

# The Military Client/Couple: Does Anyone Really Hear Me? Or Get Me?

Presented by:

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# Where do we begin...????

- Over 1.5 million military members and their spouses/partners will be seeking individual, family or couple counseling over the next ten years due to the exposure of combat trauma, military sexual assault, sleep apnea, depression, anger, substance abuse, anxiety and other presenting challenges such as suicidal ideations and PTSD.
- Sadly, every 65 minutes, (the average time it takes to browse Facebook), another veteran takes their own life. That's 22 suicides per day (Department of Veterans Affairs, Feb. 2013).
- One suicide is one too many...

# Suicide risk factors & warning signs

- Relationship problems
- History of previous suicide attempts, talking or hinting of suicide, themes of death in letters or notes
- Substance abuse
- Family history of suicide or violence
- Work related problems (hear of negative counseling support)
- Transitions (deployments, re-entry into civilian work force)
- Significant loss of a love one
- Current or pending disciplinary or legal action
- Setbacks (academic, career, personal, physical limitations)
- Financial difficulties (gambling, spending)
- History of Depression
- Giving away property
- Withdrawal from friends, isolation, and loss of interest in activities
- Unusual behavior
- Acquiring the means to kill oneself

(Fort Bragg Suicide Prevention Program, accessed online November 2013)

# How is military culture different?

Military culture is a special population & entails a unique mental health therapist . One that can...

- Demonstrate unconditional positive regard, acceptance, presence & empathy
- Teach creative solutions to recreational activity and social interactions
- Educate families on PTSD, depression, substance abuse and offer resources
- Coach the veteran couple to remain on track with goals & redefine as needed
- Nurture the cyclic thought patterns of triggers & arousal to a state of mindfulness
- Face the countertransference of one's own fears about authenticity within sessions
- Implement the importance of self-care for all family members
- Pastor the unique spirituality & religious beliefs of each individual
- Accept the gender differences, sexual orientation & preferences of others
- Understand the vast races, cultures & ethnicities the couple has interacted with
- Delve into the intimacy of the bedroom where impotence, isolation, insomnia, aging, and injured bodies reside alongside passionate desires that often go unattended or ignored

# Myths about seeking help

- People who seek counseling are weak
- Counseling is just for those with serious mental & emotional issues
- Change is simple, I can handle it on my own
- Counselors are going to tell me what to do & try to fix me
- I'm going to be "flagged" if I seek counseling
- Others will judge me if I go to counseling
- It's going to get better, I just need to give it some time
- There's nothing wrong, everyone has rough times
- Counseling is just a place to air my dirty laundry, it's none of their business
- Life is tough, you just deal with it...just suck it up
- I share my problems with friends over a few drinks, they get me
- There are others worse off than me, they need it more than I do
- It's just a place where my partner & the counselor can gang up on me
- I just need to be left alone to deal with it in my own way
- I'm ok, they're the one with the problem

There is **HOPE...**  
**Help Options Purpose Engage**

We are here to **help**.

You have **options**. You are not alone, despite what your thoughts tell you.

You have **purpose**. You never deploy alone & you're never alone when you deploy home.

You can **engage**. You will find healing, hope & happiness but it does take time.

# Key issues for military families

- A lack of family understanding
- Increase socialization
- Properly medicated
- Doctors/providers who care and are non-judgmental
- Confidentiality
- Insomnia
- Triggers
- Arousal
- Violence
- Anger/rage (embracing the anger, there is a reason for it--feeling unjustified)
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Feeling alone
- Feeling defective
- Feeling outcast
- Frustration with the VA
- Partner/relational problems
- Lack of sexual arousal (due to meds or discord within the relationship)
- Nightmares
- Uncomfortable in crowds
- Symptomology
- PTSD
- Flashbacks
- Hypervigilance
- Physical/emotional pains
- Grief
- Isolation from family, friends, support

# Ways to assist in addressing needs

- Limit TV & news (read news instead)
- Counseling Sessions online
- Veterans supporting other veterans (peer support groups)
- Support groups with their own unit using other soldiers as mentors
- Daily/weekly check ins with others
- Recreation therapy (archery, Tai Chi, yoga, swimming, hiking, fishing, hunting, rafting, fly fishing)
- Creative therapy (yard sale)
- Movie therapy (comedies)
- Symphony/music/arts therapy
- Grocery store therapy (leave the house once a day to buy a banana)
- Adventure therapy (dragon boat racing, marathons, back packing)
- Socialization therapy (movies/dinner, park in front & work up to going inside)
- Spirituality
- coping skills (non-judgmental & unconditional acceptance)
- Sharing stories (veteran/therapist)
- Medication (research meds on their own, natural ways, diet, exercise)
- Embracing grief of what was/what is
- Vulnerability rug or comfort zone corner
- Facebook groups for online support
- Bibliotherapy (self help books)
- Open discussions regarding sex, what's working, what isn't
- Assurance of a safe haven "What I say isn't going to flag me."



# Adult pleasant event schedule

(DBT handout, source unknown)

- Soaking in the bathtub
- Planning my career or education
- Getting out of debt (pay it down)
- Collecting things (coins, shells, etc.)
- Going on vacation
- Thinking how it will be when I finish school, work, etc.
- Recycling old items
- Going on a date
- Relaxing
- Going to a movie in the middle of the week
- Jogging, walking
- Thinking I have done a full day
- Listening to music
- Recalling past parties
- Buying household gadgets
- Lying in the sun
- Planning a career change
- Laughing
- Thinking about my past trips
- Listening to others
- Reading magazines or newspapers
- Hobbies (stamp collecting, gardening)
- Spending an evening with friends
- Planning a day's activities
- Going skating
- Meeting new people
- Remembering beautiful scenery
- Saving money
- Going home from work early
- Journaling
- Practice karate, judo, yoga, belly

# Adult pleasant event schedule

(DBT handout, source unknown)

- Thinking about retirement
- Repairing things around the house
- Working on my car, bike or motorcycle
- Remembering the words & deeds of loving people
- Wearing sexy clothes
- Having quiet evenings
- Taking care of plants
- Buying or selling stocks
- Going swimming or water aerobics
- Doodling or drawing
- Exercising
- Collecting old things
- Going to a party
- Thinking about buying things
- Playing golf or soccer
- Flying a kite
- Having discussions with friends
- Riding a motorcycle or bicycle
- Sex
- Running or walking around a track
- Going camping
- Singing around the house
- Arranging flowers
- Practicing religion (church, pray, etc.)
- Losing weight
- Going to the beach
- Thinking I'm an OK person
- A day with nothing to do
- Having a class reunion
- Going sail boating
- Traveling abroad or in the US
- Painting
- Doing something spontaneously
- Doing needlepoint, crewel, etc.
- Sleeping

# Adult pleasant event schedule

(DBT handout, source unknown)

- Driving
- Entertaining
- Going to clubs (Elks, Toastmaster, etc)
- Thinking about getting married
- Going hunting
- Singing with groups
- Flirting (with a partner or otherwise)
- Playing musical instruments
- Doing arts & crafts
- Making a gift for someone
- Buying records
- Watching boxing, wrestling
- Planning parties
- Cooking
- Going for a drive
- Writing books, poems, articles
- Buying clothes
- Going out to dinner
- Working
- Discussing books
- Sight seeing
- Gardening
- Going to the beauty parlor or barber
- Early morning coffee & newspaper
- Playing tennis
- Kissing
- Watching my children, nephews or nieces play
- Thinking I have a lot more going on for me than most people
- Going to plays, concerts, opera
- Daydreaming
- Planning to go to school

# Adult pleasant event schedule

(DBT handout, source unknown)

- Listening to a stereo
- Refinishing furniture
- Watching TV
- Making lists of tasks
- Going bike riding
- Walks in the woods or waterfront
- Buying gifts
- Traveling to National Parks
- Completing a task
- Going to a spectator sport
- Eating gooey, fattening foods
- Photography
- Going fishing
- Thinking about pleasant events
- Staying on a diet
- Playing with animals
- Flying a plane
- Reading fiction or non fiction
- Acting
- Being alone
- Writing diary entries or letters
- Cleaning
- Taking children places
- Dancing or dancing lessons
- Going on a picnic or have one inside
- Thinking "I did that pretty well"
- Meditating
- Having lunch with a friend
- Going to the mountains
- Thinking about having a family
- Thoughts about happy moments from childhood
- Splurging
- Playing cards

# Adult pleasant event schedule

(DBT handout, source unknown)

- Doing crossword puzzles or Sudoku
- Having a political discussion
- Playing softball
- Seeing or showing photos or slides
- Playing guitar
- Knitting
- Shooting pool
- Dressing up & looking nice
- Reflecting on how I've improved
- Buying things for myself
- Talking on the phone
- Going to a museum
- Lighting candles
- Listening to the radio
- Getting a massage
- Saying "I love you"
- Thinking about my good qualities
- Buying books
- Taking a sauna or a steam bath
- Going skiing
- White-water canoeing or kayaking
- Going bowling
- Doing woodworking
- Taking ballet, tap or line dancing
- Sitting in a sidewalk cafe'
- Having an aquarium
- Going horseback riding
- Doing something new
- Working on jigsaw puzzles
- Thinking I'm a person who can cope
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

# Value Statement

- I thank God for the gift of this day. I am made in God's image.
- I have positive self-talk, self-trust & feelings
- I give myself permission to cry & to heal
- I have self-acceptance of who I am. I cannot lose my self worth
- I accept my feelings no matter what they are, my feelings are a big part of my healing
- I have a good attitude about my feelings
- I have goals that are attainable. I interpret how I react to life
- I no longer compete against myself
- I recognize healthy feelings & believe I deserve them
- I care, I have worth, I am intelligent, I am beautiful, I am of value
- I accept my feelings & I am learning to think through them rather than react
- I am able to offer myself grace in thoughts & actions
- I can open up my heart to experience love & be loved by others
- I will react to life in a positive manner where my well being & health are concerned
- My heart is softened when I am open to love & forgiveness
- I can trust. I can have dreams.
- I use positive messages as a way to interpret my feelings, emotions or self worth.

# Suggestions for rebuilding trust

- Commitment to not walk away from each other
- No threats of divorce or I'm leaving
- No secrets. No name calling. No lies.
- Code words for time outs when anger escalates
- Learning to have fun again (date night, first date, etc.)
- Praying or practicing spirituality together
- Hand holding/breath exercise
- Positive affirmations (what goes in goes out)
- Acceptance & redefining the post deployment relationship
- Start living life as if were where you want to be
- Hugging 20 seconds per day & cuddling
- Forgiveness without score keeping & rehashing the past

# Relationship building for military couples

1. The foundation of a good relationship is mutual respect. Treat your partner with the same respect you expect to be treated with.
2. Listen to your partner. Do not interrupt. Good listening skills are essential for positive communication. Attentive listening reduces misunderstanding & unrealistic expectations.
3. Talk about your feelings. If you are hurt or disappointed, say so. Holding in feelings only builds resentment & anger.
4. Control your anger. There is no room for physical or emotional violence in loving relationships. When angry, find safe outlets like exercise or mediation. Talk to your partner only when the anger is under control.
5. Show affection whenever possible. Small gestures of love go a long way to cementing strong relationships.
6. Put aside time for intimacy. Make sure you & your partner have special times alone without interruption.
7. Praise your partner for the positive things he/she does for the family & relationship. Recognition is one of life's strongest & most positive motivators.
8. When issues develop that can't be resolved over time between you & your partner, consult a trusted counselor for help. Unresolved issues fester & grow when left unchallenged.

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# Positives of counseling

- My words resonated heart-felt needs where real life counseling met me behind the locked doors of broken dreams, hopes & abilities
- I needed someone to talk to who was honest & open
- It taught me new forms of therapy such as walking on the beach & yard sale therapy
- Remained neutral as a third party, listened as we communicated & presented it in a new way, like “why didn’t I think of that.”
- When making difficult decisions, I was told how proud you were of my decisions
- Demonstrating new sexual positions & helping us to go deeper in our sexuality than we have in years
- Being a place where I could open up & not really know I did
- Getting to a place where I could talk to my partner without getting in a fight
- Being our sounding board by keeping an open mind
- Listened to my needs & did something about it
- Counseling helped me stay above the waves
- The most important trait was your integrity, you treated me as an individual & didn’t put me in a box

# Positives of counseling continued...

- Three way communication
- I get to talk about what I think and you kept it safe
- Listening with wisdom and experience to share
- Helped me to find myself & be at peace
- Having support & an open minded person hear, laugh & smile with me
- Understanding what a veteran has gone through, you have life experience
- Ability to converse & communicate
- Learning to choose the right relationship
- You helped me through a tough year, gave me hope for my future, changed my life
- Showed us how to be a team instead of fighting against each other
- Very kind, loving, relate to me, care, are empathetic
- Have taught me I matter in a relationship
- Set me on a path to a happier life & helped me recognize/own my own stuff
- You were my friend, not just a therapist doing her job
- Remained neutral, open, non-judging, friendly without being a "buddy"
- Helped us to uncover what was left unsaid & hidden

# Positives of counseling continued...

- Met my needs by consistently being there, present, mature, professional
- I've seen myself grow
- Boundaries: saying no and not being afraid to speak, feeling strong enough. I learned I have boundaries and I can protect them
- My role in life has always been a victim—didn't know any difference until now
- I realized I had many deep seeded resentments about sex/intimacy. Abuse has made me leery of physicality (MST survivor)
- I learned about complex PTSD & I want to deal with it
- I'm beginning to study PTSD & how it has a daily part in our lives
- Helped to bring back some of the old silliness to our interaction & more conversation
- He has been working hard even when events are bad to keep open talk & kisses me more—yessss!!!
- If there isn't communication in our relationship, the relationship will fail---I couldn't bare that
- To be heard without judgment or filters
- Military life is a test for a relationship rather than a retraining factor

Questions...???

# Resources

- Military One Source [www.militaryonesource.mil](http://www.militaryonesource.mil)  
1-800-342-9647
- National Center for PTSD [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)  
(offers free PTSD Coach phone application)
- Suicide prevention [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)
- US Department of Veterans Affairs [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)
- Vet Centers [www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov) (war zone veterans)
- Veterans Crisis Line [www.veteranscrisisline.net](http://www.veteranscrisisline.net)  
1-800-273-8255 (chat, online or text 838255)
  
- *Get Out of Your Mind & Into Your Life*, Steven Hayes, Ph.D.
- *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman, M.D.