

GUIDELINES FOR HELPING YOUR FAMILY AFTER COMBAT INJURY

Your military loved one has been wounded and suddenly your world has been turned upside down. Combat injury is a life-changing event that impacts a family's routines and its sense of safety and wholeness. Combat injury especially affects children of all ages. Children worry about the effect of the injury on their wounded parent; how that injury will change their bond with that parent and the parents' relationship with each other. Often, caring adults do not know how to speak to children about the injury and its impact on their family, or how much and what kind of information should be communicated.

At this time, many resources of care and support will be extended to your injured service member, to you and

Combat injury is a life-changing event that impacts a family's routines and its sense of safety and wholeness.

to your family and children. Due to normal distress and anxiety, there may be times when you will not hear, understand, or accept all that you will be told.

Do not be shy about writing things down or having an important person in your life accompany you and take notes for you. When you have questions or forget important information ask doctors and healthcare professionals to re-explain or repeat themselves so you can better understand the information they have provided. Good communication between you and your spouse's medical team and between you, your spouse, your family, and your children is essential for helping you cope and make important decisions related to the care of your injured loved one and to the care of your family.

Principles of Caring for our Nation's Combat Injured Families and Children

Despite the uniqueness of your family's situation and your loved one's combat injury, there are certain principles that should inform the care you receive. Understanding these principles of care can assist you in recognizing what you require and in seeking appropriate services to support your family's long-term health and wellbeing. Care and services should be delivered in a manner which:

- Provides a sense of safety, comfort, information, practical assistance, and connection to appropriate community resources that can foster your family's healthy recovery. While the major goal of the health care facility is to provide treatment to your loved one, there will be people on staff who can assist in solving some of your family's practical needs.
- Is family focused and understands that you, your family, and your children are all profoundly affected by the injury. Treatment should help relieve family distress, support ability to be available to your children during the stress of injury recovery, and help guide your efforts in communicating with your children about the injury.
- Reinforces your family's strengths and resilience while understanding that each family may respond in a different way to the challenges it faces. Healthcare professionals must be responsive to the unique impact of the injury on your family and provide appropriate help and support.
- Is sensitive to the unique responses of children of varying age and gender, and recognizes that distress, care needs, and communication ability will vary according to the age of your child or children.
- Is tailored to your family's *changing needs* throughout

Continued

what may be a long course of treatment and rehabilitation; anticipating future needs as the recovery process unfolds, including discharge and transition to a new community or new way-of-life.

- Encourages a partnership and bringing together of services between your family, treatment providers (both military and civilian), and community services. Quality care reaches across traditional professional boundaries and levels of care.
- Respects your family's unique background including culture, language, composition, ethnicity, religion and the traditions of military families.
- Helps your family access care and addresses any *barriers to service* (unnecessary roadblocks that get in the way of your good care), which can complicate the healthy recovery of your loved one and family members. These barriers may include a family member's difficulty in accessing health care or community services, their reluctance to seek needed help, or a community's lack of awareness or understanding of the needs of combat injured families.
- Is informed by knowledgeable service providers, professionals, organizations, and communities that have access to and provide quality educational materials to address the challenges that confront combat injured families.



Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress
Department of Psychiatry
Uniformed Services University
4301 Jones Bridge Road, Bethesda, MD 20814-4799
www.CSTSONline.org