



Intimate Partner Violence: Help for Military-Related Victims

THE BATTLE MINDSET

It can be difficult to change back to a “civilian” mindset upon returning home.

What is the relationship between the effects of war and IPV?

Does having been in combat cause IPV?

What is PTSD?



WHAT IS INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE (IPV)?

IPV, also known as domestic violence, is physical, sexual, and/or psychological harm inflicted by a current or former partner or spouse, and can occur in heterosexual or same-sex couples. IPV occurs in military and non-military families and can occur in relationships where one or both partners are active duty military, Reserve, National Guard, or veterans.

Violence is used in intimate relationships for different reasons:

- **Coercive, controlling behaviors and violence:** In this pattern of IPV, a range of coercive behaviors in addition to physical or sexual violence is used with the intent to entrap the partner, limit the victim’s options, and establish and maintain control over the victim’s daily life.
- **Resistive violence:** A victim who endures a continued pattern of emotional abuse, threats, intimidation, and physical and/or sexual violence will likely strike back in some way: in self-defense, in retaliation, to pre-empt further attacks, and/or to show the abuser that she/he will not accept this treatment without a fight.
- **Acts of violence BUT no pattern of coercive and/or controlling behavior:** This violence may be related to ongoing conflict about specific issues or dynamics in the relationship, and neither party is significantly fearful of the other nor feels entrapped by the other.
- **Acts of violence related to mental illness, substance abuse, or brain injury:** A person who has one or more of these conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), substance abuse, depression, etc.,

may also perpetrate IPV. However, the reality is that most people with mental illness do not commit acts of violence, including IPV. More commonly, mental illness, substance abuse, or brain injuries can be co-occurring conditions in perpetrators of IPV in any context.

If you are experiencing IPV that occurs in any of these contexts, help is available. Knowledgeable advocates can help you assess the pattern of violence that's occurring and your risk of serious injury or death. They can explain available resources and work with you to determine what will help stop the violence and to develop an effective safety plan.



If you are being abused, it is not your fault. No one deserves to be abused.

My Partner Fought in the War and Seems Different Since Returning. Why?

Your partner's time in the war zone will affect him or her for a long time. Military members learn combat skills and function in a battle mindset to survive in the combat zone, but this mindset may create problems when transitioning home.

Most people returning from war zones experience stress reactions and need time to readjust. This can be especially intense during the first months at home. These common stress reactions are a normal part of readjustment: anger and aggression, guilt, hurt, anxiety, depression, or withdrawal. Most service members and veterans successfully readjust to life back home. Remember that reintegration takes time and patience.

However, untreated stress reactions can affect relationships, work, and overall well-being. Your partner may cope with stress by drinking, taking drugs, withdrawing, isolating, and may have sudden emotional outbursts. Even minor incidents at home may lead to over-reactions.



IS MY PARTNER MORE LIKELY TO BE ABUSIVE SINCE RETURNING FROM THE WAR?

While most returning military personnel have some readjustment and stress issues, most do not become abusive to their families.

In some relationships with a history of psychological and/or physical violence prior to deployment to a war zone, there are reports of increasing violence upon return. In some relationships in which there was no history of violence/abuse prior to deployment, there are reports of psychological, physical, and/or sexual violence upon return from the war zone.

COMBAT-RELATED PROBLEMS THAT MAY INTERACT WITH IPV

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is a serious but treatable condition that can occur after experiencing a traumatic or terrifying event(s) that involved death or injury or even the threat of death or injury to self or others. It can also include learning about a traumatic event that has happened to a close family member or close friend; and being repeatedly exposed to extreme adverse details of the traumatic event (e.g., first responders, police officers, etc.). Symptoms include:

- Experiencing intrusive, bad memories of a traumatic event.
- Avoiding things that might trigger memories of the traumatic event, such as crowded places, loud noises, etc.
- Shutting down emotionally to prevent feeling pain, fear, or anger.
- Operating on “high alert” at all times, having very short fuses, and/or startling easily.
- Experiencing sleep problems, irritability, anger, or fear.
- Negative changes in mood and thinking.



PTSD symptoms are intense and troubling and generally do not go away without treatment. If these symptoms don't decrease over a few months, they can cause problems in daily life and relationships, and living with someone with PTSD can be very difficult. Most military personnel and veterans with PTSD are not violent but some are.

When IPV is also present, PTSD may aggravate the IPV behaviors or vice versa.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

TBIs may be obvious traumas to the brain (e.g., direct wounds to the head and brain) and result in changes in speech, motor, and cognitive skills.

Other TBIs may be mild and not so obvious. Explosions that produce dangerous waves of high pressure rattle a person's brain inside the skull and can cause a mild TBI. Helmets cannot protect against this type of impact. Some people have had these experiences while deployed but are unaware that some of their problems may be a result of a mild TBI.

Some symptoms of mild TBI are similar to those of PTSD such as sleep problems, poor memory, anxiety, depression, irritability, impatience, anger, poor impulse control and/ or increased verbal/physical aggression. Other symptoms include headaches, dizziness, fatigue, blurred vision, and intolerance to noise and light. The presence of a TBI may aggravate PTSD stress reactions and vice versa.

Most military personnel and veterans with TBI are not violent but some are. When IPV is also present, TBI may aggravate the IPV behaviors and vice versa.

Substance Abuse

Some combat veterans "self-medicate," drinking or abusing drugs to numb out difficult thoughts, feelings, and memories related to their war-zone experiences. Warning signs of a problem include: frequent, excessive use; having thoughts they should cut down; feeling guilty or bad about drinking or using drugs; being criticized for overuse; and/or problems with work, family, or other regular activities.



Most military personnel and veterans with substance abuse problems are not violent but some are. When IPV is present, the sub-

stance abuse may aggravate the IPV behaviors and vice versa. Research indicates that regular substance abuse by the IPV perpetrator is a factor that increases the risk of dangerous/lethal violence.

Depression and Suicide

War experiences and combat stress reactions can lead a depressed person to think about hurting or killing him/herself. A common emotional reaction to combat is to feel guilty, blame oneself, or feel shame. Combat-related guilt is strongly related to suicidal behavior. If your partner is feeling this way, take it seriously and seek help.

Most military personnel and veterans with substance abuse problems are not violent but some are. Research indicates that depression and threats of suicide may increase the risk of dangerous/lethal violence.

WHICH RISK FACTORS INDICATE INCREASED DANGER FOR IPV VICTIMS?

The following factors indicate a higher risk of danger and lethality:

- A history of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse toward intimate partners
- Access to lethal weapons
- Threats to kill partner
- Threats of suicide
- Relationship instability, especially a recent or imminent separation or divorce
- A pattern of coercion and attempts to control your daily activities
- Obsessive jealousy
- Stalking and surveillance
- Strangulation
- Forced sex or pressuring for sex even when separated
- Antisocial attitudes and behaviors and affiliation with antisocial peers
- Presence of other life stressors, including employment/financial problems or recent loss

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF ANY OF THESE RISK FACTORS ARE PRESENT IN MY RELATIONSHIP?

Research has shown that when the risk factors listed above are present in a relationship, there is reason to be concerned about safety for yourself and your children. Trust your instincts – if you think you are in immediate danger, you probably are. Take steps to protect yourself and seek information about legal options and military or civilian community services available to you.



RESOURCES FOR HELP

- In a crisis situation, call 911 for immediate assistance.
- For confidential assistance and referrals (24/7), call the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-SAFE (7233); TTY for the deaf: 1-800-787-3224. Assistance is available in over 140 languages.
- Active duty military, Reserve, and National Guard personnel and their families can contact and receive information from Military OneSource (24/7), at 1-800-342-9647, or online at <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/health-and-wellness/family-violence>.
- If you are on a military installation, contact the installation victim advocate, the Family Advocacy Program (FAP), and/or law enforcement, or the domestic violence programs in the local civilian community. FAP contact information can be found online at <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/> then click on “Installation Locator.”
- The Department of Veterans Affairs Caregiver Support Services can be contacted at 1-855-260-3274 or <http://www.caregiver.va.gov/index.asp>.
- The Veterans Crisis Line can be contacted by calling 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, chat online, or send a text message to 838255 to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. This line serves active duty military, National Guard, Reserves, veterans, and their families. The website can be found at <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>.
- The National Resource Directory connects wounded warriors, service members, veterans, their families, and caregivers to programs and services that support them, <https://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov/>.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Center for PTSD has published two Returning from the War Zone, guides – one for military families; the other for military personnel. They can be downloaded from <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/PTSD-overview/reintegration/index.asp>.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



The development and production of this guide was funded under the auspices of the Avon Foundation's Speak Out Against Domestic Violence initiative. More information about the Avon Foundation for Women is available at <http://www.avonfoundation.org/>.

This guide was also supported by Grant No. 2011-TA-AX-K110 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.