Recommendations From Military Family Members
-For the Family Circle-

Take Care of Yourself First
☐ 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

☐ Recognize that 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”
  + Create your own support group to share experiences
  + Consider joining support groups: Blue Star Moms, Gold Star Moms, Family Alliance for Veterans of America, or other support groups
  + Learn everything you can about PTS/TBI
  + See your own therapist, if necessary

How To Help Your Vet
☐ 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
        + 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

☐ 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
  ► Avoid 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

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

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”

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

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

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

☐ 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

☐ 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 Vets Centers for help and information

☐ Find the right counselor and/or sharing partner for the veteran
  ▶ It must be a person s/he trusts

☐ Unless you have a Power of Attorney, VA medical information will not be disclosed to or discussed with you

☐ Keep copies of everything – never give out an original

☐ Create your own chronological journal
  ▶ List important contact information for doctors, therapists, etc.

HOW TO GET HELP FROM THE VA AND OTHER HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

☐ Learn about Vets Centers and Veterans Affairs Facilities
  ▶ See if one facility is favored by your veteran over another

Disclaimer: The focus of the information contained in the pamphlet is educational and not a treatment plan and, there are no guarantees that the information contained in this document or our online videos (www.communityvetsproject.org) will be effective. Every person with PTS/TBI may have unique challenges that are outside the realm of this effort. Please seek prompt, professional help as necessary.

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