

JOINING FORCES



Joining Families

HELPING, CARING AND LEARNING

Post Deployment Stress Responses

“Service members who have a difficult time after their combat experience often reveal their troubles to those they most trust – their family or close friends.”

Families and friends of returning soldiers often wonder what to expect when their loved one returns from a combat zone -- what is “typical” by way of stress responses, and when should they become concerned. Common questions may be “at what point should I be worried about my spouse or buddy?”, or “how can I encourage my friend or spouse to seek help?” It is important to educate service members and their families about post deployment distress symptoms, and how to distinguish between *normal* stress responses and those behaviors that may signal a more *serious* problem that requires medical

Distress Responses

It is not uncommon for people who have been involved in high stress situations to have what are called distress responses. Distress responses may be physical or emotional in nature. Symptoms of distress are usually mild, and go away after several weeks. If these problems (*described below*) *last longer than a month or two months after returning home, a medical professional should be consulted.* There are effective treatments today that are readily available from primary care physicians or mental health providers.

- **Sleep Problems** — difficulty falling asleep; staying asleep or waking early and not being able to get back to sleep.
- **Restlessness** — being jittery, overreacting or showing a high degree of nervous energy.
- **Overly Watchful or Hypervigilant** — oversensitivity or anticipation about things in the environment (e.g., noise, physical objects) that are viewed as a threat to personal safety.
- **Social Withdrawal** — avoiding family or friends, always wanting to be alone, avoiding social activities that he/she used to enjoy.

The majority of returning service members are likely to have some of the distress responses described above. *Veterans should be encouraged to seek help when these symptoms persist or when they disrupt individual or family health or functioning.*

For more information on post deployment distress responses for your staff and those they serve, go to: <http://www.centerforthestudyoftraumaticstress.org/downloads/CSTS%20Helping%20Your%20Loved%20Ones.pdf>