



DEFENSE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

For Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury

PTSD: What Unit Leaders Need to Know

What is Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

PTSD is a medical disorder that results from exposure to one or more traumatic experiences. PTSD can affect a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviors—resulting in a range of symptoms. Leaders at all levels need to know the realities of how psychological health conditions affect the unit's ability to perform its mission. Untreated PTSD can severely damage someone's career, and it's important for leaders to recognize PTSD and get service members into care.

Facts about PTSD:

- PTSD is a common psychological health disorder and is even more common after combat
- PTSD can affect anyone, from the newest recruit to the commander in chief
- Nearly eight percent of Americans are diagnosed with PTSD during their lifetimes
- PTSD is a treatable psychological health disorder with several effective treatment options available



What can you do to help your service members?

- Know your service members so that you can recognize when their behaviors change dramatically
- Give your service members the benefit of the doubt—if you do notice dramatic changes, inquire about the changes rather than make assumptions
- Know the symptoms of PTSD and don't be afraid to ask if a person has them
- Try to encourage service members who need care to go in for help, recommend that they look into off-base or online resources if they are hesitant

Things to avoid when it comes to helping

- Don't try to act as a counselor or therapist—if the service member needs help, encourage them to see a professional
- Don't ignore the problem—hoping the person “snaps out of it” is not an acceptable plan
- Don't remove them from leadership positions simply because they have PTSD
- DO NOT leave a service member who is suicidal alone—immediately get them to a professional qualified to do a medical evaluation
- Do not discuss the service member's issues with others in the unit