



# AMERICA'S HEROES AT WORK

SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS OF  
Returning Service Members with TBI & PTSD



[www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov](http://www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov)



## About America's Heroes at Work



**America's Heroes at Work** is a U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) initiative that focuses on the employment challenges of veterans living with **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)** and/or **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**. The project equips employers and the workforce development system with the tools they need to help employees affected by TBI and/or PTSD succeed in the workplace - particularly service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

★☆☆ Due to advances in military medicine and protective equipment, increased numbers of service members are surviving the injuries they sustain on the battlefield. However, the changing combat landscape has caused an increase in TBI and PTSD, which are increasingly recognized as leading injuries of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. By many accounts, hundreds of thousands of brave men and women will be coping with the challenges of TBI and PTSD as they reenter civilian life, today and for many years to come.

Although their injuries may not be visible, some service members with TBI or PTSD may face difficulties in their transition to the workplace. However, employers should know that often simple workplace supports can help individuals with TBI and/or PTSD

succeed in their jobs, and that employment can play a major role in their recovery.

America's Heroes at Work is a targeted education campaign designed to increase awareness of TBI and PTSD issues among the workforce system and to educate employers on workplace accommodations they can make for employees affected by the conditions. The initiative offers a variety of educational resources through its comprehensive Web site, [www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov](http://www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov), which features fact sheets, Web-based training tools, educational presentations, success stories and more. It also provides a toll-free phone number that employers can call for personalized assistance related to accommodations for veterans with disabilities (800-526-7234).

America's Heroes at Work is managed jointly by DOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) in collaboration with other federal agencies engaged in TBI and PTSD programs, including the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Health and Human Services and Education, the Small Business Administration, the Social Security Administration and others.

### Help for Employers:

FOR PERSONAL ASSISTANCE RELATED TO JOB ACCOMMODATIONS FOR VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES CALL:

**JOB ACCOMMODATION NETWORK (JAN)**

800-526-7234 (VOICE)

877-781-9403 (TTY)



## Common Employer Questions About TBI & PTSD

### What is TBI?

A Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is defined as a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the function of the brain. Not all blows or jolts to the head result in a TBI. The severity of such an injury may range from “mild/concussion,” (i.e., a brief change in mental status or consciousness) to “severe,” (i.e., an extended period of unconsciousness or amnesia after the injury). A TBI can result in short or long-term problems, although most people with TBI are able to function independently.

### Are all TBI cases severe?

No “TBI” is an umbrella term that spans a wide continuum of symptoms and severity. In fact, the large majority (80%) of combat head injuries sustained in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom are mild concussions as opposed to severe, debilitating TBI.

### What is PTSD?

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can develop in response to exposure to an extreme traumatic event. These traumatic events may include military combat, violent personal assaults (e.g., rape, mugging, robbery), terrorist attacks, natural or man-made disasters, or horrific accidents. The event, directly experienced or witnessed in another person, involves actual or threatened death, serious injury or threat to one’s physical integrity. The person’s response to the event is one of intense fear or helplessness.

### What are some possible behaviors associated with PTSD?

Many people with PTSD repeatedly re-experience their ordeal in the form of flashback episodes, intrusive recollections of the event and nightmares. A stress reaction may be provoked when individuals are

exposed to events or situations that remind them of the traumatic event. Avoidance of those triggering cues is a very significant feature of PTSD. Feeling detached from others and emotional numbing are common. Symptoms of PTSD may also include difficulty sleeping, problems concentrating, irritability, being hyper-alert to danger, feeling “on edge,” and an exaggerated startle response. PTSD symptoms usually emerge within a few months of the traumatic event, however symptoms may emerge many months or even years following a traumatic event.

### What should employers expect from a person with PTSD? Will they have violent outbursts?

PTSD develops differently in different people. Some returning service members with PTSD may suffer from memory deficits, lack of concentration, time management issues, disorganization, panic attacks, sleep disturbance and outbursts of anger, among other challenges – all of which can interfere with everyday activities inside and outside of the workplace. Most symptoms will decrease over time. People, by virtue of having a diagnosed PTSD condition, do not pose a direct threat to themselves or others. Employees who manage their symptoms through medication or psychotherapy are very unlikely to pose a threat. Employers may help reduce the overall stress in the work environment or mitigate known vulnerabilities to stress by providing a job accommodation.

### There’s a lot of stigma associated with PTSD. How can employers separate myth from fact?

The America’s Heroes at Work Web site features a fact sheet, “Dispelling the Myths About PTSD,” which helps debunk some of the stigma associated with combat stress. Employers should realize that most people with PTSD recover naturally over time, and that employment plays a vital role in the recovery of people with PTSD.



### What should employers expect from National Guard and Reservists who return to their jobs with TBI and/or PTSD?

As TBI and PTSD are the signature injuries of the Global War on Terror, it is possible that many National Guard and Reservists will return to their civilian jobs with these conditions. However the effects of TBI and PTSD vary widely from person to person depending upon the severity of one's injury or traumatic experience. To educate yourself, read through the free materials on [www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov](http://www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov).

### Are TBI and PTSD conditions that are exclusive to veterans?

TBI and PTSD within our military populations are getting a great deal of well-deserved attention. However the conditions are not new -- or exclusive to veterans. Some first responders, for example, are among the millions of people who experience post-traumatic stress. And according to the Brain Injury Association of America, more than 1.4 million people sustain a brain injury every year in the United States. The America's Heroes at Work initiative is designed to help any employee with TBI, PTSD and other invisible conditions succeed on the job.

### Why does employment play such an important role in the recovery of transitioning service members with TBI and/or PTSD?

Employment enables many people with disabilities, including those with TBI and/or PTSD, to fully participate in society. For example, employment provides income that is key to individual and family economic well-being, and builds skills for future well-being. It also provides greater social interaction and connections that can reduce isolation and build social capital. Finally, employment provides a valued social role in our society and helps create a sense of personal efficacy and social integration that contributes to life satisfaction.

### What promising practices can DOL recommend to employers who might be hesitant to hire a veteran with TBI and/or PTSD?

Most employers know that hiring veterans with disabilities is the right thing to do, however due to stigma and fear of the unknown, some may be hesitant to hire veterans with head injuries and psychological conditions such as PTSD. But employers needn't be nervous. In addition to making reasonable workplace enhancements, employers can leverage a variety of promising practices to create a positive, successful workplace experience for disabled veterans and transitioning service members. These include job coaching, mentoring, customized employment, natural workplace supports, and simple physical accommodations such as alarm clocks, task lists and alternate lighting. In addition, they might try easing into veterans employment by offering short-term internships with the possibility of permanent employment, job sharing options or other kinds of flexible workplace schedules. Learn more by reviewing the Fact Sheets & Reference Guides section of the America's Heroes at Work Web site. ★ ☆ ★



*Employment plays a vital role in the recovery of our wounded warriors, including those who are experiencing the effects of Traumatic Brain Injury and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The America's Heroes at Work initiative equips employers with the tools and technical assistance they need to support these brave men and women and ensure a successful employment experience."*



**- Hilda L. Solis,**  
U.S. Secretary of Labor



# www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov



**The America's Heroes at Work Web site educates employers and workforce development professionals on ways to help employees with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and/or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) succeed on the job. It features:**

- Easy-to-understand fact sheets and reference guides
- Web-based training tools
- Train-the-trainer educational presentations
- Helpful links to information related to TBI, PTSD and veterans/disability employment issues
- Real-life success stories of veteran employees with TBI/PTSD and the satisfied employers who hired them
- A toll-free help line for personalized assistance related to accommodations for veterans with disabilities (800-526-7234)



**Downloadable fact sheets include:**

- Frequently Asked Questions About TBI & Employment
- Frequently Asked Questions About PTSD & Employment
- Dispelling the Myths About PTSD
- Accommodating Employees with TBI
- Accommodating Employees with PTSD
- Promising Practices for Supporting Returning Service Members with TBI/PTSD: Job Coaching, Workplace Mentoring, Natural Workplace Supports and Customized Employment
- Hiring Veterans with TBI & PTSD: Do's and Don'ts for Employers & Hiring Managers
- Tips for Communicating with People with TBI/PTSD
- Employers and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Myths & Facts.



## **What should employers do if they suspect an employee is struggling with the effects of TBI and/or PTSD?**

Employers must realize that, once they hire a veteran with a disability, they are not alone. A wealth of support services exist to help them respond to the unique needs of their employees with disabilities or combat-related injuries. If available, a company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a good place to seek counsel and assistance for workers struggling with TBI, PTSD and other disabilities. And to learn the types of workplace accommodations they should implement, employers can call the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a free consulting service that provides individualized worksite accommodations solutions and technical assistance regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other disability related legislation. Just call 800-526-7234. Other support services abound. The America's Heroes at Work Web site ([www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov](http://www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov)) features links to a wide variety of organizations and supports, as well as educational resources on accommodations and promising employment practices.

## **Why should employers hire disabled veterans?**

Veterans make excellent employees for a variety of reasons (including leadership, teamwork experience and their accelerated learning curve). In addition, there are often tax incentives available to help employers cover the cost of accommodations for employees with disabilities and to make their places of business accessible. Of course, hiring veterans with disabilities is simply the right thing to do. To learn more, read the America's Heroes at Work fact sheets on incentives for hiring veterans and people with disabilities and visit [www.HireVetsFirst.gov](http://www.HireVetsFirst.gov).



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Office of Disability Employment Policy  
Veterans' Employment & Training Service  
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Personalized Assistance for Employers:  
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