

Counseling Should be Mandatory for Veterans

Larry Uzzle



Psychological counseling is a sensitive subject in the macho world of the military. There's tremendous stigma attached to soldiers who receive psychological counseling, such as, "You're seeing a shrink or psychoanalyst." This comment can make a soldier feel inadequate or vulnerable. In my day, soldiers never asked for psychological help because they ran the risk of being disqualified for command, losing rank, or maybe even getting a medical discharge.

These days, in order to eliminate the stigma, a few regular Army units have started to make psychological counseling mandatory for soldiers returning from combat. One particular military base that requires counseling is Fort Bragg in North Carolina. They initiated mandatory counseling after three soldiers returning from Afghanistan murdered their wives in 2002.

As a concerned father whose son recently joined the military, I believe that counseling could help prepare my son for what to expect when he enters the military *and* when he returns to civilian

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life. Many times, recruits are yanked out of settled civilian lives and thrown into the military, which makes them susceptible to stress. Some return home totally removed from the base of support that they used to enjoy. They need support to make the transition from a warrior mentality to a civilian mentality. Counseling helps because it gives them a chance to express

themselves. Counseling gives people a great opportunity to hear themselves think out loud and to put things into perspective.

Additionally, psychological counseling should remain mandatory for at least five years after active duty from the military. During these sessions, doctors

would have a chance to diagnose post-traumatic stress disorder.

Without follow-up care, the veterans often try to manage with social isolation, substance

abuse, overwork, and behavior that is suicidal and destroys families. Individual and group treatment settings give the veterans hope and direction.

Our society needs to realize how important psychological counseling is for military personnel. As a caring father I will monitor my son's behaviors for post-traumatic symptoms when he returns from Iraq. If the need arises, I will help him to seek treatment.

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READ FURTHER about PTSD symptoms on p. 22 and more on PTSD and Military Sexual Trauma (MST) on pp. 25-27.