

Clergy Training on PTSD and Caregiving: Communication, Parenting and Self-Care

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Supporting Veterans, Caregivers, and Their Families

Knowing You're Not Alone

Hope for the Future



Supporting Clergy and Veteran Families

- 1) Orient clergy to family issues of warriors with PTSD
- 2) Provide basic information on some of the things clergy themselves can do to help families (mostly through education)
- 3) Suggest ways in which houses of worship and/or communities can provide assistance to families
- 4) Provide some resources for additional learning

Areas of focus

Communication



Parenting



Self-Care



Caregiver and Veteran: **Communication**





Avoidance & Change

- # Afraid to address what happened to them
- # Family members fearful of examining the event

Reactions


Trauma reactions change how a survivor feels and acts



This change affects everyone in the family



Knowing that something terrible can happen can make people feel fearful




Very often trauma survivors feel “on edge” due to preoccupation with staying safe

Interplay of Reactions

Family members often feel upset that their loved one has gone through a trauma



How the trauma survivor and family member communicate about their reactions is important



“She thinks I’m weak”

“He is always withdrawn from us”

Guidance for Caregivers



- # **Be cautious** about showing doubt about Veteran's story
- # **Be cautious** about asking interrogative questions

DO

express care and concern:

“I am sorry that this has happened to you.”

normalize trauma reactions,
say things like:

“You are not alone,” or
“This has happened to
other Veterans.”

validate the experience:

“That must have been very
frightening.”

PTSD & Relationship Dangers

- # High divorce rates
- # Increased risk of partner and child abuse
- # Risk to partner's mental health



“We” versus “You” Approach to PTSD

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Communal coping | Associated with healthier relationships—How “we” deal with problems |
| Communal view | Coping with problems as “We” |
| Communication | “On the same page” about problems |
| Communal action | Partners discuss and both take action in addressing problems |

Communication Strategies



Passive

Assertive

Aggressive

Hearing the other person out

“We” approach to problem solving

It may be the PTSD it may not

“Walk a mile in someone else’s shoes”

Respect



Listening & Empathy

Verbal

- # Ask clarifying questions
- # Paraphrasing
- # Tone of voice

Non-verbal

- # Body language
- # Attentiveness
- # Eye contact
- # Facial expressions

Listening Strategies



Strategies to De-escalate Arguments



Take a **time out!** This allows both partners to calm down and collect their thoughts. But there are rules.

Code word or
sign

Set a time to
reconnect

Plan ahead





PTSD & Parenting

A photograph of a family: a man with a beard in a green shirt, a woman with curly hair in a white shirt, and a young child in a plaid shirt. They are all smiling and looking at each other. The man is on the left, the woman is on the right, and the child is in the center. The woman is kissing the child on the cheek. The background is a bright, out-of-focus indoor setting.

You Know Best

You know your Veteran and child the best

Take into account your child's age and development

Impact of PTSD on Parenting and the Child's Experience

- # What impact can PTSD symptoms have on parenting?
- # What may a child's experience of these symptoms be?





Depression

Emotional
Numbing

Irritability

Anger outbursts

Panic attacks

A research study with married OEF/OIF Veterans who were referred to mental health treatment in VA found ...

75%

reported difficulty
reintegrating with
their family

(Sayers, Farrow, Ross, & Oslin, 2009)



A research study with married OEF/OIF Veterans who were referred to mental health treatment in VA found ...

41%
felt “like a
guest within
their home”

(Sayers, Farrow, Ross, & Oslin, 2009)



A research study with married OEF/OIF Veterans who were referred to mental health treatment in VA found ...

25%

reported “their children acting afraid or not being warm towards them”

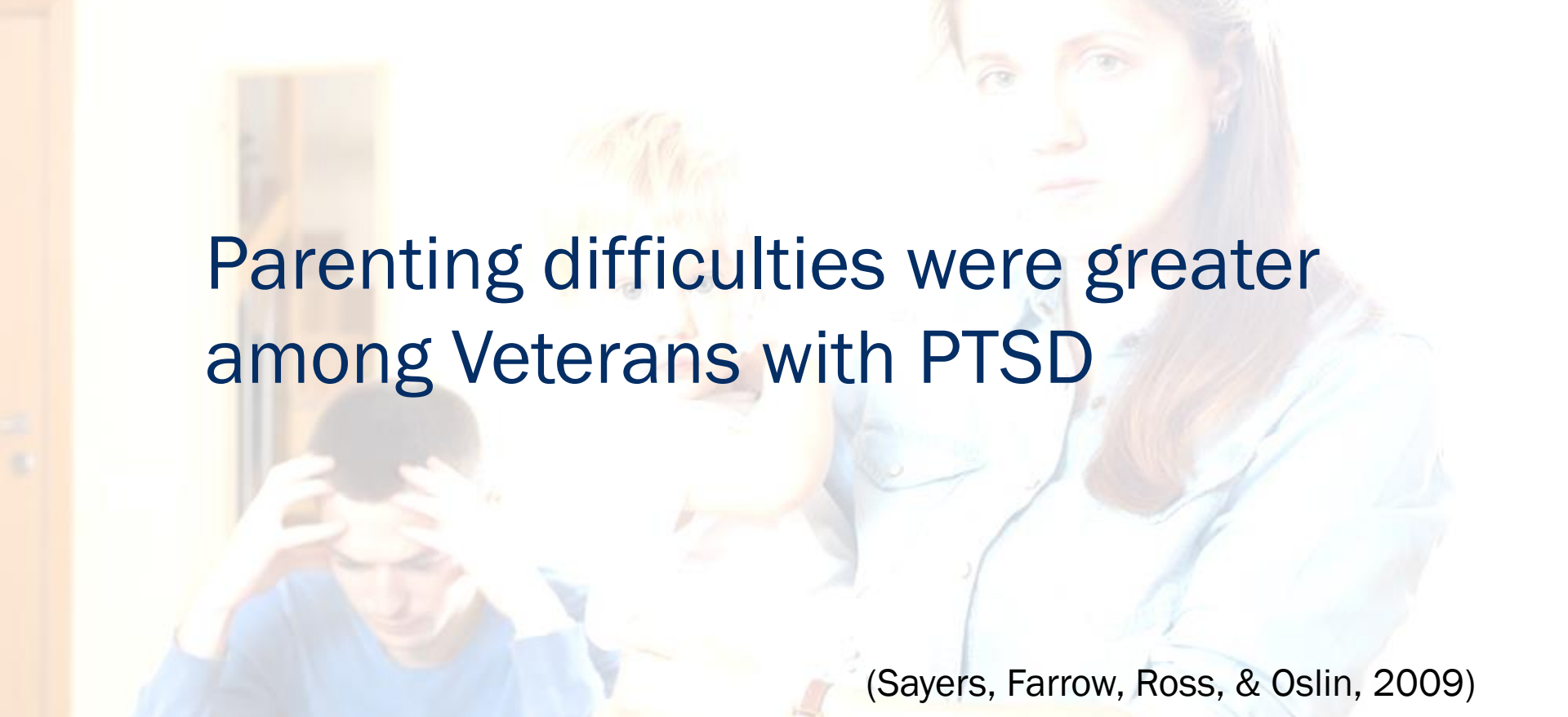
(Sayers, Farrow, Ross, & Oslin, 2009)



A research study with married OEF/OIF Veterans who were referred to mental health treatment in VA found ...

Parenting difficulties were greater
among Veterans with PTSD

(Sayers, Farrow, Ross, & Oslin, 2009)





If you're like a lot of families,
NO one talks about it.

Barriers to talking with children about PTSD

- # You don't know how to explain it to your children
- # Talking about it is painful
- # You feel shame, guilt, and embarrassment
- # You worry about how your child will perceive you
- # You are afraid your children may tell others



Direct communication
with children about mental health issues is encouraged



Discuss what/when/how
openly with your Veteran

Do your homework

How to prepare...

Encourage children to ask questions and share feelings

Regularly open the discussion

Timing is everything



Starting the conversation ...

- # Be hopeful yet honest
- # Start the conversation slowly
- # Encourage sharing and questions
- # Be aware of your and your Veteran's feelings
- # Pay attention to your child's reaction

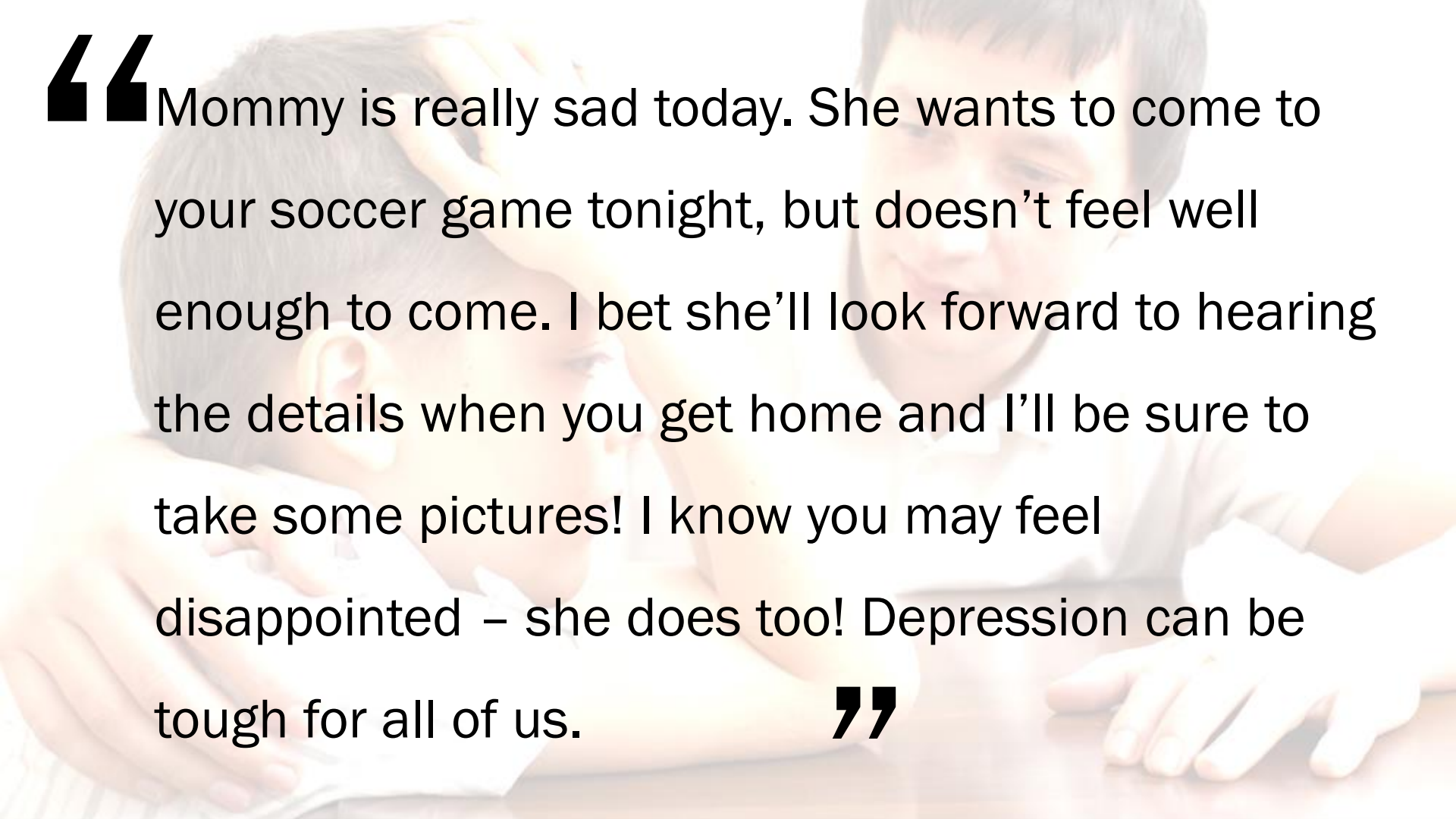




- # Avoid sharing details of Veteran's traumatic event(s)
- # Help child understand specific symptoms and how to cope

“Daddy feels uncomfortable in large groups. That’s why we take two cars when we go to family gatherings – it allows him to leave early if he wants to. ”





“ Mommy is really sad today. She wants to come to your soccer game tonight, but doesn't feel well enough to come. I bet she'll look forward to hearing the details when you get home and I'll be sure to take some pictures! I know you may feel disappointed – she does too! Depression can be tough for all of us. ”

Talking to your child...



“You cannot ‘catch’ PTSD”

“Many helpful treatments available”

“You are not to blame”

“I don’t have all the answers”

What are some red flags
that I may need
to explore
professional help
for my child?





Comments about hurting self or others

Depression/Anxiety

Regressive behaviors

Increased clinginess and crying

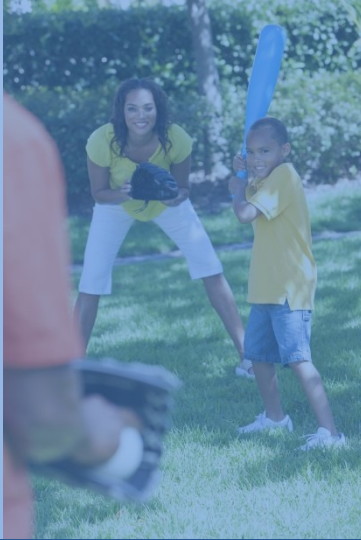
Aggressive behavior

Changes in sleeping/eating/weight/energy

Changes in school behavior

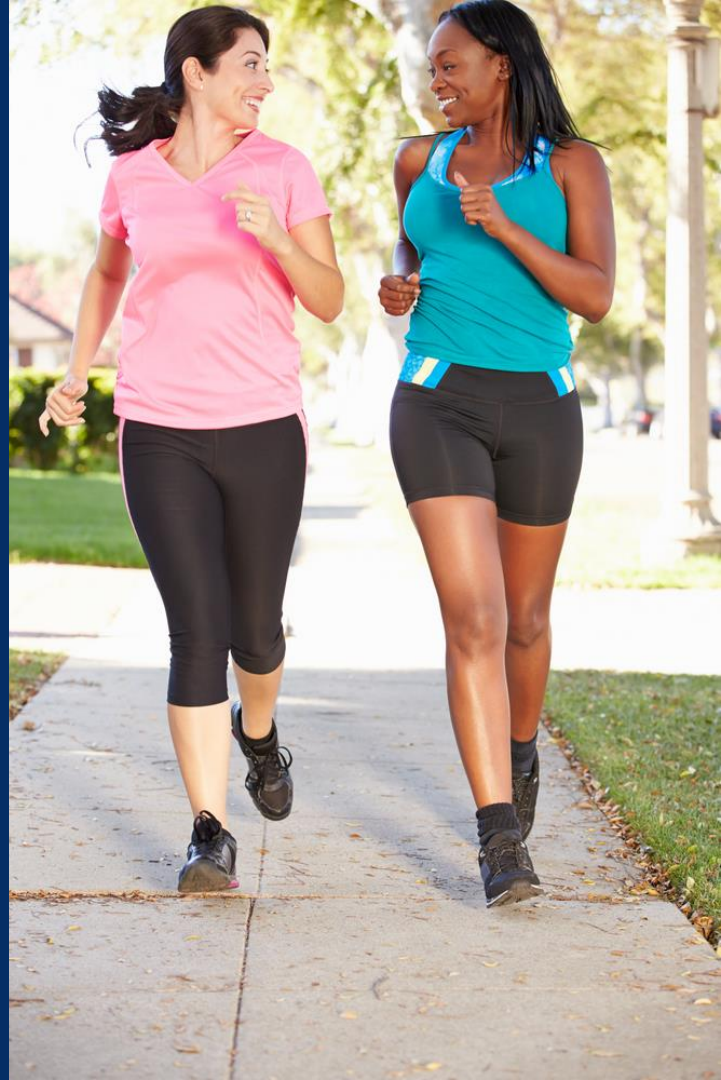
CHILD Red Flags

Fostering close relationships with children



Caregiver **Self-Care**

- # Avoiding isolation
- # Maintaining a social life
- # Maintaining pleasant activities
- # Sleep, diet, exercise
- # Spirituality



- ✓ Being a parent is challenging
- ✓ PTSD affects everyone in the family
- ✓ It is important to talk to your children about it
- ✓ Maintain family routines, rituals, one-on-one time
- ✓ Self care is important to get yourself through the tough times
- ✓ Ask for help



Building Hope



Summary

Communication



Parenting



Self-Care



Collaborating with Others

- # Assertion Training for Couples
- # Conflict management for Couples
- # Anxiety Management for Couples
- # Problem-solving for Couples
- # Communication Training for Couples
- # Couples Retreats
- # Couples Therapy

National Center for PTSD Website

www.ptsd.va.gov



PTSD Consultation Program

FOR PROVIDERS WHO TREAT VETERANS

(866) 948-7880 or
PTSDconsult@va.gov



There is no charge for
these services.

Who can contact us?

Any provider treating Veterans with PTSD.

Who are the consultants?

Experts at the National Center for PTSD including psychologists, social workers, physicians, and pharmacists.

Ask us about

- Evidence-Based Treatment
- Medications
- Clinical Management
- Resources
- Assessment
- Referrals
- Educational Opportunities
- Improving Care
- Transitioning Veterans to VA Care

Clergy Resources

The Clergy Connection Newsletter on Children of Veterans:

http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/docs/ruralclergytraining/The_Clergy_Connection_October2014.pdf

Support Group Webinar:

<https://chapvaco.adobeconnect.com/p6oqcegwxqa/>



Our Newsletter: The Clergy Connection

<http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/ruralclergytraining/>

Contact the Rural Clergy Training Project:

jim.goalder@gmail.com