

DEPLOYMENT CYCLE SUPPORT PROGRAM

Signs and Symptoms of Distress

OBJECTIVES:

1. Terminal Learning Objective

Participants will be able to identify post-deployment signs and symptoms of distress and whether additional services are required.

2. Enabling Learning Objectives

- a. Participants will be able to identify a minimum of 10 signs or symptoms of post-deployment distress.
- b. Participants will be able to identify when to turn for help.
- c. Participants will be able to identify at least two sources of help available.

NOTES:

A. Post-deployment signs and symptoms

During deployment, employment, and redeployment, many of us have experiences, thoughts and feelings that, while normal given the situation, make us or others around us uncomfortable. *It is quite normal for most soldiers to have some of the following signs or symptoms, and these should go away over time:*

1. BODY

- Eating changes – not eating or over-eating
- Sleeping changes – not sleeping or excessive sleeping
- Stomach problems – upset stomach, nausea, vomiting
- Bowel problems – diarrhea or constipation
- Heart/Lung problems – heart racing/pounding, feeling dizzy or lightheaded, out of breath, cold sweat, dry mouth, or pale skin
- Headaches, migraines
- Fatigue – tiredness, drained, no energy, takes effort to move

- “Jumpiness” or easily startled
- Pain in old, healed wounds
- Tension, aches and pains
- Trembling, fidgeting, fumbling things
- Crying spells
- Inattention to hygiene or self-care

2. THINKING

- Poor concentration
- Difficulty thinking or making decisions
- Flashbacks to stressful events
- Intrusive thoughts of home, family, etc.
- Bad dreams
- Loss of interest and/or motivation, apathy
- Loss of trust/confidence
- Difficulty remembering things
- Distant, haunted (“1000 yard) stare, “spaced out”
- Disregard for rules, laws, and regulations
- Thoughts of hurting self or other unit members

3. FEELING

- Frustration, upset, irritable, angry
- Worry, anxious, keyed up
- Guilt, shame
- Depressed, down
- Emotional numbing (Don’t feel anything)

4. SOCIAL

- Withdrawn, discomfort being around other people, silent, sulking
- Difficulty communicating with others – particularly about the deployment
- Arguing and starting fights
- Inability to be left alone, constant need to be with or near someone else

B. When to get help

These signs and symptoms are usually normal – normal reactions to abnormal situations and stressors. Over time, you will adjust and these symptoms will slowly go away. However, sometimes the symptoms do not go away on their own. You need to take action and seek help if the symptoms:

- Interfere with normal duties and/or tasks of daily living for more than 6-8 weeks.
- Involve elements of dangerousness – for example, thoughts of hurting self or others, reckless drinking, drug use, etc.

1. Other Warning Signs

Sometimes things have not gone well at home while we have been gone. Perhaps you or your buddy has been profoundly affected by experiences while deployed. Or maybe you or your buddy may be coming home to a very different family environment.

We have to rely on our buddies, our unit leaders, and our community resources to help us cope and succeed. If you are facing family, job, or other problems at home, be sure to talk them over with your peers, chain of command, etc. If you know of a unit member facing home issues, maintain contact with them and do what you can to help them through it. Refer and/or take them to other resources (chaplain, chain of command, etc.) if you suspect they may do something to hurt themselves or others.

Things to look out for include:

- Talk of suicide or killing someone else
- Giving away property or disregard for what happens to one's property
- Withdrawal from friends and from activities
- Problems with girlfriend (boyfriend) or spouse
- Acting bizarre or unusual (based on your knowledge of the person)
- Soldiers in trouble for misconduct (Art-15, UCMJ, etc.)
- Soldiers with lots of financial problems
- Soldiers who have lost their job at home (reservists)
- Those soldiers leaving the service (retirements, ETSs, etc.)

C. Where to get help

There are a number of people and agencies willing to help out. If you are experiencing the "Warning Signs" listed above, talk to a chaplain or a counselor at Division Mental Health/Community Mental Health Service. If you see these "Warning Signs" in another unit member, notify your chain of command immediately.

If you are having body symptoms (stomach, headaches, eating or sleeping problems, etc.), seeking medical help is best. A medical provider will help determine if your symptoms are stress-related or caused by some other physical ailment.

On the other hand, moral issues are often best addressed by chaplains. Regardless of whom you talk to, getting help early is the most important thing. Below is a list of people and agencies who can help you with various stress problems:

1. Within the unit

- Peers
- Supervisor
- Chain of Command
- Chaplain
- Medic and/or Battalion Surgeon

2. On Post

- Medical personnel at the clinic or hospital
- Post chaplains
- Army Community Service personnel
- Alcohol and Substance Abuse Program personnel
- Social Work Services
- Community Health Nurses
- Occupational Therapists
- Dieticians

3. In the Community

- Medical personnel
- Veterans Administration clinic or hospital
- Ministers and clergy
- County and state health department
- County and state social services

Review of main points

- Signs and Symptoms
- When to get help
- Where to get help