



HEALTH AWARENESS

Understanding The Psychological Effects Of War

(NAPSA)—If you know a service member who is having mental health problems, there are ways you can help.

Over 2 million men and women have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since September 11, 2001. Many have deployed multiple times and many have been exposed to the stress of combat. While not all who serve come home with severe mental health symptoms, all are affected.

Current studies suggest that as many as 35 percent of those seeing combat will eventually show signs of the invisible injuries of war—post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, depression, anxiety. Family members often recognize these signs before their loved ones yet feel unable to help.

Your loved one may return from war with understandable—but extremely complex and sometimes frightening—emotional, cognitive and behavioral reactions, including fear, rage, sadness, withdrawal, depression, anxiety, confusion, difficulty concentrating, memory lapses, headaches, body aches, substance abuse and relationship difficulties.

Your loved one may be reluctant to seek help for a number of reasons. Dr. Barbara Van Dahlen, a licensed psychologist in the Washington, D.C. area, and founder and president of Give an Hour, a national nonprofit organization providing free mental health services to the military community, offers these suggestions:

- Be direct in your communication. Tell your service member how much you love him or her and that you are there.

- Express hope, optimism and commitment.



Family members are often the first to recognize the signs of post-traumatic stress in those returning from active service.

- If your service member is reluctant to seek professional help, offer to go with the person. Relationships can be adversely affected by the consequences of war and your willingness to do your part to work through these difficulties will be helpful.

- If your loved one remains unwilling to seek help, go for yourself. A professional can help you develop a specific plan to assist your loved one, and your loved one may be more willing to accept help upon seeing your example.

If you feel your loved one is a danger to him/herself or others, don't hesitate to ask for help or call the police.

"We know that the psychological effects of war and repeated, long deployments affect many more people than just the service member," notes Dr. Van Dahlen. "It is important to know that these kinds of reactions are normal and to remember you are not alone and that help is available."

For more information, visit www.giveanhour.org.