



Defense Health Agency (DHA) Clinical Communities Speaker Series
OCT 2023 CCSS: Collaborative Best Practices in Military Health Care
S01: iCOVER: Peer-Based Intervention for Acute Stress Reaction

Resource List

Combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is increasingly recognized as having a variable course in returning veterans. The article, [Severity and symptom trajectory in combat-related PTSD: A review of the literature](#) (2019), reviewed the existing literature that identified predictors of illness duration or severity in this population. Several studies identified hyperarousal and pre-deployment dissociation as predictive of disease severity. Important clinical factors to explore in the assessment of PTSD in combat veterans include hyperarousal and a history of dissociation as these may predict disease severity, and re-experiencing as this has been identified as a significant predictor of suicidality. Further study into this topic may reveal biological or more sensitive psychosocial markers predicting illness severity and prognosis.

The [Combat stress reaction: Tips for providers](#) (2021) factsheet, published by the Defense Health Agency Psychological Health Center of Excellence, reports on Combat stress reactions (CSRs). CSRs are normal, temporary physical, behavioral, emotional, and mental changes that occur in reaction to extremely stressful combat-related events. CSRs are hardwired survival responses triggered by the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) responsible for arousal and/or the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) responsible for shutdown. Immediate CSRs last from hours to days and may affect a Service Member's ability to function. This factsheet provides detailed tips for providers who treat patients with CSR. Suggestions include providing education and reassurance that CSRs are normal, asking about past behavioral reactions to stress, providing interventions for acute anxiety or panic conditions, and assessing for future CSR.

The [Guide to coping with deployment and combat stress](#) (2021) reviews combat and operational stress reactions (COSRs) and ways to manage these behaviors. It includes tips for providing support to soldiers in distress and information on coping with deployment separation. COSRs can cause adaptive stress reactions that affect alertness, vigilance, strength, and endurance. Leaders must be aware of the warning signs of COSRs and act quickly to mitigate its progression. Techniques and coping skills by Service Members who face combat or disaster situations are listed to help teammates better cope with stress in order to complete the mission. Feelings of guilt for failing to prevent or surviving fatal combat situations are common themes with survivors. Remembering the larger purpose of the mission is essential to facing such difficult situations.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Center for PTSD has a dedicated webpage for [Acute Stress Disorder](#) (2023). Acute stress disorder (ASD) was introduced into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)-IV in 1994 and reclassified in the DSM-5 in 2013 in the Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders category. ASD and PTSD share the same requirement for exposure to a traumatic event however, they differ in several ways. ASD is a risk factor for developing subsequent PTSD however not all individuals who meet criteria for ASD will develop PTSD. A diagnosis of ASD is important so that individuals experiencing early significant distress in response to a trauma can be identified and treated. Effective treatments for ASD include cognitive behavioral interventions, psychological first aid, and psychological debriefing.



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References

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