

# JOINING FORCES



## Joining Families

HELPING, CARING AND LEARNING

### Post Deployment Health Risk Behaviors

*“The emotional impact of deployment is not just about PTSD. A variety of risk behaviors can also challenge returning soldiers, their families and healthcare providers. Health risk behaviors require our attention.”*

As the Global War on Terror continues, a great deal of attention is paid to disorders that can result from combat stress, such as PTSD. In fact, Army families are more likely to suffer the effects of new or increased changes in behavior in returning service members that imperil individual and family health. Increased tobacco or alcohol use and newly developed aggression or reckless driving can compromise the health of service members as well as their families. It can be difficult for healthcare practitioners and families to distinguish between normal post deployment readjustment and those changed health behaviors that require medical attention. We must educate soldiers and their families to be alert to these risk behaviors and to encourage help-seeking if these symptoms persist.

#### Risk Behaviors

The following risk behaviors can result from combat deployment and are often overlooked as health issues even though they may have long term consequences. These behaviors can first appear during a holiday

reunion or in the first days or hours of reunion and reintegration with the family post deployment.

1. **Cigarette or other tobacco smoking** — These habits may start, restart or increase since deployment.
2. **Alcohol use** — Drinking that increases upon return from deployment may be a misguided effort to reduce stress.
3. **Reckless driving or irritability and anger at home** — the intensity of the war zone can show up in aggressive driving or irritability. Alcohol makes this even worse.

Changes in behavior can be the result of the stress of deployment. They require evaluation to keep our Army family strong.

*These health risk behaviors are especially difficult for families with infants and young children, and can lead to injury, illness and marital and family problems.*

**For more information on health risk behaviors, visit:**  
<http://www.centerforthestudyoftraumaticstress.org/education.courage.shtml>