



Families of Rural OEF/OIF Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury:

Concerns and Issues

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Ridgewood: Ingenious Communication Strategies *for*
Arizona Governor's Council on Spinal and Head Injuries

3rd Annual Trauma Spectrum Conference
Emerging Research on Trauma Recovery & Reintegration
For Servicemembers, Veterans and Families

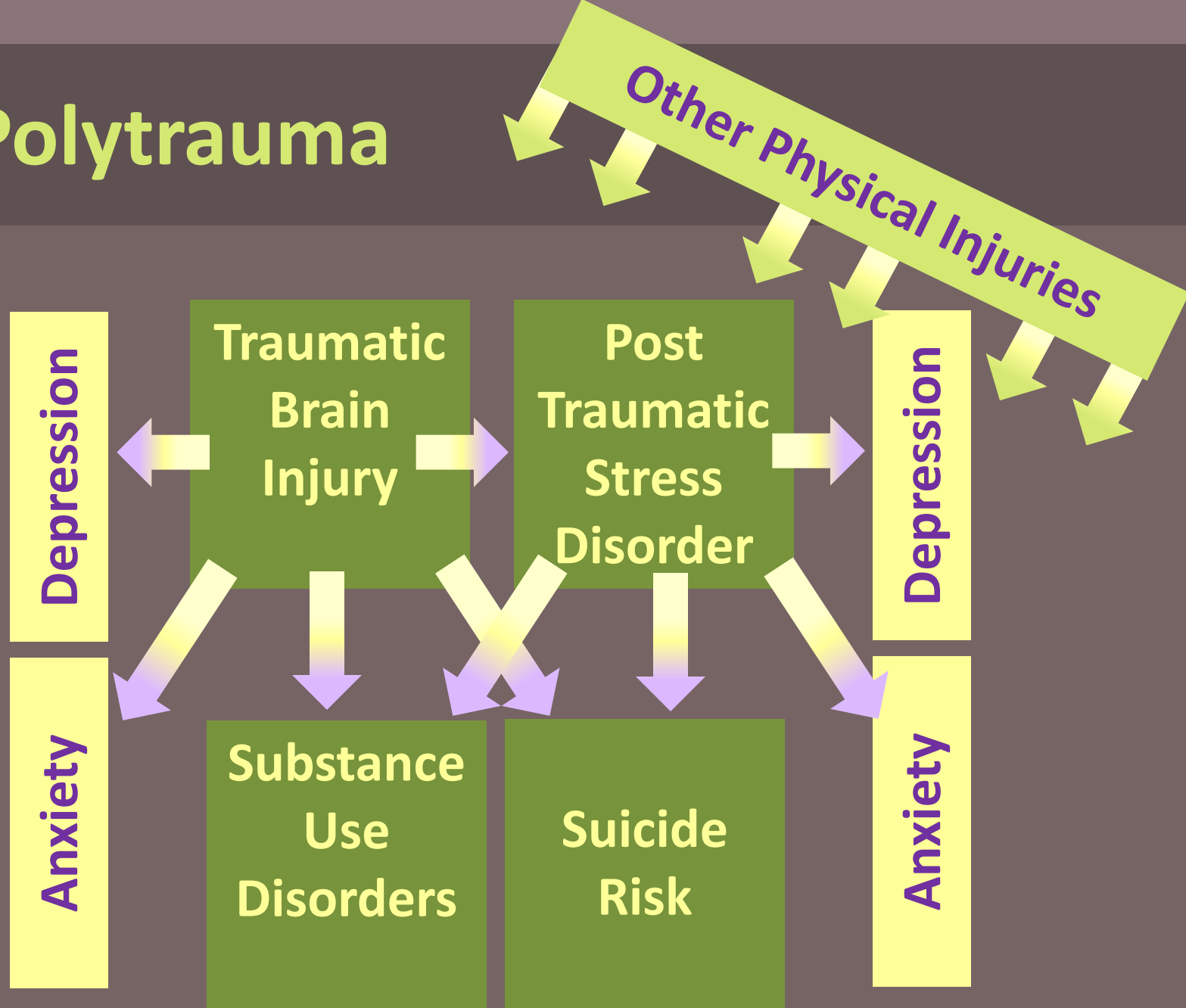
December 7-8, 2010 ■ National Institutes of Health ■ Bethesda, Maryland

TBI / Polytrauma



BLAST INJURIES

TBI / Polytrauma



Arizona's Military / Veteran Families



20,000+ Active Duty

with 27,000 Dependents

Almost half are based in rural areas

13,000 Guard & Reservists

1,746 have deployed from rural counties

600,000+ Veterans

(10% of AZ population)

1 in 4 AZ Veterans live
in rural communities



Effects on Families



Financial: high care costs

Employment: quit or lose job over care issues

Relationships: loss of partnership
high percentage of divorce

Children: needs may become secondary

Social: isolation

Geographic: fewer, less specialized services
available in rural areas

Changes in Family Interactions



- As brain injury changes the way the individual thinks, acts, and feels, it changes the way the individual interacts with family members

- The dynamics of the family change

- Relationships change

- Family structure and functioning changes

Changes in Family Interactions



**“We are not the same people
we were”**

GRIEF and LOSS

**“Our relationship doesn’t
work the same way anymore”**

LONELINESS

A NEW BURDEN OF RESPONSIBILITY

Capacity for Support: Implications

Military and VA Treatment Facilities

- Multidisciplinary team?

- Links to TBI-expert community resources?

Rural Communities

- Often generalists who wear many hats

- Gaps in necessary specialties

Family Systems

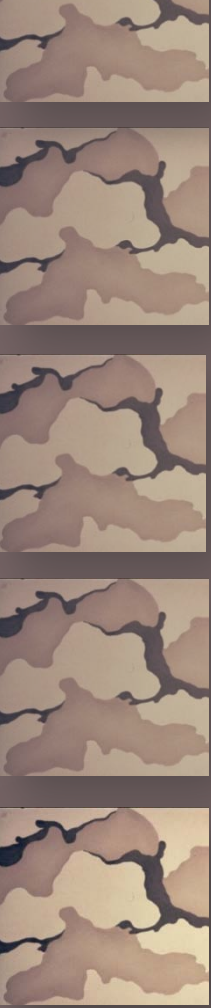


New Expectations for the Family

- Accessing treatment, follow-up, and advocacy often falls to the family
- Assuming this responsibility is a significant stressor in addition to the “normal” stressors of deployment on the family



Implications



Having limited understanding of the challenges the person with TBI may be having can have a serious negative impact on family dynamics and erode the family system—absent information about:

- What is causing the changes in the individual
- How to understand the changes
- Are the changes permanent
- Can they be fixed
- How to deal with the changes
- Resources and support...

Implications



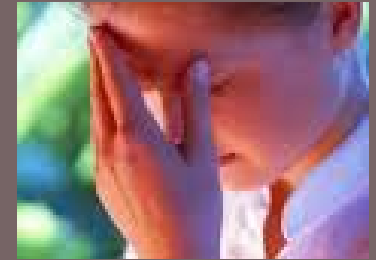
- The family is often overwhelmed

- They don't know:

- Where to turn for help

- What to do

- If / where there are resources available




- The family may become more and more dysfunctional—and the behavior changes in the individual with TBI may become more extreme

Thinking Beyond the Clinical Environment

- Life after TBI is a journey
- Providers engage with the client at particular points on the journey
- It is important for providers to direct the client/family to a larger array of resources over the course of time



Thinking Beyond the Clinical Environment



The client/family needs direction to resources over the lifetime journey:

- Clinical
- Independent Living
- Vocational
- Information and Education
- Access to additional referrals
- Links to the community of people living with brain injury

Resources

 BrainLine.org

 [Defense & Veterans Brain Injury Center:
DVBIC.org](http://Defense & Veterans Brain Injury Center: DVBIC.org)

 TraumaticBrainInjuryAtoZ.org

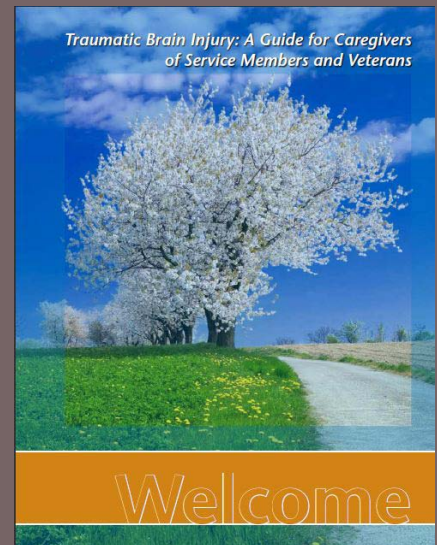
 BrainTrauma.org



Blast Injuries: Traumatic Brain Injuries from Explosions

Researchers are trying to understand the nature of blast injuries and how exactly they damage the brain.

[READ MORE](#)



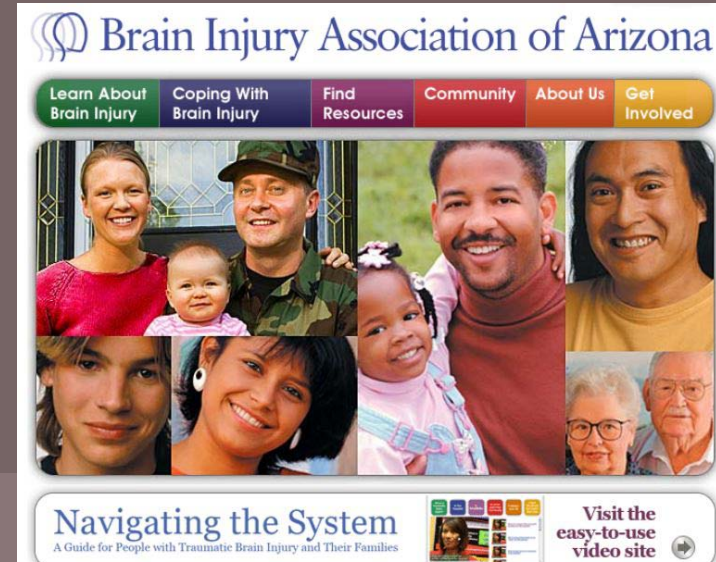
Resources

AZ Coalition for Military Families: arizonacoalition.org



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Arizona Coalition for Military Families. At the top left is the logo, which features a stylized sunburst and the text "ARIZONA COALITION FOR MILITARY FAMILIES" and "BUILDING SUPPORT FOR ALL WHO SERVE". Below the logo is a navigation menu with links for "Home", "About ACMF", "Resources", "News & Events", and "Mil/Vet Employment". The main content area has a dark background with a silhouette of a person's head and a sunset. The text reads: "Arizona Coalition for Military Families", "The Arizona Coalition for Military Families is a public/private partnership focused on building Arizona's capacity to serve and support all service members, veterans, their families & communities.", "Arizona is home to more than 625,000 service members and veterans from all eras.", and "To honor their service and sacrifice, ACMF partners are committed to providing the best care and support possible to them and their families." At the bottom of the main content area is a button that says "ABOUT THE COALITION".

Brain Injury Association of Arizona: BIAAZ.org



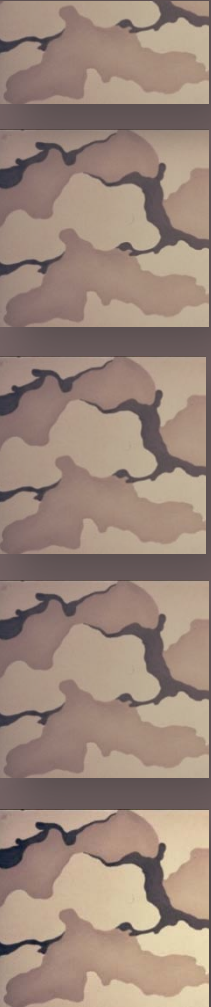
The screenshot shows the homepage of the Brain Injury Association of Arizona. At the top is the logo, which features a stylized brain and the text "Brain Injury Association of Arizona". Below the logo is a navigation menu with links for "Learn About Brain Injury", "Coping With Brain Injury", "Find Resources", "Community", "About Us", and "Get Involved". The main content area features a collage of photos of diverse people, including a woman, a man, a baby, a young girl, and an elderly couple. At the bottom of the main content area is a button that says "Navigating the System". At the bottom of the page is a footer with the text "A Guide for People with Traumatic Brain Injury and Their Families" and "Visit the easy-to-use video site" with a play button icon.

Resources



- Military/Veteran Employment Portal
- Brain Injury Information & Referral
- Family Peer Mentor Program
- “A Warrior’s Journey” Conferences for Service Members, Veterans, & Families
- Social/Recreational Activities
- TBI Ombudsman

Questions?



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