

# THE HIGHLIGHTER

A publication of the Hancock County ADAMHS Board and Community Partnership

On November 11th this Country will take time to remember our Veterans. The Hancock County Board of Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services would like to take this opportunity to pass along behavioral health information for veterans as well as active military personnel, their families and friends. These are trying times for anyone who has been involved in the military or know someone who has or is currently serving. The ADAMHS Board would like to offer some advice on taking care of yourself or someone you know who may be struggling. Please take a moment to read over this information. If you know of someone who could benefit from the information please forward this along.

## **Veterans: Protect Your Mental Health**

No one who is or was involved in a war is untouched by the experience. Combat stress reactions are a normal part of the readjustment process. Over time, these reactions will become less disturbing. The following is a listing of some of the more effective coping behaviors that can be used if and when troublesome symptoms occur.

### **Unwanted distressing memories, images or thoughts:**

- It is very natural and normal to have vivid memories of trauma events.
- Remember that unwanted memories are just that - memories, and no longer events that control you.
- Establish a counter memory (something very pleasing) that can be consciously called up to override the unwanted memory.
- Talk about unwanted memories with someone that can be trusted.

### **Sudden feelings of anxiety or panic:**

- Physical reactions such as heart pounding and feeling lightheaded due to rapid breathing are not dangerous.
- The accompanying thoughts of fear of a heart attack or fear of loss of control are more upsetting than what the actual physical reactions produce.
- Concentrate on slowing breathing. These sensations will pass after a brief period of time.

### **Sleeping difficulties:**

- If experiencing nightmares, night terrors or thoughts of panic remember that you are reacting to a dream and that you are safe.
- Distract your thoughts by listening to soft calming music, talking to someone or watching a comedy show/movie.
- Maintain a regular bedtime schedule. Avoid strenuous exercise and the use of alcohol, tobacco and caffeine just before going to bed.

## **Support the Mental Health of Returning Service Members:**

During the transition of homecoming many service members and their families experience a range of emotions and behaviors. These reactions are normal but at first may seem troublesome and difficult to deal with.

*The following are some suggestions of how to support the returning service member:*

- Be supportive and respectful of the service member's need to adjust.
- Provide a safe and comfortable environment.
- Do not force or challenge the service member to communicate about his or her combat experiences. Be non-judgmental if the service member chooses to share combat experiences.
- Learn about some of the possible stressors and emotions the service member may have experienced while away from home.
- Most importantly, be genuine, loving, supportive and assertive in expressing your own needs and expectations, rather than hide your emotions in an effort to protect the service member or veteran.
- Avoid large crowds, reunions, etc. until the service member is ready.
- Be ready to learn and accept new skills for coping used by the service member.

*What to do if a person threatens suicide:*

- Be direct and talk directly about suicide. Listen and allow expressions of feelings.
- Be non-judgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong.
- Don't dare him or her, or ask them to do it.
- Don't be shocked. Don't be sworn to secrecy.
- Offer hope that assistance is available.
- Take action. Remove the means to commit suicide.
- Most importantly, GET HELP!

## **Help is available:**

Century Health: 419-425-5050 (adult mental health and substance abuse services)  
Family Resource Centers (youth and family mental health and substance abuse services)

Toll free crisis hotline number: 1-888-936-7116

[www.hancockadamhbd.org](http://www.hancockadamhbd.org)