to teachers and other school staff if their child is going through a particularly difficult period.

"My mom was constantly talking to [my daughter's] teacher, so her teacher knew what was going on, and the counselors, too...They would speak to [my daughter] all the time because she would go into these sad moods...she would say she misses her mama, and the teacher would speak to her about it and encourage her...that was real helpful for us."



“Just having [my wife] back, that was a big deal! When so much of your life is taken away from you, you appreciate even the most basic little things. So, when it returns, you really feel the hole being filled.”

Once families receive notice that their loved ones will return home, they begin to focus on the homecoming.

"It was an 18 month ordeal, and we prepared for the homecoming. It was the waiting and the waiting to find out exactly what day he was coming in, because [my son] was sending me emails and the phone calls saying, 'Mom, you guys have got to be there.' "

The homecoming is an important event for returning service members as well as their families. The homecoming can be a very joyful time.

"I went and picked [my sister] up at the airport...She was back for good; she had finished her year. The kids were crying, and we hugged and we kissed – it was such a joy that I can't even explain it to you."

"I felt like for the first time in nine months...I could sit down and not worry about where he was. That was huge."

"When she got back, that [was] essentially Christmas and Thanksgiving...together. It [felt] festive in the holiday way, even though it was just May."

A variety of other emotions can be part of the homecoming experience as well.

"I didn't fly there to greet [my son], and I should have. Not knowing what his wife was up to, I just wanted them to be their little nuclear family when they got back...I didn't want to get in the way, I guess."

"One of the things that [my friend] remembers...is that nobody went [to his homecoming]. Nobody there. Nobody...He feels like nobody, not even his own

family, cares for him."

"Watching [my husband] get off the plane...I knew he was safe and sound. But then I kind of felt guilty because there were five less [soldiers] that were coming off the plane. That hit me at the moment."

Guilt is a strong emotion that family members can also experience. It can happen when a loved one comes home when other service personnel do not.

"I chose not to go to one of the funerals...I just could not bring myself to do it. Knowing that my husband was one of the ones alive was a guilt that I could not get over."



Volunteering for a cause can help family members cope with challenging periods.

It is helpful to educate yourself and other family members about how best to prepare for the homecoming.

"Know the resources before they come home. Educate yourself on what is available to you as a family so the soldier doesn't have to search for that when they get home...Attend all of the things that you can: the

reunion reintegration briefings, the Yellow Ribbon briefing...the family support groups. It doesn't have to be a clique, it doesn't have to be anything more than a referral and resource for you, but become a part of it so that you can get that [information]. Don't miss out on that."

To meet the needs of both family members and returning veterans, it is a good idea to discuss expectations before the homecoming.

"Just talk about the homecoming. I think that is the important thing."

"Discuss what everyone expects from a homecoming...I can't stress that enough. Don't have high expectations. The military person has just traveled through several countries and hours and hours to get home. They are probably going to be exhausted."

"That first night back, they may also want to go out somewhere and unwind or let go with their friends. Don't take that personally."

Service members may need to remind themselves about the deployment challenges that their families have faced back home.

"Service members...You are coming home to your spouse...and they have been doing it by themselves for months now. They are exhausted, too. They are just as exhausted as you are. So handle that situation very delicately. They need a break just as much as you do. And respect what they have done since you have been gone. Don't come in and change everything all of a sudden, because they have done a wonderful job."

Many families make special preparations and plan celebrations to welcome their loved ones home.

"We actually made his 'man room.' My husband always wanted an office...We bought furniture, we took his [awards]...had them framed, and we put them on the wall. We hung pictures of him when he first joined the military to present. So when he came home, he had his room that he could study in, read, he [could] play Star Trek."

"I [put in] an alarm system, because I had this feeling that he would be just really jumpy, so I tried to see if I could secure the house [to] make it safer for him."

"[My husband] cleaned the house...to make sure that it was ready for me when I got home."

"Just trying to make sure that the girl things were done...the manicure, pedicure, waxing. You just want to look your best."

Some families choose to have private homecoming celebrations while others enjoy celebrating in a more public way.

"When she came back, we prepared all the nice things that she likes, and we went to Virginia and waited for her. When she came home, she had some of her friends over and had a party."

"My neighbors...found out that [my husband] was back, so...constantly people were coming in and out of the house just for him. He said that he felt like a king."

"We got banners made up that said, 'Welcome Home!' and placed all of the yellow ribbons we had around the house...and we drove up to Mississippi to see him."

"I think that there are some things to keep in mind [when] making decisions about their homecomings, to think of the future impact...it is a personal thing when you have a deployed family member coming home...When it is on TV and the child is surprised by their dad in the classroom, for example, it might be great for a moment, but here is a boy that is vulnerable in front of the camera."

Whatever way your family chooses to mark the occasion, if you have children, try to include them in preparing for the homecoming.

"Have the kids help with everything that is going on...[My kids] were pretty much involved with it every step of the way...[helping with] little things around the house so their [dad] didn't have to worry when he got home."

"My sons came to the armory and helped me [put up] balloons."

Homecoming is more than the initial greeting of the service member. It involves the first few days and weeks that a veteran is home. During this period, families can help veterans relax and begin a transition back to life at home. To best assist, families should follow their loved one's lead. Sometimes what a family anticipates may be different than what a veteran wants or needs.

"We need to respect their silent moments...We need to respect also the things that they don't want to share and the things that they cannot share."

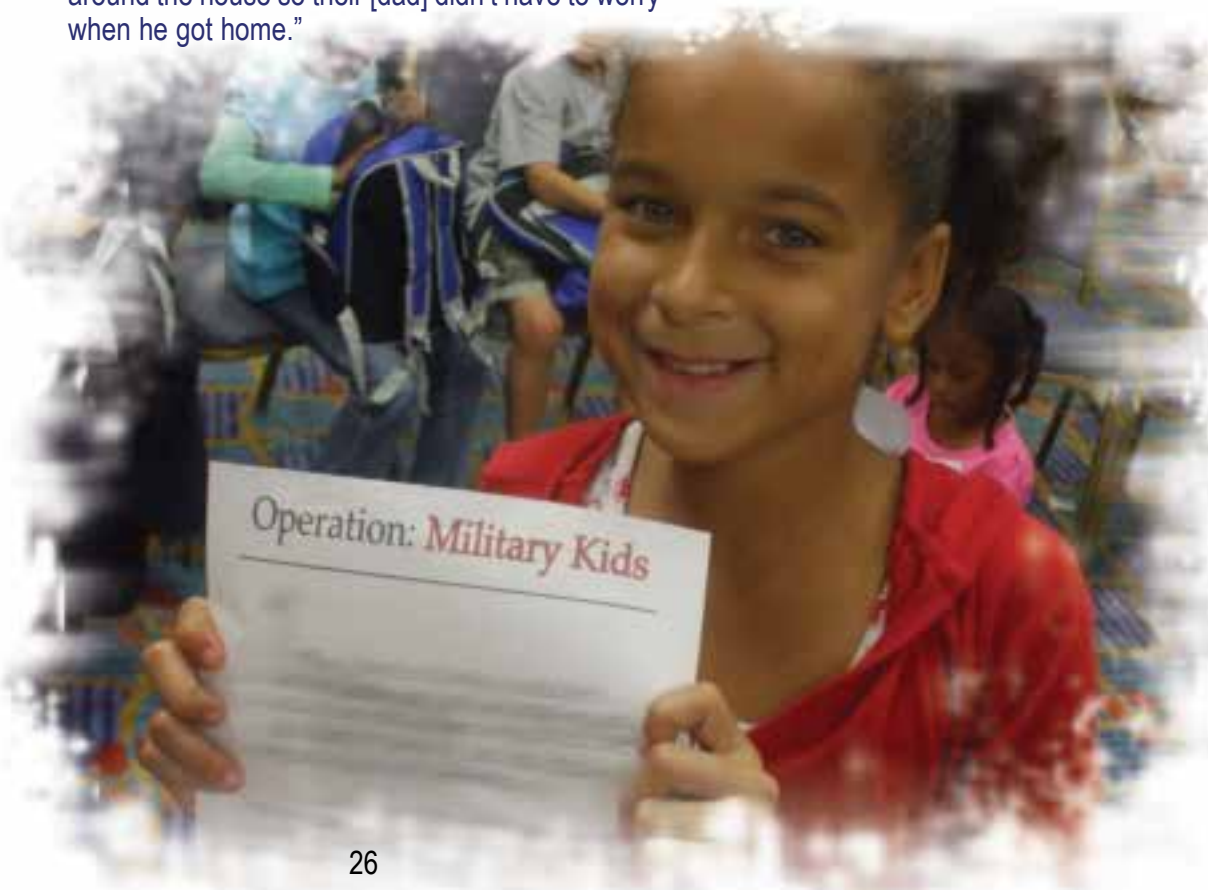


Photo courtesy of Operation Military Kids

"Let them come back to you their own way... They may need quiet time. They may need just to go to Dairy Queen and get ice cream, they may need just to hole up in the bedroom and sleep for a week, and just let them do that."

"Be really careful. If you have a big family like I do, and [your husband] is trying to sleep in, just try to make it as private as you can. It is between you and your spouse or just your immediate family."

"Give them some time to adjust. For the first few weeks, [my husband] really didn't want to see anybody. Even his own mom...He called and said he was home and everything, but he really didn't want everybody swooping in. He just needed quiet time for a little bit with me and our cats. Just take it one day at a time, very easy."

"Instead of overwhelming them, let them ease into it. Even if they don't want to talk to you about what happened over there."

It will help to have a warm, caring environment at home. This sets a positive tone for the veteran's long-term reintegration.

"You have to be there to support them. They don't need stress when they come home. They have enough to worry about."

"Any little bit that I could do to take care of the mountain of things [my wife] was going to have when she came back was a bigger present than anything I could have gotten her."

"We did a bunch of things throughout the house. We didn't want him to come back and worry about anything. All the repairs were taken care of, the lawn was cut...simple things...He could be home two or three months and not do anything."



U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Barry Bena

If you have children, it is a good idea to talk with them about what they can do to help with the homecoming.

"I tried to explain to [the kids] several things that I had understood would be helpful to [their father] – that was when he is sleeping, don't surprise him. When you are in the house, don't make loud noises that might startle him."

"I told my kids...you need to understand [Dad's] boundaries...and just kind of let Dad have his space. He is gonna have to adjust."

Here are additional tips from family members on how to prepare for and support the homecoming of a loved one:

- Be flexible; adjust the family's schedule to the veteran's needs.
- Be available to listen, but don't pressure the veteran to talk.
- Give the veteran some time alone to sleep, relax and reflect.
- Find time to enjoy the veteran's company and be together as a family.
- Allow some time for the veteran to process their experiences with other veterans.
- "Take charge" if necessary to give the veteran a break from responsibilities.
- Be sensitive to changes in the veteran's feelings or reactions.
- Prepare some of the veteran's favorite meals.
- Consider additional comforts such as playing soft music, taking hikes or walks in nature, etc.

U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Samuel Morse

U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Meghan J. Canlas



Settling Back In

"You go through this period of where everyone is euphoric. You are happy, celebrating that he is back. And then we even out."

When homecoming festivities wind down, families return to more normal routines. In the early weeks home, however, service members may need to continue to rest and take things easy.

"I think that's what happens; the lack of sleep that you have over there. You try to catch up."

"It was hard for him, and he just slept a lot. I knew that he was tired and I tried very hard to go watch

television in the other room while he slept and just let him rest."

Families may also need time to rest, relax, and reconnect with their loved ones.

"We were in our third year of marriage at that time, so it was a pretty brand new marriage. I think both of us, as a couple, did a good job at reconnecting again...I think that spending time together was important...going to church, getting involved in family events. That made the transition a lot easier."

Many families find it helpful to take a vacation or stay home and enjoy a "staycation" full of

relaxing and enjoyable activities. This can be a time to rebuild family and marriage bonds and create some special memories.

"Our key was going on a family vacation...We planned for it and we did it. We went to Costa Rica and had a good time."

As time moves on, service members begin returning to their day-to-day lives, including getting back into family, work, and community roles. This transition process is often referred to as "reintegration."

"I said, 'Let me give him a break for at least three months...because I don't know what it is like to be over there 24/7, having to constantly worry about your safety.' You know, it probably takes time to get your body and your mindset back to normal."

Some families find the transition goes quite smoothly.

"He was just acting really normal and I was like, 'This is weird. You just came back from Iraq, you know? Do you want to scream? Do you want to break some plates?'"

"Just being a family again. I think this one has gone smoothly, or if there are problems that she has directly related to the deployment, they were resolved rather neatly."

Other families report that challenges remain for months and sometimes even years.

"You spend the first two weeks on this high that they are home, and the pride and everything carries you through. But then it gets hard."

"When they come back from Afghanistan or Iraq, they are not the same person that you knew. They change and get very stressful. Like my sister has a lot of anxiety. She cannot be in a crowd. If she sees a crowd, I have to pull her away. Some people don't understand that."

"I think people see the military guys dressed in uniform and they see the Yellow Ribbons and nice [reunion] stories on CNN...They don't understand the different person that comes back to you...and how difficult it is for you to deal with those differences."

"It takes a while for you to come back and be okay, to get back in the swing of things...The problems that [service members] have over there continue when they get home...It is like you are trying to get on a train when it is already moving...It is tough."

For National Guard and Reserve veterans, the return to civilian jobs and community life can be challenging. This can be particularly true if there are problems in the workplace or if the family is experiencing financial difficulties.

"I think, as a Reservist, you put things into perspective because when you come back...you still have to go out and get a real job. You got to get up and do what you got to do."

"Reservists need to involve their families...The [family members] don't understand their life; they

don't understand the challenges. The only thing they see is that my husband, my son or daughter is back in one piece, and life is supposed to be great."

"When [my husband] started back at work, [he found] they had taken his job and split it and gave part of the responsibility to another person, and they put him in a cubbyhole...I think our job and careers are so much of a part of who we are, and you get back after you fought so valiantly and now somebody puts you in a cubbyhole...That is so wrong."

"When [my husband] came back, we were pretty good. But he started to see the money dwindling little by little, and there wasn't a job to transition into. So he spent a lot of time at home, looking for a job. That was one of the most difficult parts for us as a couple."

Part of reintegration involves returning to pre-deployment roles and responsibilities or developing new roles within the family.

"It was almost like a tug of war for power. 'Who is gonna be in charge? Who is gonna do what?' We did have a couple tiffs...I got used to certain chores when he was gone and he was like, 'You are doing this wrong. You are doing that wrong.' I was like, 'You have not been here for nine months and now you are trying to tell me how to do this.' It was hard for me. I didn't want to argue with him too soon."

"Understand that you have placed an unbelievable amount of confidence and a lot of responsibility on your family to take care of things while you are away. So...now that you are back...you should not feel like

[they are] incapable of handling it. That can especially make a spouse feel inadequate."

For veterans with children, stepping back into the role of a parent can bring another set of challenges. Parents may need time to realize that children have grown during the deployment and are now more independent.

"[My husband] left when our son was one year old and [when he returned], he would freak out that he was walking up the stairs in our house to the second floor. [My husband] would scream, 'He is gonna fall! Get him!' He is not gonna fall. He has been doing this for [several months] now."

"There was that readjustment and trying to figure out what her role was again as a mom and how much I needed to step back...There was me feeling like, 'Okay, is my job totally done? Or how much of me being a dad is still applicable and how much has she got to take over? I know she is the mom, but can I still leave him with her and stuff? Does she know what to do?' That was the big deal those first two weeks...what it meant that we had a mom again, and what were we supposed to do with her?"

"It is like hitting reset all over again and then trying to figure out, 'Okay, what are you supposed to be doing and what is expected of me?' You got to talk so much about the same stuff over and over again, and reestablishing what it means to be a mom and what it means to be a dad every time there is a deployment or a separation."

Parents and caregivers need to talk and work together to resolve any parenting issues that arise.

"The standards I had set for the kids was not up to my husband's liking, [who] is a lot stricter than I am. So then got into a balance-of-power thing with the discipline. It was tough. It was a big struggle."

"Everyone has a different way of raising children...I may have taught my nieces and nephews how to do something a certain way, and [my sister] would say, 'No, I want it done this way.' So I had to back off and realize that their mother is home and to let her run the show how she runs the show. It was a re-adjustment for me to step back...That was difficult, but we got through it."

As families reunite, family members are often interested to learn about their loved one's experiences during deployment.

"It was helpful for her to tell us what she had seen or heard, because that was a whole different world over there. So it helped us understand."

Families may especially want to know more about the veteran's experiences overseas if he or she is acting differently than before the deployment.

"I think it is important that we know a little bit of...what they experienced. We should know so that we know how to address certain issues if [they] need to be addressed."

Even though family members may be curious about their loved one's combat experiences,

it is important not to push a veteran to talk. Follow the veteran's lead and discuss the subject if and when the veteran brings it up.

"I advise [families] not to ask about [what happened overseas]...It took my dad all of these years to communicate about it. There are reasons. It is not for us to push. If it needs to be pushed, it should be done through a therapist who is trained to deal with it. There are steps to bringing information out. I know that from my childhood. I know that from my marriage. Things aren't just solved because you want the answer."

Some service members may not be allowed to talk about their combat experiences for security reasons. However, even when veterans are permitted to talk, discussing their combat experiences may not always be easy. Here are some tips on communicating with veterans about their deployment experiences:

• Discuss experiences when the veteran is ready and at the level of detail the veteran chooses.

"Don't ask them about what they went through. Let them tell you...I told [my daughter], 'When you are ready, you can tell me.' [Families] always want to know, but let them come to you and tell you."

• Veterans may choose to share their experiences a little bit at a time. Families need to be patient and let veterans speak when they are ready.

"Just be patient...it is more about letting them get it across to you however they feel most comfortable."

• Understand that the veteran may not want to discuss combat experiences for fear of upsetting the family or bringing back bad memories.

"Even to this day, every now and again, [my husband] would get a nightmare. It would come when...the subject of Iraq would come up in conversation."

• Veterans share a common bond. Because of this, veterans may want to talk about combat experiences with other veterans rather than with family members.

"They are the ones that can share the part of [my husband's] life that I cannot...They can relate. They have walked in each other's shoes. When [my husband] is having one of those really bad moments, only another [veteran] can really understand. It is like me with the other military wives, there are things I can share with them that I can't discuss with my sisters...And that is the same thing with his military buddies."

"There are no other people that understand at the same level that they do. [Veterans] don't have to make efforts to explain because when you sit with civilians like me...it doesn't have the same meaning. But when they talk to their peers, they understand. The feelings are there; the connection, the language is there."

In addition to the challenges of returning to everyday life, many families must also learn to cope with stress reactions carried by the veteran or other family members.



It is normal for people to have reactions to stressful situations such as deployment and reintegration. While some families find that deployment and reintegration go smoothly, others experience stress reactions that may cause concern. This section explores some common reactions to stress and responses to trauma reported by family members and OEF/OIF veterans. This section also provides advice on how families can identify reactions and what they can do to help themselves and others to cope.

Stress Reactions in Family Members

Deployment and reintegration often bring additional stress to military families. It is common for family members to experience reactions to the additional stress. Some common stress reactions reported by family members include sleeplessness, anxiety, feeling down, and a general feeling of being overwhelmed.

"I am just a big bundle of nerves all the time."

"A lot of stress; it was very bad...I was 130 pounds and I am 147 now...I tried to do things in the house to keep me busy. I cook, I clean, I do everything, but I don't feel comfortable and I am very depressed."

"I lost weight because I lost my appetite."

"I had anxiety because I was concerned about his reintegration."

"I got really stressed out, and when I stress out, my hair falls out. So my hair started falling out in certain areas."

"We noticed that [my son's] grades started to slip a little because he was not at a point where he was concentrating."

Positive coping strategies can help family members deal with stress.

"I have walking partners...every morning I walk from 5:00a.m. to 6:30a.m. It is for my health."

"We really tried to focus on the things that we could be

grateful for...focused on more of the positives."

"We would go to veterans' parades. We would go to things that really helped us see what the benefit [of our sacrifice] was."

"I reached out to people. I found that if I talked about it, there was someone that was able to give me some advice; something that I may not have thought about. 'Why don't you try this' or 'I know a person who may be able to help you with that.' Just little simple things that helped out."

"I [took] a little vacation at times...just for a day or two mostly, sometimes for two weeks. Not because I don't love him or miss him when he is gone, but so I can just kind of do my own thing."

Positive Strategies for Coping with Stress

- Spend time with family and friends.
- Focus on the positive things in your life.
- Listen to soothing music; meditate; practice yoga.
- Take a break from everyday activities.
- Share feelings with someone you trust.
- Help others in need.

Usually, stress reactions last for a short amount of time, such as a few days or weeks. However, if stress reactions last for an extended period of time (one or two months) or interfere with normal activities, then it is important to speak to a mental health professional. Please see the Resource Guide on Page 51 for suggestions on available providers.





Understanding Veterans' Responses To Trauma

It is common for veterans to have responses to trauma as a result of their experiences during deployment to a combat zone or being involved in or witnessing a traumatic event during their deployment.

"[My son] said he got nervous when people got around him. So I guess that would be one of the triggers. When people got too close to him, he would have an anxiety attack or it would make him nervous, he would say."

"Her moods – one day she could be happy, then mad, then frustrated...So whenever she would have these moods, we would just give her some time."

For example, many OEF/OIF veterans have reported troubles with sleep – either problems getting enough sleep or sleeping too much.

"[My husband] had a real hard time sleeping. His pattern was awful. He maybe got four hours of sleep at night...The sleep deprivation then caused other problems because he was easily agitated."

"[My husband] wanted to sleep all the time. And to me, I was like, 'Come on. Let's go out. Let's walk.'"

Driving-related issues are also commonly reported by OEF/OIF veterans.

"He was driving, and I was trying to explain how to turn into a Wal-Mart parking lot because he had never been there, and instead he turned into a dealership and he just lost his mind. He got so upset and just so angry...I think he was in his own world at that moment, and that did scare me."

"I was like, 'You tell me I drive like Grandma Moses and now you are telling me I drive too fast.' [My husband] is like, 'I am used to driving like three miles an hour in the Humvee because they are looking for explosives, so they didn't go that fast.' For nine months he was driving like that and then we get into a vehicle here, and 40mph, 50mph, 60mph on the highway was a bit much for him."

Trauma responses can vary from veteran to veteran. They may be different at various times in the reintegration process. Responses may occur within a few months after return from deployment or may not surface until years later. Because of this, it is important that family members pay attention for an extended period of time to a veteran's responses to trauma after he or she returns home.

"What about the unseen injuries and what about those things that are going to crop up two years from now? So, it is like long term...They may not manifest for a while. They may sort of lie dormant, but it doesn't mean that they are in any way less related to that deployment and that service. Because people like to say, 'Well, that person served two years ago, so he should be fine.'"

Understanding How Veterans' Responses To Trauma May Impact Families

Military families can be greatly affected by a veteran's responses to trauma. Not only can a veteran's responses be a major source of stress for the family, they may have a large impact on the daily lives of family members as well.

"Any time the family is sleep deprived, it affects us all. I was grouchy, he was grouchy."

"He drives very fast. One day he was driving 100 miles an hour. I started crying because I got very scared."

Sometimes a veteran can be overly protective in a way that is more extreme than how he or she acted prior to deployment. This "over protection" may reflect the veteran's safety concerns, but when it disrupts family life, it can be a sign that a veteran is having difficulty coping with his or her traumatic experiences.

"[My husband] was kind of paranoid...He would be up late and he would always be saying, 'You can't go out. Like, I want you here.' I understand that now."

"I went to get a glass of water and there was a chair under the front door...lodged under the knob. I was like, 'What is this?' And [my husband] is like, 'Oh, I just put it there.' I said, 'Don't do that again. There is nothing happening here. Nothing is going on. We are fine.' And after that, I never saw the chair again."

Family members who are exposed to a veteran's symptoms of anxiety and depression over a period of time may develop similar symptoms themselves.

"When [my husband] came back injured, my whole world turned around. I gained 70 pounds...I was stressed. I was told I went into the second stage of menopause without going into the first. I didn't sleep. They had me on sleeping pills."

Because of this, family members should learn about some of the more severe responses to trauma that veterans may experience.

"I think it is important that we know a little bit of everything that [veterans] might experience. We should know so that we [can] address certain issues...I think that is very important."

"[Families] should be able to notice, so if they see any signs, they could take action to help."

When Symptoms Persist

Many veterans will be able to deal successfully with their responses to trauma over time.

"When [my husband] first came home...if he would hear planes coming over, it would startle him a little bit. It has gotten better now."

But some veterans may have difficulty coping with their experiences.

"I started to see a son that was like a stranger. Like, he was not the [son] that I said goodbye to [before deployment]."

When trauma symptoms last more than one or two months, become worse over time, or greatly impact the veteran's or family's daily lives, it is important for the veteran to get professional help. If not properly addressed, responses to trauma can progress to more serious psychological disorders such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression, and even thoughts of suicide.

The next few pages describe PTSD, depression, and suicide risk factors in more detail. We have also included some information on Traumatic Brain Injury, as this often-hidden physical condition can greatly impact families.



What Is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

PTSD is a disorder or group of symptoms that can develop after a person experiences a traumatic event. A person who develops PTSD typically has gone through a life-threatening event, experienced harm to themselves, or witnessed others being harmed or killed. Although PTSD symptoms usually begin within three months of a traumatic event, they may also emerge much later, particularly in combat veterans. Symptoms lasting more than a month may indicate PTSD.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, individuals who have been exposed to a traumatic event and develop PTSD display symptoms from the following three categories: Re-experiencing, Avoidance, and Hyperarousal.

Symptoms of Re-Experiencing

Symptoms related to re-experiencing a traumatic event include:

- Repeated, disturbing thoughts.
- Nightmares.
- Flashbacks (a feeling of going back in time and reliving the event).
- Physical reactions (pounding heart, rapid breathing, nausea) and/or emotional reactions (angry, fearful, moody) to reminders of the event.
- Mental exhaustion (difficulty remembering, concentrating, making decisions).

Nightmares:

Veterans may re-experience traumatic events while sleeping, in the form of nightmares. Nightmares of this nature are often frightening for veterans to experience and disturbing for family members to observe.

"Most of the times [in his nightmares], he would be yelling 'Incoming!' and trying to avoid rounds coming in at them...I knew what it was, but I was more in denial that this was happening to him. Of all the people, not to him! Then, it kind of hit me just how bad it was for him."

"I observed the way he slept and the nightmares he had...[He] was running in bed...hands to his side, almost in a military position."

In extreme cases, there have been reports of serious injury while a veteran is having a nightmare and unknowingly grabs a weapon or physically harms the person sleeping next to them.

"Once...when he was having a nightmare...he was reaching and I didn't know what he was reaching for. I guess he was trying to grab whatever gun he could find to protect himself...That was the point that I made sure that there weren't objects around the bed that would become a danger for me."

"One time, my son actually tried to choke [his wife] during one of the bad dreams, and I said, 'You need to go talk to somebody.'"

Flashbacks:

Flashbacks are another way of re-experiencing past trauma. Flashbacks typically happen without warning, are uncontrollable, and in some

cases, painful. Veterans report that during a flashback, they feel like they are "taken back in time" and are reliving the traumatic event as they experienced it during their deployment.

"I can remember [my son] out in the yard one day. I don't know why, but for whatever reason, he was crouched down in a position, as if he was about to go into battle. And I was like, 'What are you doing?' He said, 'Oh, you forget that is what we did. That is what we trained for.' He was still in that mode."

For some veterans, flashbacks can be brief and disorienting.

"There was one time that I went to LA Fitness and I had a flashback. It wasn't even like a flashback that was a horrible flashback, it was just like I was back in the gym in Iraq and I walked up to the refrigerator and snatched a Gatorade and walked out. But I didn't realize what I did until I got to the parking lot. In Iraq, you take the Gatorade and walk out....So I had to go back in there and say, 'Hey, I am sorry. I just wasn't in the right mind at the time.' I didn't go into detail. I just gave them the money and kept moving."

For others, flashbacks can bring about a very real and present sense of danger. These types of flashbacks can be frightening for veterans to experience as well as for family members to witness.

"[My son] took me to the Grand Canyon...We were [driving] into the Canyon and he felt he was going into a situation that was unsafe...it was a winding road and we had no communication...I said, 'This is so beautiful!' and he said, 'Beautiful? This is risky. Mom, you don't know what you are talking about.'...He starts talking to himself...He was having

a flashback...I [was] trying to calm him. So, he said, 'The radio is not functioning. How are we going to communicate?'...I tried to converse with him about something else, but it was not helping. He kept on yelling...It is something that is difficult for me to understand because I never heard that voice before...Finally, he said 'We need to overnight this. We cannot continue driving.' I said, 'Okay. Let's go to the next stop.'

Flashbacks can occur as a result of a noise, sight, sound, or smell that reminds the veteran of past traumatic experiences. These reminders are often called "triggers."

While everyone has their own unique triggers, here are some triggers commonly reported by OEF/OIF veterans:

- Fireworks.
- Balloons popping.
- Anything that sounds like a gun or explosion (car backfiring).
- Movies, TV, or Internet scenes related to war, violence, and/or explosions.
- Airplanes (sound of engines).
- Objects on the side of the road.
- Smells of diesel or garlic.
- Traffic jams with no movement, especially under bridges or between high rise buildings (Ex. Downtown Miami or Ft. Lauderdale).

"The loud noises thing creeps me out. I am conscious of it and I definitely don't like anybody sneaking up behind me. It is worse now, more than ever...I hate New Year's Eve."

"If [my sister] is in a crowd, it occurs...You see her eyes pop and she will just step back. I will ask her if she is okay, and she will say, 'I can't go there.'"

"Seeing the C-130s...they are a trigger for me...That is the plane that they used on the ramp ceremony."

"There were sounds. I can't remember in particular what they were, but I think it was a commercial that was on TV...Every time the sound came on...my husband would ask, 'What is that?' without realizing it is a commercial."

Many veterans report fireworks as a key trigger to their flashbacks. This is because fireworks sound like an incoming round of ammunition.

"On the 4th [of July], I stay inside the house...You know how everybody goes outside and sees the fireworks, I won't do that. I will watch the TV instead...the fireworks remind me of the mortars."

"If I hear anything loud, like on the 4th of July, oh, my God. I had earplugs in and the noise-canceling headphones, and I could not stop the noise...I am in [my room] crying. It was so horrible."

It is important for both veterans and their family members to identify the triggers that set off flashbacks or produce upsetting feelings.

"When he gets out and the traffic is bad, that is a trigger for him to have a terrible feeling that something is going to happen."

"Going to the Air and Sea Show a month later was not the smartest thing to do because when the first set of planes flew over, [I] hit the ground, not remembering that it wasn't Iraq any more."

"I can't watch any war movies, anything like that. I wanted to see *Iron Man*...In the first opening scene, there is a Humvee getting blown up...and that was the last scene from my first deployment...so I can't watch anything like that."

Symptoms of Avoidance

Avoidance means staying away from reminders of a traumatic event. Symptoms related to Avoidance can include:

- Staying away from thoughts, feelings, or conversations related to the trauma.
- Staying away from people, places, or events that are reminders of the trauma.
- Having difficulty expressing feelings (laughing, crying, loving).
- Feeling "different," disconnected from others, or no longer able to relate to others.
- Feeling strong guilt, depression, or worry.
- Losing interest in activities that were enjoyable in the past.
- Having trouble remembering the traumatic event.

People suffering from PTSD often stay away from reminders of their traumatic experience. Reminders of a traumatic event can be physical in nature, such as a person, place, or object. Some reminders may not be so obvious, such as a veteran's thoughts or feelings.

"To get to the backyard, there is a wooden fence that is about eight feet tall, and you can't see over it. You have to go through the breezeway to get to the backyard, and that was a problem. [My son] said, 'I don't know who is in the windows or who is on the roof.' So, he didn't feel comfortable going through the breezeway at that point."

"When [my husband] was having the anxiety attacks...it was because he got nervous when people got around him... He rarely left the house...I would say to him, 'What is going on? I notice that you don't go anywhere.' He would say, 'People are enemies, and I don't know who my enemies are.' "

Some veterans with PTSD report feeling "numb" or unable to experience normal feelings (such as happiness or anger). This happens when veterans shut down their feelings to protect themselves from experiencing emotions related to the traumatic event.

"I had nothing to give, mentally, physically."

"Usually it is when [my wife] has this sad face on and she is far away. I ask her, 'What are you thinking?' "

Family members may feel hurt or rejected if a veteran withdraws emotionally or disconnects from family life and activities they once enjoyed.

"[Our son] was very absent. Like, he wanted to sleep, he wanted to be in the dark, he didn't want to see anybody, and every time that we would go out, he was very jumpy."

"We are a pretty loud family...and [my sister] was pretty rowdy and loud, too. But, when she came back home, she was a "no noise" type of person. She didn't like noise too much."

Veterans and families can work together and seek professional help to deal with the changes in their lives caused by avoidance symptoms.

"When we go out, and if the line has a lot of people, usually that is when he is like 'No.' So...I take him away from the crowd and we will go sit somewhere and talk and when the line goes down, we go back."

Symptoms of Hyperarousal

Hyperarousal involves the person feeling "on guard" or "on edge" most of the time. Symptoms of hyperarousal include:

- Being easily startled.
- Feeling tense, nervous, anxious, jumpy.
- Constantly scanning surrounding areas for danger.
- Having difficulty sleeping.
- Having angry outbursts.

A veteran experiencing hyperarousal almost always seems "on edge," jittery, or on the lookout for danger. Because their stress is almost constant, the veteran can feel like a pressure cooker and "let off steam" in the form of sudden, angry outbursts.

"[My husband] couldn't sleep. He was having very tough times... he had a lot of anger. He was very violent."

"I think that his post-traumatic stress manifested in his driving more than anything...I noticed that when we went out, he would be on edge. He always seemed to kind of tense up...if anything didn't go right or if someone cut him off, he would immediately become enraged. He would lose his mind for like 30 seconds, and once he realized that frightened me, he tried to get control."

Because they feel tense and are always "on alert," many veterans find it difficult to relax or to fall or stay asleep.

"[My son] unfortunately would stay up for two or three days at a time, where he could not sleep. So, he is up and down in the house, and it gets to a point where you have to get up and say, "Are you okay?" He would say, 'I am fine. It is just that I can't sleep.' "

Another sign of hyperarousal is when veterans have extreme "startle" responses to unexpected events, such as loud noises or a tap on the shoulder.

"Any little noise that my son hears, he will jump."

"[My husband] is kind of paranoid...We had a balloon and our son popped it and he freaked out."

Symptoms of hyperarousal can be very difficult for military families because they may cause arguments, tension, and stress within the family. Both family members and veterans may benefit greatly from seeking professional help for these symptoms of PTSD.

Only a mental health professional can diagnose PTSD. However, families can play an important role in recognizing symptoms and getting their loved ones to find help.

"Learn about PTSD; know what the signs are so you can reach out and get help."

For more information on symptoms of PTSD, go to: <http://www.ptsd.va.gov>.

Understanding Depression

Another significant type of trauma response seen in veterans, as well as family members, is depression. In fact, studies show that the rates of depression in military spouses are similar to those found in veterans.

In life, everyone experiences events that may leave them feeling sad or upset. Often, these feelings are temporary and improve with time. Feeling sad or "blue" does not mean a person is depressed. Depression is a serious condition that affects a person's body, moods, and thoughts. It interferes with a person's everyday life and gets in the way of their personal relationships.

On the next page are some signs of depression. If someone you know has experienced at least five of these symptoms for two or more weeks, they may be suffering from depression.

"Depression...is out of the ordinary. People are not themselves anymore – withdrawn from the family, withdrawn from community things, withdrawn from work."

"Signs of depression - not wanting to talk, not wanting to communicate, talking about death, violent behavior, outbursts."

Signs of Depression

- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed.
- Difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions.
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much.
- Persistent headaches, chronic pain, or digestive problems.
- Changes in appetite and/or weight (gain or loss).
- Change in work performance or attendance (missing deadlines, calling in sick, decreased involvement with coworkers).
- Feelings of hopelessness.
- Feeling sad or blue.
- Feeling angry, agitated, irritable.
- Feeling worthless or hopeless; extreme guilt. A negative outlook on life.
- Restless. Overly worried or anxious.
- Lack of energy. Feeling tired all the time.
- Lack of sex drive or sexual difficulties.
- Thoughts of suicide or death.

Depression can develop as a result of PTSD or occur on its own. Depression is thought to be caused by biological changes in the brain that happen when someone experiences a lot of stress. Depression can happen to anyone, and is the most common type of psychological condition among adults worldwide. There is nothing “weak” about having depression. If someone has experienced high levels of stress, they are at risk for depression, no matter who they are or how strong they may be.

“I realized that grown men could be taken down mentally....that your entire life, your entire mindset can change over six months. I never thought that six months could really alter your brain. A traumatic experience like that brought me into reality to see that.”

What Does Depression Feel Like?

People who have depression tend to “see the world through dark colored glasses.” In other words, everything may seem gloomy,

pessimistic, and hopeless. They may say statements like:

“Nothing will ever be the same.”

“I feel like a complete failure.”

“Everything I do goes wrong.”

“No one understands me or really cares about me.”

“There is nothing good for me in my future.”

If you think someone may be suffering from depression, the most important thing you can do is assist that person in getting help. Like other conditions such as diabetes or heart disease, depression often requires professional attention and treatment. Encourage the person to see a health or mental health professional as soon as possible.

“I would give the kind of support they needed. Sometimes people might need some counseling to help them out, and I would encourage it.”

Depression can be treated with medication, counseling, or a combination of both. Often, the combined treatment is most effective. Counseling helps individuals become more aware of their thoughts, feelings, motives, actions, and perceptions. It can also teach helpful ways to cope with stressful events. With the assistance of a mental health professional such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, or counselor, individuals can become more aware of their thinking processes and the issues that affect them.

“They had other veterans there who also spoke to us and other spouses that spoke to us, and I think that really helped.”

Military personnel and their families are at risk for depression because of the distressing nature of their job and the many life disruptions they endure. Unfortunately, few people talk about depression, so many who are suffering feel like they are alone.

Understanding Suicide

"Suicide is a bigger thing than most people realize, and they need to be more aware about it. It is very real."

Depression is a common reaction to trauma and one of the most dangerous. If left untreated, depression can cause long-term problems and, in severe cases, can be fatal. Approximately 15% of people with severe clinical depression attempt suicide (source: Wellness Council of America). This number can be higher among service personnel and their families.

"I have friends who have [committed suicide] or attempted to do it. I know it is real. I know it is not made up and I know it is a possibility and it can happen. I understand."

Although recent media reports have headlined Army-related suicides, the fact is suicide is a risk in all of the Armed Services branches.

"Whenever I hear about suicide in the military, I always think that it is an Army problem, but I know it happens in the Air Force [also]."

People in need of assistance often do not openly ask for help. Because of this, it is important that you become familiar with suicide risk factors, learn to recognize warning signs, and know what to do if a loved one needs help.

"It is a very serious thing. My husband had an 18-year old that hadn't even been deployed yet, [and he] committed suicide this past year. We also had

a Navy sailor that didn't want to deploy again. [He was] expecting his first baby. He just committed suicide three months ago."

Suicide Risk Factors

Service personnel are at risk for suicide because they have access to lethal weapons and are frequently involved in high-danger situations. However, people who experience any of the following also are at an increased risk of suicide:

- A traumatic event, such as combat.
- Severe depression.
- A life-changing stressor (e.g., loss of job or relationship).
- Death of a loved one, especially if by suicide.
- Previous suicide attempts.
- Exhibiting rage, anger, or severe irritability.
- Using drugs or alcohol in excess.

"One [suicide] was a few months after he got home. As a matter of fact, there was one just as recent as July this year. There was another one that attempted suicide a month right after that."

Close family members and friends are often in the best position to look for signs that someone may be becoming a risk for suicide.



Signs That Someone May Be At Risk For Suicide

- Increase in use of drugs or alcohol.
- Isolation and withdrawal.
- Change in mood, especially increases in anger/irritability.
- Feeling hopeless and depressed.
- Increases in impulsive and risk-taking behavior.
- Rigid thinking, believing there are no solutions and that nothing will help (or feeling trapped).

Additional Risk Signs For Youth

- A stressor that is very important to the child or adolescent (e.g., failing a test, a breakup, an argument with parents).
- Increased risky behavior, especially with peers.
- Breaking rules, leaving school, running away.
- Focusing on death, death-related music and art.
- Extreme anger, irritability, increasing opposition with adults.

If you suspect someone may be suicidal, here are some things you can do to help that person:

Ask Questions: Ask the person if something is bothering them. If the person is refusing to talk or is evasive, continue to ask questions that will help reveal what's troubling him or her.

Listen: If someone close to you is suicidal, you need to let that person talk. Let that person express how he or she is feeling. Listen for clues as to their intentions in how they speak.

Be Direct: Do not be afraid to ask the person directly if he or she is planning on committing suicide. Using the word "suicide" will not increase the chances that someone will take their own life.

Encourage The Person To Seek Help: All suicidal thoughts are serious and must be treated as such. Encourage the person to seek help immediately from a counselor or other health professional.

Safeguard The Area: Encourage the person to give up anything they could use to hurt themselves, such as a gun, knives or other sharp objects, pills, etc. By removing these items, you may reduce the possibility of an impulsive suicide and will also show your concern for the person.

Warning Signs That Someone May Be Planning Suicide Soon

- Talking about death.
- Making threats about suicide or statements about death and dying.
- Having a plan for committing suicide.
- Obtaining materials, tools, weapons necessary to attempt suicide.
- Making plans or arrangements for death (e.g., changing a will, saying goodbye, etc).
- Giving away belongings.

Recognize Suicidal Statements

Learn to recognize statements that could signal someone is thinking of suicide. Below are some common statements that people at risk for suicide may say. The next time you talk to someone who may be suffering from depression or is at risk for suicide, listen for the following:

"I feel trapped."

"There is no way out."

"I can't take the pain any more."

"Nothing will ever get any better."

"There is no reason to live."

"I can't make myself feel better."

"My life is ruined."

"Nothing will ever be the same anymore."

"No one loves me."

"No one would care if I wasn't around."

"No one even notices that I am here."

"Pretty soon it won't matter anymore."

"She would say things like, 'You know, I am just tired of being here. Sometimes I just am tired of living.' Little things like that. That kind of scared me."

"He says to me, 'I can't do this anymore...If I went away, no one would miss me.' That bothers me."

If someone you know is about to commit suicide, it's not too late to call for help!

What To Do In A Crisis

Find Help Immediately:

Take the person to a local Emergency Room, a local community mental health agency, a family physician, or a crisis center. In an emergency, call 9-1-1 or a suicide prevention hotline immediately.

Veteran's Suicide Hotline: 1-800-273-8255
or
1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

Closely Monitor The Person:

Do not leave the person alone. Stay with him or her until help arrives.

Remove Means Of Suicide:

Remove any objects or items that the person can use to harm himself or herself, such as guns, knives, weapons, or pills.

Combat-related reactions may make some veterans or their family members more vulnerable to depression and possibly suicide for years after return from deployment. If you or someone you know is having difficulty dealing with stress, may be suffering from depression, or shows signs of suicidal behavior, it is important to find help. Seeking professional assistance from a counselor is the best way to help someone in need.

"One of the [guys] that came to [my husband] was the one who attempted suicide. [My husband] recommended that he speak to somebody. That is what stopped him from going through with it...[The vet] didn't realize at what level it was getting. They took him to [the V.A.] and admitted him...He is now happy again. He smiles, he laughs, he jokes, versus before when he would say, 'I don't care if I die right now.'"

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) happens when an outside force impacts the brain. Sometimes, a hidden brain injury occurs that can go unnoticed for weeks or even months after a veteran returns home.

"The Humvees are not like being in a Cadillac. Your body is being slammed all over. Just putting on a helmet doesn't mean that your head is protected."

Veterans with hidden brain injuries often pass initial physical exams. However, when symptoms do occur, the effects of TBI on veterans and their families can be worrisome. In the chart below are some signs of TBI to look out for (Source: National Institutes of Neurologic Disorders and Stroke).

Diagnosis of TBI requires examination by a medical specialist such as a neurologist or psychia-

trist, but family members play a critical role in recognizing symptoms and getting a veteran to a VA Hospital for help. Like other severe injuries, getting professional medical help as quickly as possible can improve the outlook for recovery from TBI.

"There is an expression, 'The elevator is operating but the doors don't close.' You sense the loss in their face. I mean, when you are looking at somebody and they don't understand what you are saying, you can see that expression of loss, that they are not really sure, and that is how we found out about TBI."

Much is still unknown about the brain and TBI rehabilitation. The support of family and friends is important for the veteran's recovery. It is highly recommended that family members work with a mental health professional such as a psychologist or social worker, who can help families understand TBI and how to adjust to life changes due to the injury.

Signs of Mild TBI:

- Trouble with memory, concentration, attention, or thinking.
- Headaches, lightheadedness, confusion, dizziness.
- Blurred vision or tired eyes, ringing in the ears, bad taste in the mouth
- Fatigue or lethargy.
- Changes in sleep patterns, behavior and/or mood.

Signs of Moderate to Severe TBI

(can include minor symptoms plus the following)

- Headache that won't go away or gets worse with time.
- Repeated nausea or vomiting.
- Convulsions or seizures.
- Inability to wake up from sleep.
- Dilation of one or both pupils of the eyes.
- Slurred speech, weakness, or numbness of arms/legs.
- Loss of coordination.
- Increased confusion, restlessness, or agitation.

It is important for family members to know where to go should a loved one need assistance.

“I know [my husband], so I was able to know what was going on with him, but other people wouldn’t have probably noticed.”

If someone you know needs help coping with their reactions to stress or responses to trauma, he or she will need to speak to a mental health professional. This section will assist in understanding what to do and where to go if a loved one needs help.

Seeking Assistance

Military families can experience many challenges when it comes to dealing with deployment and reintegration.

“Still the anxiety, still the fears, still the nightmares, they haven’t changed. Those are still there.”

Whether it is problems in the marriage, challenges with children, or stress reactions, family members may need to reach out in order to find help for themselves.

“I think that the first step is knowing that you have a problem or that you need help.”

“After deployment, we had several challenges, and I actually sought therapy for our family...because the adjustment was really hard.”

Just as personal fitness trainers use their knowledge and expertise to help people get in shape, counselors can teach and guide families through difficult times.

“Somebody once said to me, ‘Counseling is like having a messy desk, and going to somebody helps you put everything in the right order.’ Some issues are very serious and some of them you just need to talk out. So to have somebody help you organize is very helpful. They helped me organize my thoughts with my husband’s assistance.”

Some families worry about the stigma of seeking advice from a mental health professional.

“I think it comes from the soldier themselves. They don’t want the families to reach out for help. To them, that would be a sign of weakness.”

“Military families have that fear factor that somehow somebody is going to hear about it.”

Other barriers also make it difficult for families to get help.

“We are too proud to ask for help or say, ‘I need you.’ That is one of our biggest problems as human beings.”

“Not knowing where to go...is the biggest problem. [Military families] need help, but have no clue of how to find it. Sometimes they just need somebody as a mentor or somebody that they could call and say, ‘I have this problem. Do you have any idea what I could do or where I could go without feeling like [my] entire business [is] for everybody to know?’ ”

“One of the negatives for my wife is that our primary

language is Spanish...We have a large Hispanic population here in Dade County, so I think [we] need to reach out to the Hispanic families and help them.”

“Because we are a Haitian family, it is tough. [My mother] barely speaks any English.”

If someone needs help, they should get it as soon as possible. Family members shouldn’t wait for things to get better, because chances are they won’t.

“We were just not the same two people that we were before [my husband] left, and I honestly didn’t think we would ever find it again. I first went to counseling to say I took the step; that I could check the box. So if anyone asked, I went through the motion. That was my mentality at the time...I felt like, ‘I support you so much while you were gone and I am not gonna let you come home to me like this. I don’t deserve this.’ It wasn’t until I realized it wasn’t him and it wasn’t me that I was able to take a step back. I kept reminding myself, ‘I am not gonna let my marriage be a victim of war.’ And that is what counseling did for me. It was a long process...but it saved our marriage...When we feel we are going off the wagon again, we jump right back in and call our counselor and say, ‘We need to see you.’ ”

“You can find somebody that you can turn to that can actually help you through some of this stuff...someone that you can talk to that can help you feel better.”

Drawing on resources and reaching out for help is a sign of resilience for military families, not a sign of weakness.

“You gotta do everything you need to do to keep that family going.”

Photo courtesy of Florida National Guard



"Do not feel like you cannot ask for help, because I know how that is. I like to do everything myself. But if I need help, I will ask for help because I know that I have to be there for my two children."

Family members who try counseling often find it very rewarding.

"If you find yourself in a situation where you are struggling, there is no shame in requesting help. Don't wait until all of your options are exhausted. Believe me, waiting will not make it better. Seek help as soon as you recognize that you have a problem. There are multiple resources in the military and civilian communities that are available and exist primarily to assist you."

"Now, after going through counseling, I think things are better. We have a greater appreciation and respect for communication because we realized how vital it is to us staying together. Before it was, 'Yeah, you need to talk about it.' But we didn't really listen. You can talk and not listen, and that is what we were doing. Now we realize you have to listen."

"It's helpful to know that you have counseling available...that you can go and develop a relationship with a counselor. I know I can find an understanding individual to help me cope."

In addition to getting help for themselves, family members can also help veterans find assistance.

"You have to first realize that there's a problem. Even if the soldier doesn't realize it, the family has got to realize that and [say], 'I have to do what I have to do. You are not listening to me, so I have to help you.'"

"Support one another. Again, you are not the first family going through it. Just remember you are in a big fraternity, and just love one another."

Although veterans can benefit from speaking to a mental health professional, a veteran may be hesitant to go to counseling.

"[Veterans] feel that going to see a psychiatrist will probably mess them up in their civilian career. A lot of them try to pursue law enforcement and they know for a fact that if they say that you are crazy in your psychological evaluation, they are not going to get the job."

"A lot of people avoid that because they wonder how the outside world is going to perceive them."

"Yes, it is a stigma...for a man to go over there and then to have to come and talk to somebody because 'I am a man. I don't need any help or whatever. I am fine; everything is great.' No, it is not. You need to get help, and having a family member or someone to kind of [guide] you to see that is very helpful, I think. It takes time though, because at first they don't want to do it."

As caring loved ones, family members can encourage veterans to seek assistance.

"I think it is one of the most important things. You can end up saving your spouse's or your loved one's life."

"[My son] showed me some papers that he had that were mailed to him, and in those papers...I saw something in there that mentioned counseling. And I said to him, 'If you call this number, you can get some kind of counseling.' I kept on him to call that number, and they got him in contact with [a counselor]."

"If we felt that we needed counseling, we would get couples counseling. Even if it wasn't both of us that wanted to go, we wouldn't be judgmental or talk ourselves out of it. We are going to support each other."

"Watch them...If I was to see [something different] in one of my children, I am going to attack that right way. I am going to call somebody."

Family members may suggest that a veteran reach out for help when:

- Stress reactions continue for several months or longer.
- Stress reactions affect a person's everyday activities or work.
- Stress reactions involve the potential for harm to self or others.
- Problems that were small before deployment are now big issues.
- There is a significant "change of personality" in the veteran.
- The veteran withdraws or isolates himself or herself.
- The veteran is using drugs or drinking in excess.
- Communication with the veteran breaks down or involves angry outbursts.

Many families report that when a veteran in need gets help, family problems improve dramatically.

"It got better. We got our [son] back. He is the one that keeps the family jokes going, the harassing. We finally got him back where he was himself again. The practical jokes and all of that came back."

Recommending that a loved one seek mental health services can be a difficult conversation. Family members should choose their approach and tone carefully.

"You will think, 'How can I bring up this [topic] that is so sensitive?...How can I say it so it doesn't put down the person that I love?'...You know, there is a disgrace issue if [you] say that [someone] is unfit."

"[It is] a lot of weight on people to open up their hearts and to deal with their problems...If I am gonna open up to you and then after that you are going to say I am not qualified to be your friend or to be your partner...it will hurt."

"That is a tough line because if you try and force someone to [go to counseling], you are going to get animosity and it may backfire. That is just my feeling. But I would make a strong suggestion for them to get help, and maybe go with that person initially to try and make it an easier transition."

"It is hard. I mean, sometimes you might be able to go the route [of talking] to them about financial issues or [another] topic...and then talk about other issues that they might have."

"I would say something like, 'We are going to find somebody just to talk to you, so that you can feel better and you don't have to be alone anymore...somebody that can actually help you through some of this stuff.'"

Having a close friend or another service member talk to a veteran about counseling can be helpful if the family is having trouble getting the veteran to seek assistance.

"I think it is very important, because veterans have a lot in common. So they can talk with each other and share with each other, so I think that would be very helpful."

Veterans often learn about getting help by hearing success stories from others who have tried counseling.

"I think to take the first step to go and then talk about it in a positive light...don't be afraid to share that...We so quickly share the negative and we share what is going wrong, but we don't come back and share what worked, and that is what our families need to hear so they can do the same thing."

"I believe that the referral is the comfort zone...'I went to this person and I really think that I got a lot out of it.' ...There are a lot of [veterans and family members] that like the idea of opening the door and going through it, but there is a huge fear factor. If they knew somebody else who went through the door and went through it first, it is like, 'Wow, it is okay. I could relate to that.'"

"[My husband] felt that it would be a strike on both his careers because he is also a detective. He made me park down the street. He would park his

Tips On Bringing Up The Subject Of Seeking Help To A Veteran:

- Understand that veterans may not be aware of how they are acting or how their problems affect the family.
- Have a conversation in a calm and private place, away from distractions.
- Begin by explaining that you are concerned about the person and talk about your concerns. For example, *"I know you are not sleeping well, and I'm really worried about what that lack of sleep is doing to you."*
- Ask questions that encourage the person to share their feelings. For example, *"How have you been feeling? Is there anything that is bothering you? What's been on your mind?"*
- Explain how your loved one's problems are affecting others in the family.
- Tell your loved one that you would really like them to get help and that you are willing to go with them and support them.
- Remain supportive but firm in the fact that the loved one needs to get help.
- Consider talking to a counselor for additional advice on how to speak to a veteran or to get ideas on what the family can do to improve the situation.

car down the street and then I picked him up and dropped him off at the front door of our counseling, because he didn't want to be seen. So there is that stigma that you shouldn't be doing it...Now he says, 'Do it!' He tells everyone, even the deputies to go to counseling."

"Soldiers are very reserved individuals. They don't want to air their dirty laundry. Getting them to understand that that is not what you are doing is not easy...My husband told one of his guys, 'You're a bigger man for stepping up and saying, 'This is worth saving,' than to not go at all and lose everything you've created.'"

Where To Seek Help

Once a family member or veteran decides to seek help, the next step is choosing where to go. Family members have many supports available to them throughout South Florida (see Resource Guide starting on Page 51).

"Don't be afraid to reach out to a therapist. Your best friend is not always the person you want to talk to fix your marriage, because they are gonna have their personal opinion. I personally found out the hard way that they bring in their own opinions. A therapist is detached from it and can help you with communication."

"We have Military OneSource that we can call for translation. They have over 50 languages that they translate for you...I think Military OneSource is really good...My wife really opened up to it."

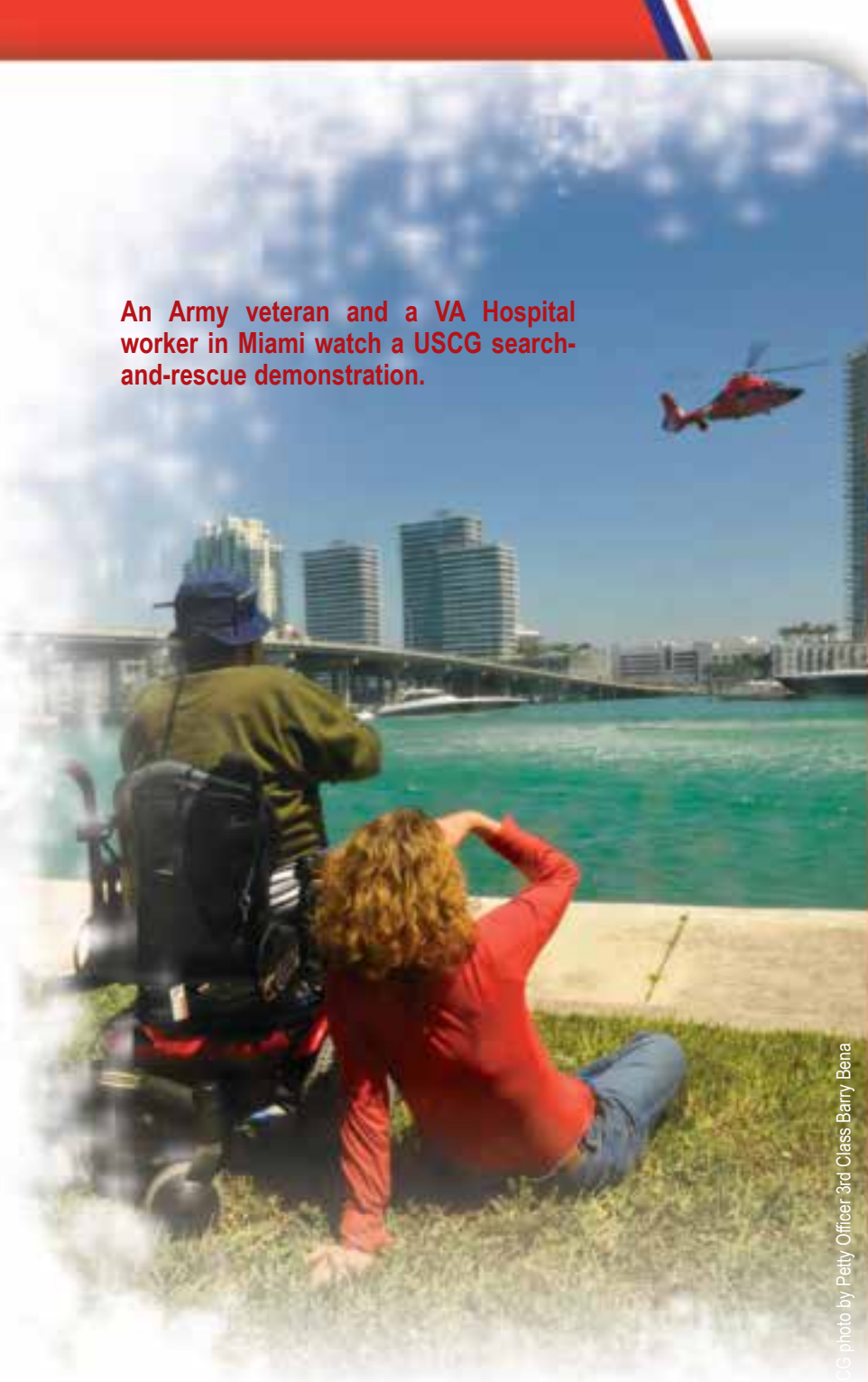
Veterans can go to a local Veterans Administration (VA) hospital.

"For South Florida especially, because it is not like we have a base, so most of the referral is going to be to the VA...they have really been good [to me]."

"The Veterans hospital has social workers who understand. The locations are very accessible and I know that they have communications with other agencies."

"Although I have mixed feeling about the VA health system, that would be one reference. I wouldn't stop at that though...My brother has said that he has had some really good experiences with them and he has had some not very good ones. I think that the things that they are good at, they are good at, and then there are major gaps."

An Army veteran and a VA Hospital worker in Miami watch a USCG search-and-rescue demonstration.



CG photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Barry Bena

Veterans can also go to one of the many other mental health providers in South Florida.

“At the Unit, they are always offering all kinds of seminars and workshops constantly to reservist and active duty as far as suicide prevention, husband and wife workshops...You [can] get together for the weekend and they do workshops and conferences.”

“Military OneSource to start. Because they could assess the problem and they could offer them free counseling. Then I would say, TRICARE and find out who your mental care providers are.”

“My brother [went to] a support group that he had found. It was a support group of other soldiers, and he did that for a while. I think that was really, really helpful for him. He did it after one of the guys in his unit committed suicide...My brother said, ‘I feel like I need to be around people that understand what I am feeling and that can support me.’”

Keep in mind that there are different types of counseling. What works for one person may not work for another. You have to find the ways that work best for yourself and your family.

“There is not one ‘magic’ type of counseling. Find what works best for you and use it.”

“There are places that can help. And if one person can’t help, seek another place for help. Just don’t say, ‘I went to get help, but that person didn’t [help me].’...Don’t close the door. Leave the door open, because there is hope enough around the corner.”

“I’d say [veterans] should go to the Vet Center, because of their style of counseling. You don’t feel

like you are in a clinic...Some of the conversations they do under the shade of a tree or sitting down and having a cup of coffee, so that is very helpful.”

“You [can] get into a support group with other people and talk to them.”

“We had counselors, outside counselors...for the soldiers or the family members who didn’t want to go through the Chaplain from the military base.”



Some veterans or family members may not be comfortable going to a military-based provider for assistance. This is okay.

“I was aware of the family support office at the base, but personally I don’t think they can provide the assistance, at least as a spouse. I wouldn’t have felt comfortable going there.”

There are many community-based providers throughout South Florida that can help (see Resource Guide).

“They could...get the help that they need without that being a common source of knowledge to everybody in the unit. It is all confidential.”

Talk to a provider before the first appointment to learn more about what programs and services they offer. This way, family members and veterans can decide which organizations best fit their needs.

“If I was going to refer to a mental health facility, I would just want to make sure that there is a degree of cultural competency of the military. Not everybody gets it. Just like everybody doesn’t know how to serve a Hispanic family or a black family.”

“Military marriages have a worse success rate than marriages in the United States as a whole, which is a sad, sad statistic. When someone is fighting to save their marriage and they are going to the wrong person, that is devastating to someone’s life. So, yes, I think it is very important to know that you are going to a resource that has some background and understanding of the military in general.”

“I chose [my counselors] through research, families, and friends; other doctors that I knew; asking them who they thought was a good person, and then doing research online and meeting them. If you feel like you have that fit and you could talk to them and they are able to give you some resolutions or some tools that are helpful, then choose them that way.”

In the next section are some recommended resources available to military personnel, veterans, and their families in South Florida.



This section contains a list of providers in South Florida who can support OEF/OIF service members, veterans, and their families.

Providers with a BrAlve logo  have received funding from The Miami Foundation and offer BrAlve-related services free of charge. Most providers with a BrAlve logo have been funded through the Summer of 2011; however programs may or may not continue beyond that time. Please call the provider for more information.

Photo courtesy of Florida National Guard

RESOURCE SECTION

About The BRAIVE Fund Initiative at The Miami Foundation

The Miami Foundation, formerly the Dade Community Foundation, has awarded grants through its BRAIVE Fund Initiative to 20 nonprofits in Southeast Florida to serve and support service personnel, veterans and their families who have served our country in Afghanistan and Iraq since 9/11. The Foundation seeks to create resources in the “civilian community” to complement and coordinate with those already provided by the “military community” through government veteran organizations and the military branches themselves.

In late 2008, the Miami Foundation received a \$5 million two-year grant from the California Community Foundation through its Iraq/Afghanistan Deployment Impact Fund (IADIF). IADIF was created in 2006 in response to a multitude of unmet needs arising among service personnel and their families as a direct result of OEF/OIF deployment. Two other Florida foundations, the Community Foundation in Jacksonville and the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice, were also awarded IADIF funding, and joined together to establish a statewide partnership called the **Florida BRAIVE Fund**. Each community foundation serves a multi-county region. For more information on the the **Florida BRAIVE Fund**, please visit www.floridabraive.org.

The BRAIVE Fund Initiative at The Miami Foundation serves Miami-Dade, Monroe, Broward, Palm Beach and Martin Counties. A list of BRAIVE grantees is available at www.floridabraive.org. For more information, contact Charisse Grant, Senior Vice President for Programs at The Miami Foundation, at 305-371-2711 or cgrant@miamifoundation.org.

Along with grantmaking, the Foundation is helping foster service coordination, training and education activities. The BRAIVE Fund Initiative is also facilitating efforts to build service providers' capacity

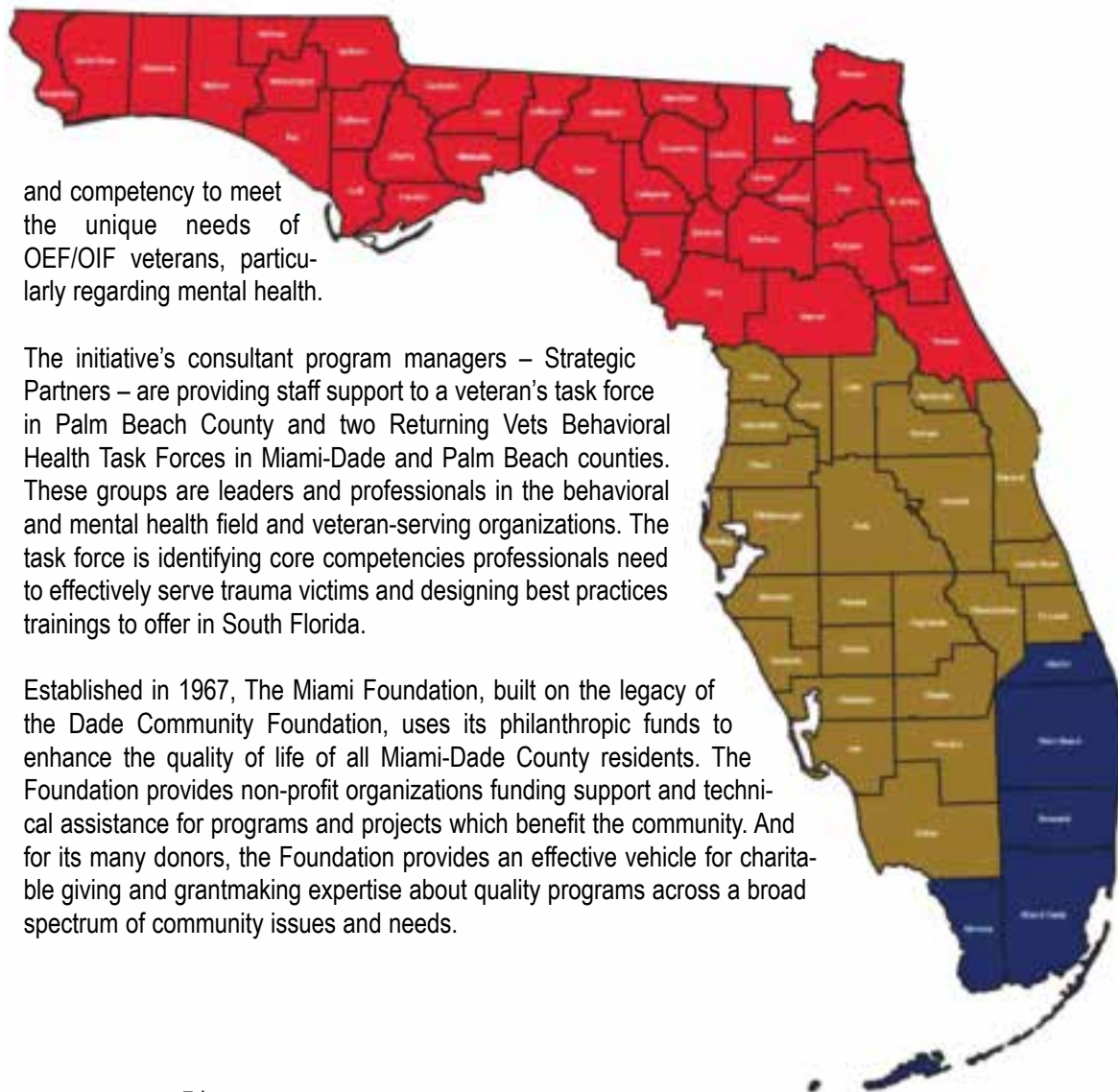


Three community foundations are collaborating to provide access to The FLORIDA BRAIVE Fund throughout the state. The foundations and their respective regions are:

The Community Foundation in Jacksonville – North Region

Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice – Central Region

Dade Community Foundation – South Region



and competency to meet the unique needs of OEF/OIF veterans, particularly regarding mental health.

The initiative's consultant program managers – Strategic Partners – are providing staff support to a veteran's task force in Palm Beach County and two Returning Vets Behavioral Health Task Forces in Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties. These groups are leaders and professionals in the behavioral and mental health field and veteran-serving organizations. The task force is identifying core competencies professionals need to effectively serve trauma victims and designing best practices trainings to offer in South Florida.

Established in 1967, The Miami Foundation, built on the legacy of the Dade Community Foundation, uses its philanthropic funds to enhance the quality of life of all Miami-Dade County residents. The Foundation provides non-profit organizations funding support and technical assistance for programs and projects which benefit the community. And for its many donors, the Foundation provides an effective vehicle for charitable giving and grantmaking expertise about quality programs across a broad spectrum of community issues and needs.

STATEWIDE PROVIDERS

INFORMATION, REFERRAL & COUNSELING



The Florida BRAIVE Helpline

The **Florida BRAIVE Helpline** serves military personnel, veterans and their families throughout the state of Florida. Operators are available 24/7 who will answer questions about housing, financial problems, family counseling, and educational programs, as well as help families through crisis situations. The calls are answered immediately by one of four Regional 2-1-1 Network Centers in Florida that also serve as Crisis Centers for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network. You can learn about resources available to OEF/OIF service members, veterans and families in two ways:

By phone: Trained specialists are just a telephone call away! For assistance, service members, veterans or family members are encouraged to call **1-877-BRAIVE-8** or just dial **211**. Operators are available 24/7, every day of the year.

Online: For listings of programs, services and contact information, please go online to www.flairs.org/braive.htm. The online database allows you to find resources by key word (zip code, etc). Most of the listings include a map, hours of operation, and a description of the services available.

The **Florida BRAIVE Helpline** is a service of the Florida Alliance for Information and Referral Services, funded by The Florida BrAlve Fund.

Florida National Guard Family Programs

Services: Family Programs strives to provide an enhanced quality of life for those who serve, retirees veterans and their families via three components: 1) information and referral services for benefits and entitlements; 2) preparing military families for deployments and separation; and 3) support and empower the emotional and academic needs of military child and youth.

Phone: Toll Free: 1-800-226-0360
Direct: (904) 823-0360

Website: www.floridaguard.army.mil/programs/family.aspx

Military OneSource

Services: Military OneSource, a free 24-hour service provided by the DoD, is available online and by phone. Consultants provide information and referrals on a wide range of issues from finding child care or managing finances to coping with deployment. Short-term, solution-focused counseling in the local community is also available. All services and materials are available at no cost.

Phone: Toll Free: 1-800-342-9647
En español llame al: 1-877-888-0727
TTY/TDD accessible: 1-866-607-6794

Website: www.militaryonesource.com

Military Family Life Consultant (MFLC)

Services: The Military and Family Life Consultant (MFLC) Program is designed to provide support and assistance to active duty Soldiers, National Guard & Reserves, military family members and civilian personnel. Military and Family Life Consultants can help people who are having trouble coping with concerns and issues of daily life.

Phone: (904) 718-9987
(904) 738-3657

U.S. Coast Guard Health Safety and Work-Life Field Office Miami

Services: Assistance and Intervention/Case Management Programs for Active Duty Coast Guard members and their families, to include Family Advocacy Services (domestic violence, child abuse), Transition and Relocation Program (seminars for retiring USCG members, help with relocation issues, Ombudsmen program), Health Promotion Program, Special Needs Program and Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAP Program provides support for rape/sexual assault issues, Critical Incident Stress Management, workplace violence, suicide prevention and an external EAP program is also offered that provides counseling on the civilian economy.

Phone: (305) 278-6660

Website: www.uscg.mil/pssumiami/

MILITARY FAMILY EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

Military Spouse Corporate Career Network (MSCCN)

Services: MSCCN is a non-profit organization that assists military spouses, veterans, war-wounded and their caregivers in their search for employment. MSCCN team members are military spouses and vets who have “been there” and understand the challenges facing military family members in the area of employment. We provide job referral services, training opportunities and educational services to military-affiliated job seekers.

Phone: 1-877-MyMSCCN (696-7226)

Website: www.msccn.org

SUPPORT FOR MILITARY CHILDREN

Florida Operation: Military Kids

Services: Programs available statewide for military children of all service branches. Programs include “Speak Out For Military Kids” (a public speaker program for teens), Day and Residential camps (funds permitting), a Babysitting Certification Program, and Camp Counselors. Please contact us for more information on these and other programs for military children and youth.

Phone: (863) 519-8677, Ext. 135

Website: www.operationmilitarykids.org/florida

Navy School Liaison Officers (SLOs)

Services: The School Liaison Officer (SLO) works for the Child, Youth and School (CYS) Services Division to help address educational issues involving military children and youth in the local school community. By partnering with the local and military communities, the SLO acts as a communication link between the Military Installations and surrounding school districts.

Phone: Suzanne Bryant: (305) 293-2621
(located in Key West)

BROWARD COUNTY

FAMILY SUPPORT



Family Readiness Team Embracing Military Personnel & Families

Services: The program, a partnership with Broward County Public Schools to assist military children, provides a range of services including assessment, crisis intervention, brief individual, group and/or family counseling to address social and emotional concerns. The program also helps families connect with services to address needs related to housing, career planning, emergency food, and links to other service providers.

Phone: Lucia Romero: (561) 414-3098

FINANCIAL STABILITY

Urban League of Broward County



Services: Services include budgeting and financial literacy, job referrals, home-buyer education, resume writing, foreclosure prevention, emergency financial assistance and more.

Phone: (954) 625-2583

Website: www.ulbroward.org

HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

Broward County VA Outpatient Clinic

Services: Part of the Miami VA Healthcare System, the Clinic provides inpatient and outpatient medical and psychiatric care, as well as many specialty services. Please call for information.

Phone: Main: (954) 475-5500
Social Work Office: (954) 625-8734



Henderson Mental Health Center, Inc.

Services: Henderson provides various counseling services, employment assistance and community linkages for OIF/OEF veterans, their family members and close loved ones. We also provide educational workshops to assist service members and their families with the deployment cycle.

Phone: (954) 921-2600, Ext. 102

Website: www.hendersonmhc.org

Ft. Lauderdale Vet Center

Services: We provide readjustment counseling service to all combat veterans and support counseling to their families.

Phone: (954) 356-7926

Website: www2.va.gov/directory/guide/facility.asp?id=551

Nova Southeastern University (NSU)

Services: NSU's Center for Assessment and Intervention offers psychological assessments for military children, adolescents and adults. In addition, we provide individual, family, and couples therapy for a variety of difficulties including PTSD, depression, anxiety, adjustment following deployment, and other social/emotional/behavioral issues. All services are offered on a sliding scale fee.

Phone: Toll free: 1-800-986-3223, Ext. 28620
Direct: (954) 262-8620

Website: www.FischlerSchool.nova.edu/cai

Stable Foundations Equine Assisted Family Therapy

Services: We provide individual, group and family therapy as well as professional education and team building services. Primary method of treatment is equine assisted family therapy.

Phone: Lorisa Lewis, Program Director: (407) 493-9656

Website: www.equinefamilytherapy.com



RE-INTEGRATION SUPPORT

VFW Post 8195 Stone of Hope Veteran Service Center

Services: Programs include assessing needs and challenges, providing direct services (e.g., disability claims, emergency assistance needs, housing assistance, and employment assistance), access to veteran's benefits and counseling and support groups. We connect veterans and their families with other local services that can address other related needs (i.e., mental health, physical health, and occupational needs). We help all veterans, with special attention to OIF/OEF veterans and their families.

Phone: (954) 987-6089

Veterans Mentoring Veterans (a program of Senior Volunteer Services)

Services: Trained older veterans from Vietnam, World War II, Desert Storm and Grenada serve as mentors to help OIF/OEF veterans by providing support, advice and guidance.

Phone: (954) 484-7117

VETERANS BENEFITS ASSISTANCE

Broward County Elderly and Veterans Services Division

Services: We assist in the processing of benefit claim to the Veteran Administration and provide emergency assistance to veterans and their families.

Phone: (954) 537-2936

MIAMI-DADE & MONROE COUNTIES

EDUCATION & CAREER DEVELOPMENT



Miami-Dade Community College PAVE Project

Services: Our goal is to assist eligible (OIF/OEF) veterans, military personnel and their families with post secondary education support and career-oriented education programs. Participants can expect to receive support with career planning, transfer information, admission into the College, course selection, degree attainment and more!

Phone: Main Office: (305) 237-7898
Direct: (305) 237-3533

Website: www.mdc.edu/main/vsi

FAMILY SUPPORT

Airman & Family Readiness Homestead ARB

Services: We provide limited direct services to all military I.D. card holders to include comprehensive Information and Referral for Relocation, Financial Readiness, Transition, and Employment Services.

Phone: Toll free: 1-800-440-9645
Direct: (305) 224-7329

Website: www.homestead-services.com/support_services



CCDH, Inc.

Services: CCDH advocates, coordinates and provides support and services to people with disabilities and their families, including military families.

Phone: (305) 596-1160

Website: www.ccdh.org

Peacemakers Family Service Center Trinity Church

Services: Employment services, Information and Referrals, Food Bank, Child Care and Youth Programs

Phone: (786) 888- HELP

Website: www.peacemakers.com



Young Warrior Program University of Miami Mailman Center for Child Development

Services: Program supports OEF/OIF military families and children to age 9 through mental health services to help children and families manage challenges related to deployment.

Phone: (305) 243-6624

HEALTH & MENTAL HEALTH



Veterans Link Up

Services: Veterans Link Up is a community partnership between the Miami Vet Center and Concept House. Programs support OEF/OIF veterans, active duty military personnel and their families as they transition through the various stages of deployment and reintegration through direct service, support, and linkage to federal, state, and community agencies. The program also coordinates care services for clients in addition to conducting community education and training on best practices for other health and social service professionals.

Phone: **Concept House Location:**
Office: (305) 751-6501, Ext. 23
Direct: (786) 566-1881

Miami Vet Center Location:
Office: (305) 859-VETS
Direct: (786) 877-9227

Miami VA Healthcare System

Services: The Miami VA Healthcare System provides inpatient and outpatient medical and psychiatric care, as well as many specialty clinics. Please call for information.

Phone: Main Line: (305) 575-7000
OEF/OIF Coord.: (305) 575-5000, Ext. 6252

Website: www.miami.va.gov

Miami Vet Center

Services: Readjustment counseling services to combat-conflict zone veterans.

Phone: (305) 718-3712

Website: www.vetcenter.va.gov



The V.E.T.S. Program at Concept House

Services: The V.E.T.S. Program provides comprehensive, residential and outpatient treatment for substance abuse and mental health treatment and support services to move OEF/OIF veterans toward recovery and self-sufficiency. The agency uses evidence-based treatment approaches. The program also includes employment assistance and supported housing options

Phone: Concept House: (305) 751-6501
V.E.T.S. Program: (305) 751-6501, Ext. 12

Website: www.concepthouse.org

**Miami Behavioral Health Center
Spectrum Programs Inc.**

Services: Children and adult services include comprehensive evaluation of needs, individual and family therapy, group therapy, psychiatric services, medication management, mobile crisis support, DETOX, Crisis Stabilization Unit, and residential treatment for individuals with substance abuse or co-occurring disorders. We also have a primary care clinic and pharmacy services available in Dade.

Phone: Dade County: (305) 774-3300
Broward County: (954) 781-4405

Website: www.mbhc.org

Key West Outpatient Clinic

Services: Part of the Miami VA Healthcare System, the Clinic provides medical and psychiatric care, as well as many specialty clinics. Please call for information.

Phone: (305) 293-4863

Website: www.miami.va.gov

LEGAL ASSISTANCE



Legal Services of Greater Miami, Inc.

Services: Resolution of civil legal problems that pose barriers to successful reintegration after discharge or pose economic and social challenges due to deployment. Our services include mortgage foreclosure defense, consumer debt defense, landlord/tenant dispute, discharge upgrade assistance and appeals of disability benefit denials.

Phone: Main Office: (305) 576-0080
Ely Gonzalez, Project Director: (305) 438-2407

Website: www.lsgmi.org

**RE-ADJUSTMENT FROM
TRAUMA & INJURY**



**Center for Independent Living
INVEST Program**

Services: Provides a range of services and support to help OEF/OIF veterans with disabilities and their families gain and maintain independence. Programs include direct services, support, and links to other services that can assist clients with employment, housing, child care, transportation, food, clothing, emergency needs and support in coping with death, disability, emotional distress and economic hardship.

Phone: (305) 751-8025

Website: www.soflamil.org



Shake-A-Leg Miami

Services: Provides sailing and other water-sports based activities for people with disabilities and their families, including veterans.

Phone: (305) 858-5550, Ext. 109

Website: www.shakealegmiami.org

VETERANS BENEFITS ASSISTANCE

**Miami-Dade County
Dept. of Human Services
Veterans Services Program**

Services: Assists veterans and their families in obtaining benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, state and the county.

Phone: (305) 270-2940

Website: www.miamidade.gov/dhs/elderly_veteran_services.asp

Monroe County Veterans Affairs

Services: Provides assistance to active duty personnel, veterans, dependents and survivors in the application and prosecution of claims for Veterans Administration benefits and entitlements from Federal, State and local levels of government.

Phone: Key West: (305) 295-5150
Marathon: (305) 289-6009
Key Largo: (305) 453-8778

PALM BEACH & MARTIN COUNTIES

HEALTH & MENTAL HEALTH

Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, West Palm Beach

Services: Healthcare services include: Outpatient and Inpatient Medical and Surgical, Dental, Pharmacy, Nursing Home, Mental Health, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder treatment, Sexual Trauma Counseling, Case Management, Prosthetic Services, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Services, Blind Rehabilitation, Outreach for Homeless, Healthcare for Women, Medical evaluation for military service exposure (including Gulf War, Ionizing Radiation, and other environmental hazards), Audiology/Speech. The Medical Center has a Vocational Rehabilitation Program that provides vocational assessments, job coaching, community resources, job leads and information on educational/training benefits for veterans. Of note, the Medical Center does have a Post Deployment Clinic and Women's Health Center. Veteran Service Officers, Veteran Benefits Administration Counselor and Florida Department of Veterans Affairs staff are available to assist veterans in filing claims and obtaining benefits.

Phone: Transition Patient Advocate: (561) 422-6951
OEF/OIF Program Manager: (561) 422-7223

Website: www.oefoif.va.gov



Faith*Hope*Love*Charity, Inc.

Services: Provides housing and/or supportive services to veterans, active duty and their families.

Phone: (561) 968-1612

Website: www.standown.org/fhlcinc.html

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Jupiter Vet Center

Services: Individual readjustment counseling for combat-related stress, group readjustment counseling, marital and family counseling, spousal and "significant other" group counseling, sexual trauma counseling and referral, bereavement counseling, referral for benefits, liaison with community agencies, substance abuse information and referral, community education, job counseling and social service referrals.

Phone: Primary: (561) 422-1220
Alternate: (561) 351-4262 (office manager cell)

Website: www2.va.gov/directory/guide/facility.asp?id=5961

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Palm Beach Vet Center

Services: Provides readjustment counseling to combat Veterans and their families at no cost. Counselors are mental health professionals employed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Phone: (561) 422-1201

Website: www2.va.gov/directory/guide/facility.asp?id=554

Oakwood Center of the Palm Beaches

Services: The Center provides both inpatient and outpatient mental health services to adults, children and families, a substance abuse counseling service, and a Mobile Crisis Team.

Phone: To access services: (561) 383-5753
For information: (561) 383-5725

Website: www.oakwoodcenter.org

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LEGAL ASSISTANCE



Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County

Services: Provides free legal advice, representation, and advocacy to OEF/OIF veterans and their families. The project helps families address issues that include, but are not limited to, disability determinations, access to benefits, employment matters, accommodations for disabilities, access to housing and/or foreclosure defense and family law matters.

Phone: (561) 655-8944, Ext. 110

Website: www.legalaidpbc.org

RE-ADJUSTMENT FROM TRAUMA & INJURY



Gulfstream Goodwill Residential BrAlve Residence

Services: The purpose of our program is to help OEF/OIF veterans who have sustained a brain injury or have been diagnosed with PTSD gain independence and pursue meaningful goals in their lives. We provide a person-centered philosophy of service delivery.

Phone: (561) 848-7200

Website: www.gulfstreamgoodwill.com/

VETERANS BENEFITS ASSISTANCE

Palm Beach County Veterans Services Office

Services: Assists former and current members of the Armed Forces who reside in Palm Beach County in preparing and filing claims for benefits for which they are entitled under federal, state, and local laws.

Phone: (561) 355-4761

Website: www.pbcgov.com/communityservices/programs/veterans/

Martin County Veteran Service Office

Services: Provides counseling for federal, state and local veterans benefits. We also provide transportation to the VA Hospital for medical appointments.

Phone: (772) 288-5448

Website: www.martin.fl.us/portal/page?_pageid=349,1006372&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

SERVING MIAMI-DADE, BROWARD & PALM BEACH COUNTIES

FINANCIAL EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE



American Red Cross

Services: The Red Cross provides outreach services to service personnel and their families, offers an economic safety net for low-income military families who do not qualify for government welfare benefits, and partners with Military OneSource and Military Home Front to provide social services, emergency travel, financial assistance and mental health support. The Services to the Armed Forces (SAF) program is a worldwide communication and support network that serves as a link between service members and their families, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Phone: SAF: 1-888-737-4306
South Dade Branch: (305) 248-2024

Website: www.miamiredcross.org

MENTAL HEALTH



The Veteran's Project of South Florida (SOFAR)

Services: Experienced private practice therapists offer individual, couples and group therapy to OEF/OIF veterans and their families.

Phone: General number: 1-877-783-2748
Dade: (305) 274-0018
Broward: (954) 929-4199
Palm Beach: (561) 393-1439

Website: www.sefapp.org/veteransprojectofsouthflorida.html

FAMILY SUPPORT

South Florida MAPS Project (Military Access Portals for Supports and Services)

Services: The SF MAPS Project is a "one-stop" center designed to help preserve and strengthen military families who have children with developmental disabilities. Using technology and community partners, Systems Navigators will: meet with families in a convenient community location; assist families in developing an Individualized Family Service Plan; and connect families to needed supports and services in the community.

Phone: 305-243-6135

Website: www.mailmancenter.org/sfmaps/

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THE FLORIDA
BRAIVE
FUND

Helping Floridians impacted by
deployment to Afghanistan & Iraq

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