Opening Page. . .

Developing a Theological Response for Returning Combat Veterans

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Mental Illness Research, Education & Clinical Center

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Basic Overview

- Military produces highly trained men and women.

- These individuals had HUGE responsibilities while deployed and return to no jobs or relatively trivial responsibilities in comparison.

- Service members are our family members, neighbors, friends, co-workers, patients. Thousands upon thousands have served in the military.

- **All** who have served come home changed. For a few individuals these changes can be debilitating and life-altering.

- This module explores positive ways Clergy and Faith Groups can respond to the challenges post-deployment
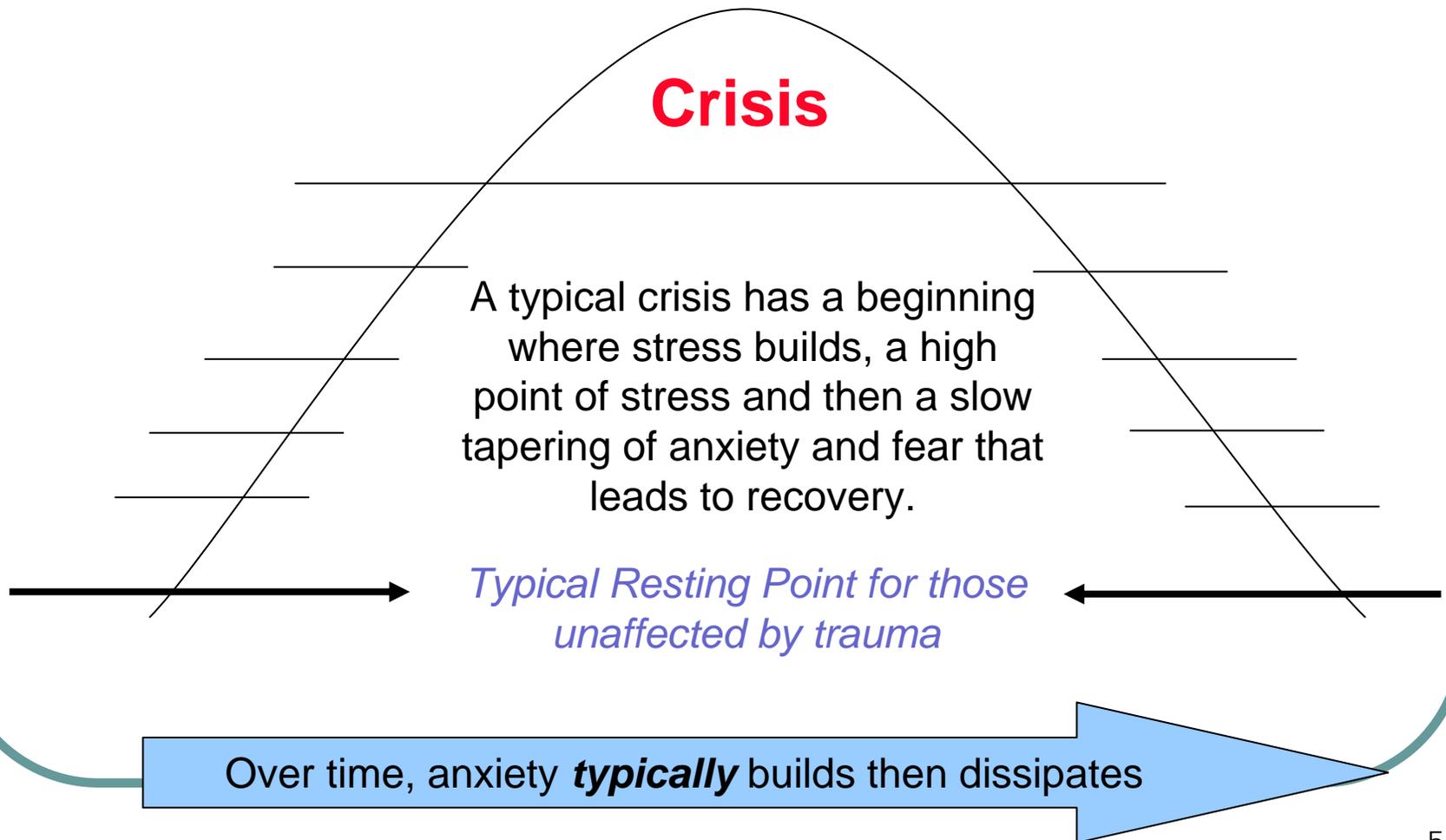
Challenges in Returning Home

Returning home is disorienting and can represent a significant change of and perhaps an absence of social community, structure, order, mission, purpose and predictability for the returning service member.

The enormity of the war experience can shatter the individual's basic sense of safety and basic understanding of the meaning of life as they knew it.
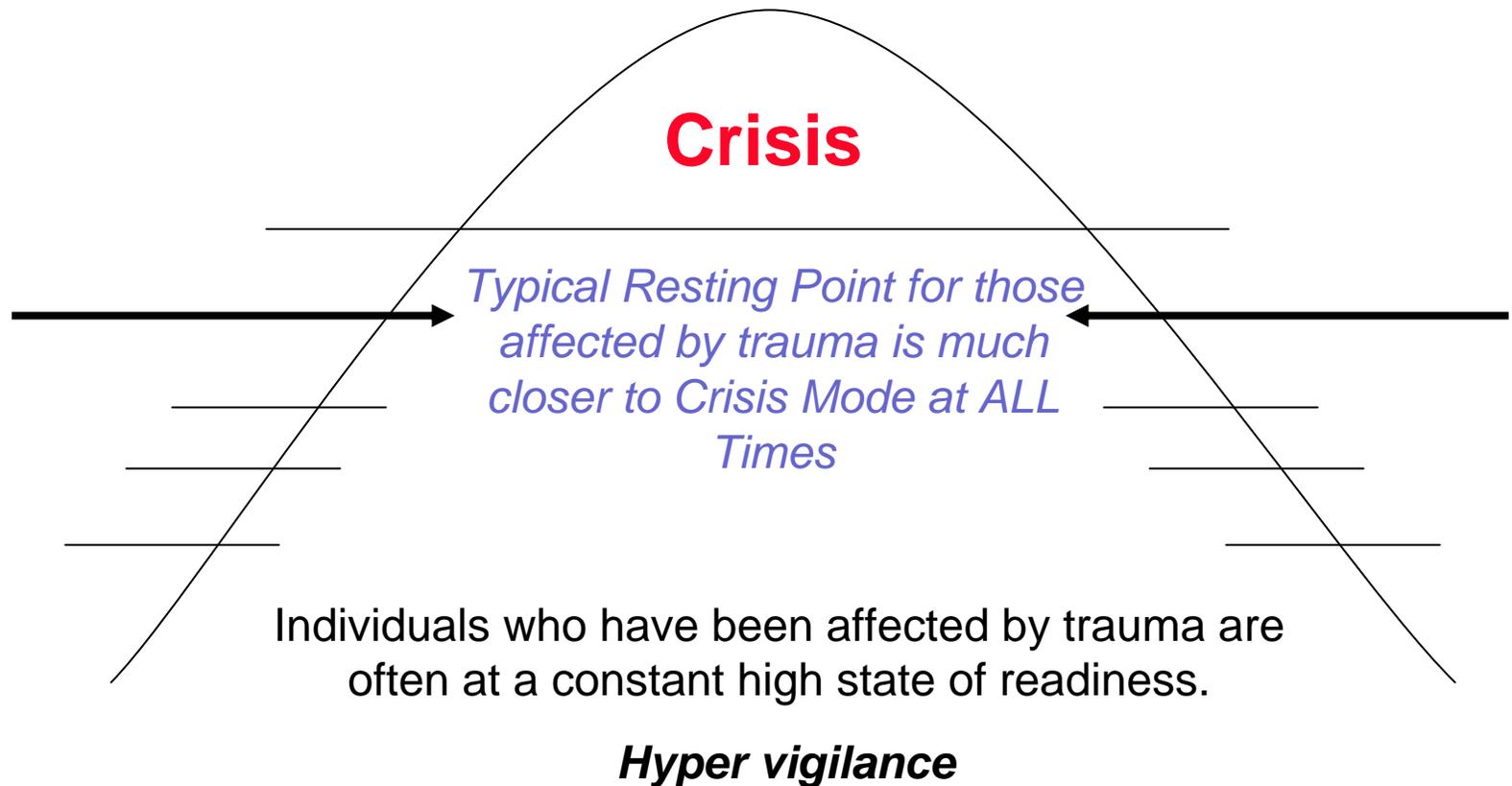
In addition, the returning soldier's family are not the same as they were before deployment to war.

Re-adjustment and "re-setting" after the crisis of trauma can be complicated and difficult.

Typical Crisis Cycle

Crisis

A typical crisis has a beginning where stress builds, a high point of stress and then a slow tapering of anxiety and fear that leads to recovery.

Typical Resting Point for those unaffected by trauma

Over time, anxiety *typically* builds then dissipates

Abbreviated Crisis Cycle After Trauma

Crisis

Typical Resting Point for those affected by trauma is much closer to Crisis Mode at ALL Times

Individuals who have been affected by trauma are often at a constant high state of readiness.

Hyper vigilance

Crisis Cycle After Multiple Deployments

Crisis

Crisis

Crisis

Pre-deployment

1st Deployment

2nd Deployment

Over time, resources for managing crisis are eroded.
Crisis comes earlier.

Re-setting for Civilian Life

Upon returning from war, individuals must "re-set" themselves for civilian life.

Re-setting includes:

- Grief and transition processing,
- Un-learning (or re-learning) basic skills such as defensive driving rather than offensive driving
- Re-developing community support systems

See www.battlemind.org

Trauma Definitions

Trauma: Injury whether emotionally or physically inflicted.   An experience that is emotionally painful, distressful or shocking and which may result in lasting mental and physical effects.

Psychiatric trauma is essentially a normal response to an extreme event.

Trauma reactions upon returning from war are **NORMAL** reactions to the abnormal circumstances of war.

Definition - PTSD

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to one or more terrifying events that threatened or caused grave physical harm (to self or other).

This is a specific psychiatric disorder in which a cluster of symptoms occurs beyond one month after someone experiences a traumatic event.

Non-mental health care providers (pastors included) should never assume this medical diagnosis or proffer it to individuals as stigmatization, distancing and inappropriate over-identification can occur.

Psychological Reactions to Trauma

- Traumatic events are often re-experienced

- Recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions.

- Recurrent distressing dreams of the event.

- Acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring.

- Intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.

Psychological Reactions (cont.)

- <u>Physiological reactivity</u> on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event

- <u>Hyper-vigilance</u>, jumpiness, an extreme sense of being "on guard" overreactions, including sudden unprovoked anger

- General <u>anxiety</u>

- <u>Insomnia</u>

- <u>Obsessions with death</u>

Physical Reactions to Trauma

1. Eating disturbances (more or less than usual)
2. Sleep disturbances (more or less than usual)
3. Sexual dysfunction
4. Low energy
5. Chronic, unexplained pain

Traumatic **B**rain **I**njury is a physical injury to the brain. TBI complicates post-traumatic stress recovery.

Poly-trauma referrers to a combination of physical and brain injuries typically requiring extensive care.

Cognitive Reactions to Trauma

1. Memory lapses, especially about the trauma
2. Difficulty making decisions
3. Decreased ability to concentrate

4. Feeling distracted

Remember: The human brain is a social brain.

Psychosocial deprivation causes physical injury to the brain. A person with a brain injury living in social isolation has two brain injuries:

- the original brain injury and
- the injury of psychosocial deprivation.
- 78% of survivors receive 100% of their support from family members.

Emotional Reactions to Trauma

1. Depression, spontaneous crying, despair and hopelessness
2. Anxiety
3. Panic attacks
4. Fearfulness
5. Compulsive and obsessive behaviors
6. Feeling out of control
7. Irritability, angry and resentment
8. Withdrawal from normal routine and relationships
9. Emotional numbness

Emotional Reactions (cont.)

10. Avoidance of situations that resemble the initial event
11. Detachment
12. Amnesia
13. Altered sense of time
14. Depression
15. Feelings of guilt and shame
16. Grief reactions

Behavioral Reactions to Trauma

1. Substance abuse
2. Self-destructive and impulsive behavior
3. Uncontrollable reactive thoughts
4. Inability to make healthy lifestyle choices
5. Dissociative symptoms ("splitting off" parts of self)
6. Discarding previously sustained beliefs
7. Compulsive behavior patterns

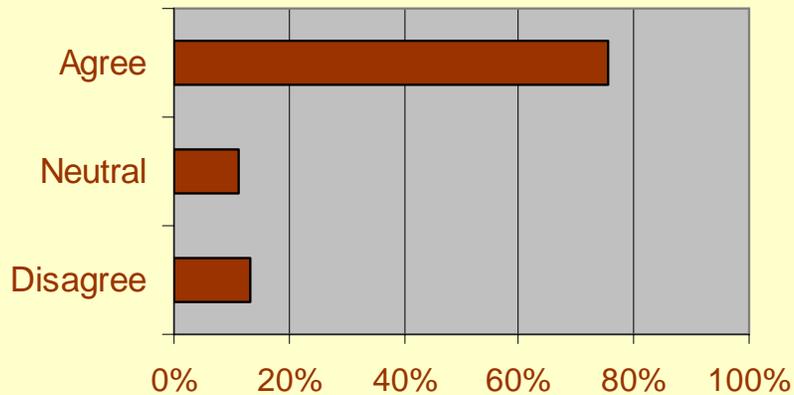# Trauma's Effect on Interpersonal Life

1. Inability to maintain close relationships or choose appropriate friends and mates
2. Sexual problems
3. Hostility – Impatience with the "stupid stuff"
4. Arguments with family members, employers or co-workers
5. Social withdrawal
6. Feeling constantly threatened by others
7. Avoidance leads to closing of communication with others.
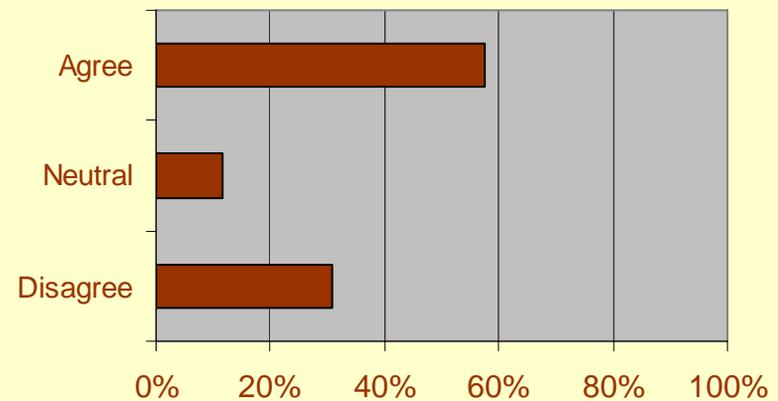
Spiritual Reactions to Trauma

1. Confusion about God
2. Altered sense of meaning in/of life
3. Loss of previously sustained beliefs
4. Confusion about core ethical beliefs.
5. Grief around loss of relationship with God
6. Questions of Theodicy
7. Feeling dirty and unworthy
8. Feeling permanently damaged
9. Feelings of guilt
10. Loss of community / communication

Spiritual Consequence of War

Difficulty reconciling beliefs with traumatic warzone events

Agree	
Neutral	
Disagree	

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

I abandoned my religious faith during the war.

Agree	
Neutral	
Disagree	

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Spirituality & Rebuilding Life

- Spirituality is that which gives a person meaning and purpose.

- It is found in relationships with self, others, ideas, nature, and, possibly, a higher power.

- These many relationships are prioritized according to an organizing principle and form an intra-, inter-, and trans-relational web that houses a person's sense of meaning and purpose.

- Spiritual distress arises when one of these relationships that provide meaning is threatened or broken. The more significant a particular relationship is, the greater the severity of spiritual distress if that relationship is threatened or broken.

- Spiritual wholeness is restored when that which threatens or breaks the patient's relational web of meaning is removed, transformed, integrated, or transcended.

Mark LaRocca-Pitts, Ph.D.   .

Veteran's Use of Clergy

- Veterans feel more comfortable approaching their pastor than they do a mental health professional.

- Research shows that 4 of 10 individuals with mental health challenges seek counseling from clergy.

- Individuals seek council from ministers more than all other mental health providers combined.

- Often seeing a member of the clergy is less threatening and has less stigma attached. Is viewed as engaging a known community resource.

- Negative reasons. . . Magical thinking, avoiding truth of diagnosis, etc.

Pastor as a Safe Haven

- Offer a calm, safe and non-judgmental, non-anxious presence.

- Provide clear, reliable boundaries of communion and respect.

- Be present with veterans and families during the storms of reintegration.

- Provide a compassionate space wide enough to encompass the awfulness of war trauma.

Pastor as Listener

- Avoid advising or offering platitudes

- Listen without interruption or comment

- Hearing content and emotion with respect

- Convey warmth and acceptance of the person, their journey and their struggles

- Avoid asking questions

- Notice <u>what is</u> in a caring and genuine way.

Pastor's Role in Grounding

- Provide roadmap for reintegration into church and community at large.

- Provide roadmap of opportunities for appropriate outlets regarding frustration, pain, fear, guilt and trauma.

- Provide avenues of dialogue for spiritual and religious growth and engagement.

- Provide honest, realistic reflection of recovery process.

- Provide spiritual, religious and community resources for veterans and their families.

Pastor's Role in Accepting

- Understand the "both/and" nature of good and evil. Then and now.

- Not trying to fix the unfixable.

- To offer deep reflection on "what is goodness" and how to help others find "goodness" within themselves.

- Understanding and accepting the dark side of human nature.

Pastor's Role in Referring

- A Pastor's referral can validate, even de-stigmatize the use of mental health services

- Pastor can bring people in need to those who know how to assist best

- Rules for referral:

  - Refer early and often

  - Provide initial pastoral care at first . . . then

  - Assist with referral calls with and for them.

What **<u>NOT</u>** to do as a Pastor

- Ask if they killed anyone
- Push for details regarding the deployment
- Try to fix problems
- Assume the service member is "unsaved" or does not have a faith journey of their own
- Push to get service member involved in church ministries
- Prematurely assuage feelings of guilt
- Diagnose PTSD, assume PTSD or label PTSD

The Pastor's Gift

Theological Reflection: Discovering the presence of God in one's experience.

Engaging spiritual resources to re-frame one's understanding of what's happening.

Methods of Theological Reflection

Various methods of thinking theologically about what your service member is going through can help you reframe that person's experience and connection with God.

Theological Reflection Resources Include:

• Sacraments / Rituals	• Festival Days
• Sacred Narratives	• Stages of Faith
• Hymns / Songs of Faith	• Images of Ministry
• Theological Constructs	

The Pastor's Challenge

- Actualizing Hope and Resilience
- Providing an honest, caring relationship
- Truthful imagination of the future
- Resource review – what was lost - what was gained?
- Acceptance of humanity
- Moving toward pardon (self and other)
- Inspiring collaboration & community

Facets of Resilience

- Resilience helps us <u>cope with hardship</u> (endures, minimizes or overcomes hardships);

- It helps us <u>resist the destructive pressures</u> on our physiological, psychological and spiritual self (maintains capacity);

- Resilience moves us to <u>achieve a new proficiency</u> out of the unfavorable experience (we learn something from the experience).

Titus, Craig Steven: <u>Resilience and the Virtue of Fortitude: Aquinas in Dialogue with the Psychosocial Sciences</u>, 2006.

True Hope

- Hope is not initiated and sustained by erasing emotions like fear and anxiety, it integrates the genuine threats and dangers that exist into the proposed strategies to subsume them.

- Hope takes into account the real threats that exist and seeks to navigate the best path around them.

- Hope brings reality into sharp focus. Hope incorporates fear into the process of rational deliberation and tempers it so we can think and choose without panic.

Groopman, Jerome The Anatomy of Hope

Need for a Community Response

- No one system can provide all the services needed.

- Supporting the family will support the individual.

- 78% of survivors receive 100% of their support from family members.

- Survivors and caregivers needs are different.

Community-based Support Teams

A community-based support team is –

- a group of volunteers
- organized to provide practical, emotional & spiritual support

Team Philosophy

- Do <u>what</u> you can, <u>when</u> you can
- In a <u>coordinated</u> way
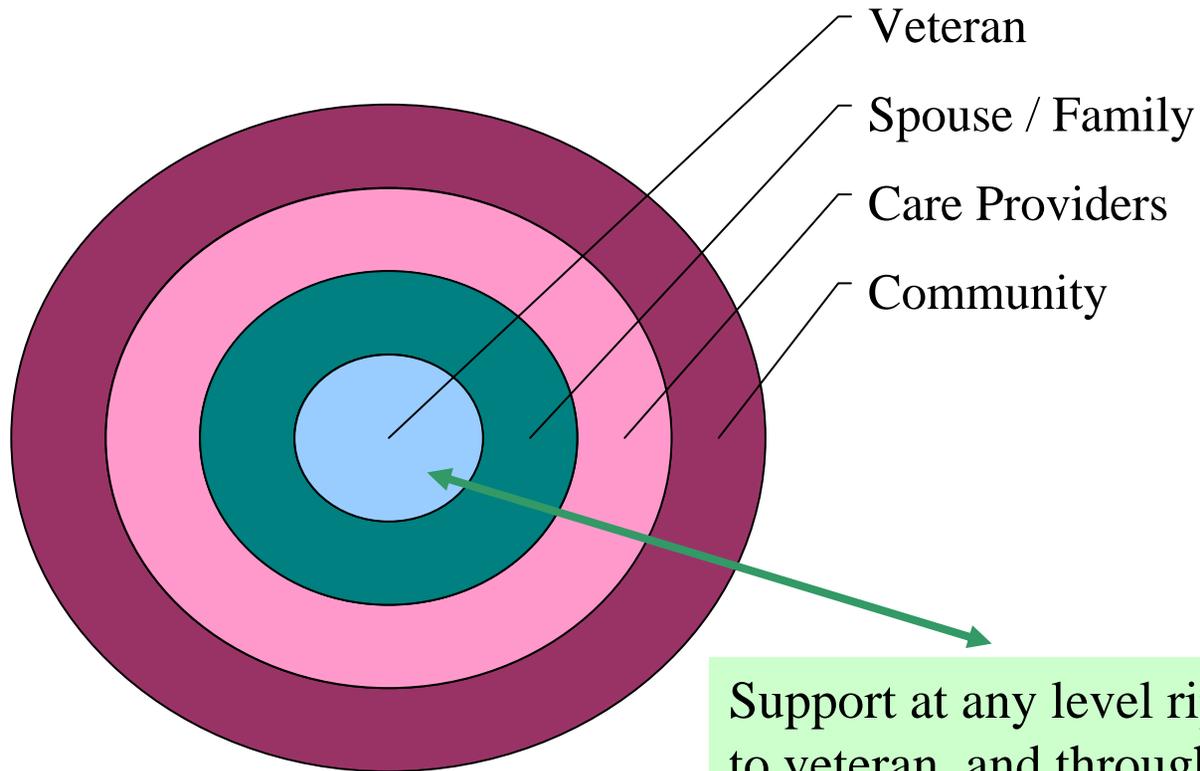- With a built-in <u>support</u> system

Value of Teams for Veteran

- Hope
- Decreased isolation
- Increased quality of life
- Decreased stigmatization
- Early intervention
- Adherence to treatment regimen
- Peer-to-Peer support

Value for Team Members

- Altruistic experiences
- Decreased social isolation
- Increased awareness of problems experienced
- Gratitude
- Mission and Purpose

Concentric Circles of Care

Veteran

Spouse / Family

Care Providers

Community

Support at any level ripples back to veteran. and throughout the community.

Support Team Philosophy

- Do <u>what</u> you can, <u>when</u> you can

- In a <u>coordinated</u> way

- With a built-in <u>support</u> system

Value of Support Systems to Communities

- Members support one another by
  - setting personal and team boundaries,
  - sharing the care,
  - inviting new persons to join the team.

- The support system encourages
  - mutual, respectful relationships
  - appropriate educational and emotional support

Project Compassion

Project Compassion

180 PROVIDENCE RD STE 1-C
CHAPEL HILL, NC 27514
(919) 402-1844

www.project-compassion.org

Faith-based Community Best Practices

- Providing childcare at all functions.

- Providing support during holidays and special occasions.

- Adopting a Veteran, Service Member and/or their family.

- Providing ministry outlets that are congruent with this population.

- Staying connected with and serving as a pastoral resource during and after deployment

Bibliographic Resources

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Figley, Charles, *Strangers at Home: Comment on Dirkzwager, Bramsen,*

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      <u>the Quest for Meaning.</u> Harper & Row; San Francisco 1981.

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Groopman, Jerome, <u>The Anatomy of Hope: How Patients Prevail in the face</u>
      <u>of Illness.</u> Random House, 2003.

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      <u>Journal of Hospice & Palliative Nursing</u>, 2005

Jaffe, Jaelline, Jeanne Segal, Lisa Flores Dumke, Fontana, A., & Rosenheck,
    R. *Trauma, change in strength of religious faith, and mental health service use among veterans treated for PTSD.* <u>Journal of Nervous Mental Disorders</u>. 2004

Bibliographic Resources

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Lynch, William F., Images of Hope: Imagination as Healer of the Hopeless**.**

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Dialogue with the Psychosocial Sciences, The Catholic University of America

Press, 2006.

Weaver, Andrew, Laura Flannely & John Preston: Counseling Survivors of Traumatic Events, 2003.

Wolski Conn, Joann (ed.), *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian*

Development. Paulist Press, 1986.

Web Resources 1

Basics

- www.va.gov VA homepage
- www.oefoif.va.gov Seamless Transition
- www.vba.va.gov Veterans Benefits Administration
- www.myhealth.va.gov My Healthe_Vet

Benefits

- http://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil Comprehensive guide to army benefits
- www.socialsecurity.gov/woundedwarriors   Social Security benefits for any disability incurred while on active duty after 10/1/01
- www.tricare.mil/mybenefit/home/overview/SpecialPrograms/PreActBenefitNGR   Tricare Reserve benefits
- www.hadit.com Info about VA claims and forums with vets helping vets
- www.vawatchdog.org/08/fedben%202008.pdf 2008 VA benefits guide

Web Resources 2

Community Support

- www.nc211.org Community resource database
- www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/local
- Social Service contact numbers for NC counties
- www.doc.state.nc.us/dop/education/jobstart/CountyResource.htm Resources by NC counties
- www.nccarelink.gov Health and Human Services
- www.vetcenter.va.gov Vet Centers
- www.amputee-coalition.org Support & resources for persons with limb loss
- www.nchv.org   National Coalition for Homeless Veterans
- www.gulfweb.org Gulf War veteran resources
- www.doa.state.nc.us/vets NC Division of Veteran Affairs
- http://dvr.dhhs.state.nc.us NC Vocational Rehabilitation: programs and locations
- www.bianc.net Traumatic Brain Injury information and support groups
- www.ssa.gov Social Security Administration
- http://veteransfocus.org NC info on Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services

Web Resources 3

Education

- www.gibill.va.gov GI Bill Info

- www.veteransfund.org Fund for Veterans Education

- www.doa.state.nc.us/vets/benefits-scholarships.htm Educational opportunities for vets and families

- www.cfnc.org College Foundation of NC

- www.ncccs.cc.nc.us/colleges_map.aspx Community Colleges by county

- http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/veteransandmilitaryhealth.html Library of Medicine& Institutes of Health: Veteran health information

Web Resources 4

Family & Home

- www.clearinghousenc.org Family wellbeing

- www.homesforourtroops.org Raises funds to assist severely injured vets build/remodel adaptive homes

- www.helpingheal.org Veteran's Financial Aid

- www.vetworking.com Social networking site for active duty members and veterans

- www.veteransandfamilies.org Resources to assist families with post-deployment transitions

- www.woundedwarriorproject.org Programs for severely injured veterans(physical or psychological)

Web Resources 5

Health

- www.myhealth.va.gov My healthe_vet
- www.hooah4health.com/deployment Deployment health resources
- www.4woman.gov Health Information for women
- www.mytherapynet.com/veterans Online therapy center: Not covered by VA, but 20% discount
- www.nchealthinfo.org Health and medical resources for North Carolinians
- www.militarymentalhealth.org
- Mental Health Self-Assessment Program
- www.ncptsd.va.gov National Center for PTSD: Research regarding symptoms and treatment
- www.ptsdhelp.net Resources for vets with PTSD
- http://www.samhsa.gov/vets/index.aspx Resources for veterans and their families
- www.gulfweb.org/bigdoc/selfhelp.cfm Info on Gulf War Syndrome @ on filing a claim with VBA
- www.aa.org Alcoholics Anonymous. Support groups and info for problems related to alcohol
- www.na.org Narcotics Anonymous. Support groups and info for problems related to drugs

Web Resources 6

Recreation & Leisure Within VA

- http://www1.va.gov/vetevent/wsc/2009 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic
- http://www1.va.gov/vetevent/nvwg/2009 National Veterans Wheelchair games
- http://www1.va.gov/vetevent/caf/2008   National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

In Community

- www.svasp.org Opportunities to learn and participate in sports for severely injured vets
- www.dsusa.org Resources for learning and participating in adaptive recreation
- www.lakeshore.org Adaptive sports and recreation programs for OEF/OIF vets
- www.teamriverrunner.org Adaptive kayaking for disabled vets
- www.carolinascahllenge.org Rehabilitative biking for disabled veterans
- www.challengeaspen.com/veteran-programs.cfm Sports programs for disabled veterans
- www.resourcecenter.usga.org Adaptive golfing programs, facilities and instructors
- http://www.ntwh.org/index.php?globalnav=programs&sectionnav=other_programs&sectionSubnav=wounded   Writing workshops for disabled OEF/OIF veterans

Web Resources 7

Veteran Organizations

- http://www1.va.gov/vso Directory of Veterans Service Organizations
- www.vfw.org Veterans of Foreign Wars. Assists members with filing claims; receives discounts
- www.dav.org Disabled American Veterans. Assistance with filing claims and transportation.
- www.amvets.org AMVETS assists with filing claims and other beneficial veteran info
- www.legion.org American Legion. Family support programs, financial assistance, transition assistance.
- www.iava.org Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America. Resources and info for OEF/OIF vets
- www.nvf.org National Veterans Foundation. Emotional support and assistance
- www.iraqwarveterans.org
- Info and support for OEF/OIF veterans

Web Resources 8

Employment

- www.usajobs.gov Search vacancies within federal government
- http://www.ncesc.com/individual/veterans/veteransMain.asp Employment Security Commission of NC
- www.recruitmilitary.com Employers seeking vets
- www.vetbiz.gov Assistance for starting a business
- www.quintcareers.com/former_military.html Resource for transitioning to civilian jobs
- www.vetjobs.com Job search for vets and families
- www.veteranstoday.com Independent job board
- www.jobbankinfo.org/govtJobBanks.aspx Portal to veteran job banks nationally
- www.helmetstohardhats.com Employment transition from active duty to a trade
- www.hirevetsfirst.gov Jobs and resources
- www.taonline.com Transition Assistance Online
- www.militaryexits.com Jobs and Resources
- http://esgr.org Resource if employer has acted unfairly following return from deployment
- http://aw2portal.com Army's Wounded Warrior Program
- www.goodwill.org Job training and placement
- http://dvr.dhhs.state.nc.us NC Vocational Rehabilitation: programs and locations

Other Resources

1. http://www.helpguide.org/mental/emotional_psychological_trauma.htm

2. http://www.hooah4health.com/mind/combatstress/default.htm

3. www.ncptsd.va.gov

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