

COURAGE TO CARE



A HEALTH PROMOTION CAMPAIGN FROM
Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, your federal medical school, Bethesda, Maryland • www.usuhs.mil

FOSTERING SAFETY, HEALTH, AND PREPAREDNESS

A 9/11 Anniversary Message for our Military Healthcare Community

Military medical providers will play an important role this fall as the nation observes the 5th anniversary of 9/11, the anthrax attacks, and the War on Terror. Disaster anniversary events are often catalysts that cause many individuals to re-experience powerful feelings around trauma and loss. For many, disaster anniversaries provide permission to seek help for physical and emotional problems. It is important that military healthcare settings create a safe environment this fall for our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and their families to feel comfortable about discussing health and safety concerns, which may be



more pronounced at this time.

Our military community has learned a great deal about preparing and responding to disaster and terrorism these past five years and has met the challenge in supporting deployments and protecting the nation.

This Courage to Care provides highlights from previous issues related to individual, family and community preparedness that can serve as “teachable moments” to foster the health and safety of our troops and their families at this important moment in our nation’s history.

MILITARY TRANSITIONS

Reunions and reintegration following deployment are military transitions that challenge returning service men and women, their spouses and children. Here are some reminders concerning individual and family health and safety.

Reunions

A homecoming brings together two powerful emotions — the excitement of being reunited and the anticipation of leaving soon again. This can be especially difficult for military children.

Remind patients:

- To be patient and sensitive to children’s reactions and permit time to become reacquainted. Young children often act shy and may not remember the returning soldier at first. Older children may express anger at not having had the parent present for important events or worrying about the parent’s safety.

Exercise caution:

- **Driving.** When people have not operated a conventional motor vehicle in a long time, or have experienced traumatic events on the road while deployed, driving can be hazardous. In the first few days encourage caution driving, and suggest having a family or friend present while driving.
- **Drinking alcoholic beverages.** Since exposure to alcoholic beverages has been limited during deployment, it is important not to over indulge. Excessive use of alcohol can be a warning sign of distress, increase the risk of accidents, and decrease the opportunity to reestablish connection with one’s spouse and family.

Reintegration

Military couples need to reestablish a shared sense of purpose and negotiate the difficult transition of reintegration following deployment. A *shared sense of purpose* is a constructive paradigm that addresses emotional changes, expectations and adjustments.

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Remind patients:

- The biggest task for the returning service member is to transform the sense of purpose created deployment into the routines and safety of everyday life.
- In their absence, the service member's family has established new routines during the deployment.
- To communicate. Service members often prefer to discuss war stories with military buddies to protect their spouse and family from traumatic memories. Spouses should not be offended. Communication can occur by taking walks, working out together or engaging in a sport. These activities can enhance family communication and health, and help build relationships with one's children.

ROUTINE HEALTH

Many young caretakers — mothers and fathers whose spouses are deployed — may be facing family health experiences alone for the first time. Routine office visits provide opportunities for “teachable moments” that can help new and young parents establish important health habits for life.

Remind parents:

- To schedule their flu shots this fall for themselves and their children.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Disasters affect families emotionally and physically, and often cause significant elevations in anxiety. Families need to be prepared, especially around their health needs, in the face of natural disasters and terrorism.

Remind patients:

- At home, have an extra supply of medications available.
- In the event of separation, family should provide instructions and training (if possible) to the primary care providers outside of the home (e.g., daycare, school teachers). This would be especially important if a family member has specific medical needs.
- Make sure adult children away from home, such as college students, and elderly family members, are prepared.
- A family communication plan is essential for relaying information about the status and location of loved ones. The accompanying Patient Takeaway provides details on creating a family communication plan.

To access previous issues of *Courage to Care* addressing many of the topics discussed in this fact sheet, go to: <http://www.centerforthestudyoftraumaticstress.org/education.courage.shtml>

PLACE LOCAL CONTACT INFORMATION HERE

COURAGE TO CARE is a health promotion campaign of Uniformed Services University. Its purpose is two-fold: to provide quality health information reflecting our University's excellence in military medicine and to present it in a friendly, appealing format for immediate distribution for the health promotion needs in your community.

