Mental Health Issues Impacting Military Personnel & Veterans

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Objectives
Following a lecture/discussion on identifying the mental health issues impacting military personnel and veterans, the learner will be able to:

- Identify the mental health issues facing military personnel and veterans
- Understand the barriers to seeking help and treatment in the military environment
- Recognize the long-term effects of mental health issues on the marital unit
- Be familiar with the effects of trauma and treatment approaches to help families.

Types of Grief
- Normal Grief
- Disenfranchised Grief
- Complicated Grief

Bereavement Overload
- Assess for bereavement overload
- When the service member has had one too many losses that they have not dealt with fully, they can become easily overwhelmed by minor disturbances.

Signs and Symptoms of Grief
- Mad/Sad... The Twin Emotions
- Physicality of Grief... Mind/Body Connection
- Psychology of Grief... Expected behaviors in non-complicated losses
- Timeframe... normal recovery milestones

Interventions
- Talk Therapy
- Psycho Drama
- Journaling
- Group Work
- Camps (Camp Woe-Be-Gone)
- Memory Books
- Permanent Memoirs
- Art Therapy
- Anger Management Classes
What is a Trauma?
- An extraordinarily stressful event that involves an actual or threatened death, serious injury, or loss that causes intense psychological, emotional and/or physical symptoms.

Barriers To Mental Health Treatment
- Career consequences for seeking treatment
- Dishonorable discharges
- Uncertainty about their future
- Inaccessible treatment
- Lack of knowledge of mental health symptoms and/or screenings

Life is full of traumas and dramas

A Traumatized Person’s Response
- involves intense fear, helplessness, or horror.
- In children, it may be expressed instead by disorganized or agitated behavior.

Mental Health Issues Service Members May Face
- Foreign combat
- Family separation
- Uncertainty about their future
- Significant loss of control
- Barriers to accessible mental health treatment

Traumatized Women Veterans Issues
- In 2013 – Ban lifted for women serving in combat areas and now serve a more prominent role on the front lines
- Military Sexual Trauma - 1 out of 5 women have reported experiencing this phenomenon
- Women Veterans make up 9% of the military and projected to be 17% by 2043
How Do Traumas Affect Individuals, including Children?

Four Major Classes of Traumatic Stress Symptoms:
1. Re-experiencing of the Event
2. Intense Psychological Distress at Exposure to Reminders
3. Persistent Avoidance
4. Persistent Arousal

In helping traumatized families and children
- Confirm that there was a traumatic event and listen to their stories
- For children, enable them to review and express associated memories and feelings (e.g. through play and art)
- Note the challenges of dealing with the memories and other consequences of the event

When Does a Trauma Become an Mental Disorder?
- When many of the symptoms persist for more than 30 days, it becomes: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

And.......
- Note the wide variations in time and method of overcoming the challenges and converting them into strengths
- For children creative methods are effective tools for processing and mastering the traumatic memories
- Children take their cues from adults

Trauma Symptoms in Family Systems
- Parental dysfunction
  - Violence
  - Neglect
  - Over protection
  - Relationship violence
  - Relationship neglect
  - Family Burnout

Methods for Assessing and Treating Families
- The methods change when dealing with a traumatized family (Maslow’s Hierarchy)
- The trauma must be dealt with before the normal process of traditional talk therapy can begin
- A trauma technique must be utilized to desensitize the client to the trauma
- The technique used in my practice is Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
EMDR
Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing
- 1987, EMDR founded by Francine Shapiro, Ph.D.
- Walking in a park while reviewing some troubling thoughts of personal trauma & moving her eyes left to right
- 1989, she conducted a study of 70 people to test her technique
- Bilateral stimulation mostly through eye movements that help desensitize clients to traumatic memories
- Controversy over the underlying theoretical concepts

8 Phases of EMDR
- 1 Assessment (present history, belief, target, judgment of belief)
- 2 Preparation (noticed right after
- 3 Assessment of target memory/image (coping, negative & positive emotions, memories)
- 4 Desensitization (target & negative cognition held, image)
- 5 Installation (coping in negative image)
- 6 Body scan
- 7 Closure (complete or incomplete session)
- 8 Debriefing on the experience of the session

Questions & Answers