

Recommendations From Family Members For The Family Circle

- ❑ **Take care of yourself first – you cannot take care of others unless you take care of yourself!**
 - You will be enduring mental and physical fatigue in the process
 - Be sure to sleep, take vitamins, and exercise or keep up with whatever you do individually to be a healthier person

- ❑ **Reintroduce yourself to your husband/wife**
 - Go really slowly
 - Do not expect the same connections and intimacy right away

- ❑ **Make positive connections with as many VA personnel as possible**
 - Ensure that a Case Worker is assigned to your veteran
 - If things are not working well with your Case Worker,
seek to obtain another using the VA's Patient Advocate
 - Coordinate all care through one person, if possible

- ❑ **Be tenacious**
 - Seek and demand answers from healthcare providers

- ❑ **Learn to recognize the onset signs of PTS/TBI**

- ❑ **Veterans and their significant others will be challenged by common enemies**
 - Avoid attacking each other
 - Strive to cope with and manage the PTS/TBI symptoms
 - There can be set-backs and added stresses:
 - Receiving a lower-than-expected disability rating
 - Your veteran being denied healthcare altogether
 - Other non-war related stresses:
 - Home finances may become very challenging when the veteran is unemployed
 - Strive to manage finances by creating a budget

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The objective for couples is to buddy-up and manage things together

- Focusing on solving the challenges together
- Fighting to win your position does nothing to resolve the conflict

- There are no one-size-fits-all therapists**
 - Don't give up, find the person who can interact with your veteran
- If a comfortable therapist cannot be found at Veterans Affairs facilities, try Veterans Centers for help and information**
- Unless you have a Power of Attorney, VA medical information will not be disclosed to, or discussed with, you**
- If your veteran won't talk to you because you are the "significant other", "mom", or "dad", find another person who may reach them and offer support**
- Encourage the veteran to perform hard, physical work or exercise**
- If on base, locate and contact the Family Readiness Officer for assistance**
- Provide nutritional foods to the veteran**
 - Support efforts to keep the body fit
 - Excessive carbohydrate and sugar consumption
- Actively listen to your veteran**
 - Avoid gasping, acting shocked, or coddling if the information is dramatic
- Tell them that whatever they tell you, you will keep confidential, and then keep your promise**
 - One mistake, and you might lose their trust forever
- Allow your veteran to initiate most of the conversations**
 - Avoid questioning them
- Create your own support group to share experiences**
- If the symptoms are severe and the police are called, make sure those First Responders know they are about to deal with a veteran who has PTS/TBI**
- Walk away if you sense the moment is escalating towards an argument**
 - Offer to return when s/he is not agitated
- Encourage school work**
 - When s/he is busy, s/he is less edgy
 - “I feel better when I have school to concentrate upon, Mom”

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- ❑ **Lock up all of your guns**
 - If the veteran owns guns, ask if they will lock them up and give you the key
- ❑ **Remove alcohol from the home**
- ❑ **Keep a low-key attitude when interacting with the veteran**
 - Talk in a slow, soft voice
 - Keep body movements to a minimum
 - Your veteran may feed off the moods of others
 - Any aggressiveness on your part is returned 10 times over
- ❑ **Learn everything you can about PTS/TBI**
- ❑ **See your own therapist, if necessary**
- ❑ **Seek permission from your veteran to obtain their military injury reports and VA medical records**
 - Help by verifying the accuracy of the information
 - Verify all necessary treatments are/were provided
 - Review that data for references to past suicide attempts, self-medicating admissions with drugs/alcohol, medications prescribed, and any other symptoms or concerns described
- ❑ **Consider seeking permission from your veteran to obtain their:**
 - General Power of Attorney
 - Durable Power of Attorney
 - Power of Attorney for Healthcare
 - Consent to Release Medical Records
 - All may have renewal dates to be re-notarized!
- ❑ **Do understand that the veteran may not want his/her parents to have access to their medical records**
 - They want their privacy
 - They may not want their parents learning about what they did or experienced in war
- ❑ **Keep copies of everything – never give out an original**
- ❑ **Consider joining support groups: Blue Star Moms, Gold Star Moms, Family Alliance for Veterans of America, or other support groups**
- ❑ **Create your own chronological journal**
 - List important contact information for doctors, therapists, etc.

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- ❑ **Learn about Veterans Centers and Veterans Affairs Facilities**
 - See if one facility is favored by your veteran over another
- ❑ **Find the right counselor and/or sharing partner for the veteran**
 - It must be a person s/he trusts
- ❑ **Be grateful for the little things**
 - The communication you do get even if it is just a “Hi”
 - The veteran only may be able to sit silently watching TV with a family member. See this as a positive event.
- ❑ **When they tell you they do not feel right or for some unexplained reason want to:**
 - Leave certain situations such as crowds, malls, stadiums, the noise caused from too many people, feeling out of place for some reason — don’t question them
 - Merely ask, “What do you need me to do?”
 - Avoid placing your veteran in similar situations in the future
- ❑ **Have realistic expectations and goals**
 - Short-term: seeing the veteran talk again with family
 - Getting them into treatment
 - Spiritual growth
 - Long-term: Financial security for the veteran
 - Watching them gain independence
- ❑ **Invite them to everything**
 - Insist on nothing
- ❑ **“Shepherd” them at events**
 - Know your veteran’s tolerance for crowds, new things, noises, making them stand out, and/or being made the center of attention
- ❑ **Understand that previously familiar things have changed quite a bit during their time away**
 - Family and friends are now married or divorced
 - Births, deaths
 - Returning home and experiencing these huge changes adds to the veteran feeling more like an outsider than family
- ❑ **You have a new “normal” now**
 - Embrace the way they are now
 - “I am happy he is home, but I don’t recognize him at all”

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