

A Health Campaign of Uniformed Services University, www.usuhs.edu, and the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Bethesda, Maryland, www.CSTSonline.org

HOW CAN I GET A SERVICE MEMBER TO SEEK HELP?

Talking Points for Loved Ones

Loved ones play a key role in encouraging service members to seek help for health problems. It is often a close family member who is the first to notice changes in their loved one's behavior or appearance. These changes may signal a physical or mental health problem, or both.

There has been an increase in psychological and medical disorders since the start of OEF and OIF. Many service members, some subjected to multiple deployments and combat exposure, have returned with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and drug and alcohol misuse. The number of suicides of current and former service members has increased in recent years. Physical injuries include traumatic brain injury (TBI), burns, amputations, and multi-trauma wounds.

Loved ones play a key role in encouraging service members to seek help for health problems.

Service members are often reluctant to seek out healthcare services, especially for emotional problems and depressive symptoms. As a result, many are living with serious health issues that affect

their well-being and the well-being of their families and children.

Talking to a loved one about seeking help isn't always easy. *How do you talk to someone about changes in their behavior* (anger, withdrawal, or risky behaviors such as reckless driving and alcohol and drug misuse), and *how do you get them to seek professional help?*

This *Courage to Care* provides tips on talking to your loved one using three approaches that may help service members view health seeking in a more favorable light.

When talking to your loved one about seeking help, emphasize:

1. The Role of Outside Events

When talking to your loved one about seeking help, point to the *outside factors* that may have contributed to what you are seeing or to your loved one's symptoms. Service members may be more willing to acknowledge a problem in terms of outside events rather than as an illness.

Talking Point

"I've noticed that you are not yourself lately. You are more irritable, withdrawn, and seem sad a lot of the time. Given what you have been through — multiple deployments, combat stress, and adjusting to being back, it's understandable, but the kids and I are concerned, and we want you to feel better."

2. Help Seeking as a Strength

Many service members are concerned that seeking help means they are weak or dependent, and they worry "what will others think of me?" Talk about seeking help as a sign

of *superior judgment*, good decision-making, and involving collaboration.

Talking Point

"This has lasted a long time — restless sleep, jumpiness, anger. Seeing someone at the clinic would be a good idea and and probably the best thing you can do at this time. I know you and the doctor can work together to help you feel better."

3. One's Obligation to Stay Healthy

Duty is part of military life and culture. Discuss health seeking as fulfilling one's duty to self and important people in the service member's life — family, children, and comrades.

Talking Point

A spouse or partner might state: "I know that you are 'getting by', but by getting help, you can be doing that much better! By taking care of yourself, you are taking care of our family. We both have a duty to stay healthy for each other, for our work, and, importantly, for our children."

Continued

Remember, loved ones play an important role in encouraging service members to seek help. This fact sheet provides three approaches that may reduce the stigma many attach to seeking medical care. In conversation, it may be helpful to: 1) describe whatever changes you are

seeing as likely due to *external events* such as the stresses of deployment, 2) talk about help seeking as a sign of *courage*, *good judgment*, and an *obligation or duty* to one's self, family, friends, and job.

RESOURCES

Real Warrior: Resilience, Recovery, Reintegration

<http://www.realwarriors.net/>

Contains information on psychological health and traumatic brain injury for service members including Guard and Reserve. Features real stories of service members who have sought and received help.

Military OneSource

www.militaryonesource.com

Features comprehensive information on all aspects of military life and health, and an 800 24/7 helpline for all services and their families.

Courage to Care is a health promotion campaign of Uniformed Services University and its Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS). CSTS is the academic arm and a partnering Center of the Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.



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