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

Karen A. Guthrie, LICSW
Senior Consultant, VA's National Center for PTSD and National Center for Homelessness among Veterans

Michelle D. Sherman, Ph.D.
REACH Program, University of Minnesota, Department of Family Social Science
Minneapolis VA Medical Center
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“He is always withdrawn from us”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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>express care and concern:</th>
<th>“I am sorry that this has happened to you.”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>normalize trauma reactions, say things like:</td>
<td>“You are not alone,” or “This has happened to other Veterans.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>validate the experience:</td>
<td>“That must have been very frightening.”</td>
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PTSD & Relationship Dangers

High divorce rates

Increased risk of partner and child abuse

Risk to partner’s mental health
<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Communal coping</strong></th>
<th>Associated with healthier relationships—How “we” deal with problems</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communal view</strong></td>
<td>Coping with problems as “We”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td>“On the same page” about problems</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Communal action</strong></td>
<td>Partners discuss and both take action in addressing problems</td>
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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 Strategies

**Verbal**
- Ask clarifying questions
- Paraphrasing
- Tone of voice

**Non-verbal**
- Body language
- Attentiveness
- Eye contact
- Facial expressions
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
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, & Osling, 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.
How to prepare...

# Discuss what/when/how openly with your Veteran

# Do your homework
# 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
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
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
PTSD Consultation Program
FOR PROVIDERS WHO TREAT VETERANS

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.

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

There is no charge for these services.

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:

# Support Group Webinar:
https://chapvaco.adobeconnect.com/p6oqcegwxwqa/
Our Newsletter: The Clergy Connection
http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/ruralclergytraining/

Contact the Rural Clergy Training Project:
  jim.goaldere@gmail.com