

## Principles of Care for Families Affected by War Injuries

Care and services should be delivered in a manner which:

- Provides a sense of safety, comfort, information, practical assistance and connection to appropriate hospital and community resources to assist in solving some of your family's practical needs.
- Is family focused supporting your ability to be available to your children during the stress of injury recovery, and to help guide your efforts in communicating with your children about the injury.
- Reinforces your family's strengths, resilience and unique challenges for which healthcare professionals must be responsive, and provide appropriate help and support.
- Is sensitive to the unique responses of children of different ages and gender, and recognizes care needs and ability to communicate depends on the child's age.
- Is tailored to your family's needs throughout treatment and rehabilitation, anticipating future needs such as discharge and transition to a new community or new way-of-life.
- Encourages a partnership and bringing together of services between your family, treatment providers (both military and civilian), as well as community services.
- Respects your family's unique background including culture, language, composition (traditional or nontraditional), ethnicity, religion and the military family traditions. Helps your family access care and helps overcome the roadblocks that can complicate healthy recovery of your loved one and family members.
- Is informed by service providers, professionals, organizations and communities that are knowledgeable and can provide quality educational materials around the challenges of families affected by war injury.

### Helpful questions to ask healthcare providers:

- What can you tell me about my loved one's condition now?
- How will he/she be treated?
- Are there medical procedures that will require my consent? If so, can someone help me read and understand what I need to do to help you provide treatment?
- Which doctor, nurse, social worker can I expect to communicate with me on a regular basis? Could I have their name, phone number and office location?
- What resources are here to help me care for my family and children?

Visit [CourageToTalk.org](http://CourageToTalk.org) for information and resources on talking about the injuries of war.

### When you're ready to talk, contact:



Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress  
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Tel: 301-295-2470 | Fax: 301-319-6965  
[www.usuhs.mil/csts](http://www.usuhs.mil/csts) | [www.CSTSONline.org](http://www.CSTSONline.org)

# Courage to Care Courage to Talk



## About War Injuries

- Are you talking about the injury?
- What have you told your children?
- Do you know what questions to ask healthcare providers?



The Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS) ([CSTSONline.org](http://CSTSONline.org)) is part of the Uniformed Services University's Department of Psychiatry, located in Bethesda, Maryland, and a partnering center of the Defense Center of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.



## Talking about War Injury



The injuries of war — combat or non combat-related, visible or invisible — affect the lives of the injured, their families and children. Family and friends play a vital role in the recovery process, especially that of talking and

listening. Yet, communicating about a serious injury is challenging for most people. *How do you talk about the injury? When and what do you tell your children? Which questions should you ask healthcare providers?*

Experts who have worked with war-injured families have prepared this brochure to help you address these questions. We hope the following information and tips will assist you on your journey, Courage to Care, Courage to Talk.

*It is important to:*

- **Acknowledge the injury and its impact.** As an involved adult in the life of an injured service member, it is important for you to talk about the injury with those who can provide needed information, support and resources. When you are ready, begin to address the impact of the injury and your future plans.
- **Talk about the injury with your wounded warrior when he/she is able and ready.** Serious injury creates a sense of loss, frustration, and pain that is often directed at loved ones in the form of anger or withdrawal. Explain that you are there to listen and to talk when your wounded warrior is ready. Your touch, your voice communicates comfort and caring essential for conversations to begin.
- **Encourage your wounded warrior to continue to parent.** Staying involved in parenting enhances the morale of the wounded warrior as well as the entire family. Encourage your wounded warrior to parent through use of the telephone, email, video chats or a hospital visit, if it can be arranged.
- **Utilize professional resources and support to keep your family strong.** Injury recovery has a past, a present and a future. While you, your wounded warrior or your children may not be ready to seek help now, remember that **when you are ready** there are professionals who can assist you.

## Talking with Children



Telling children about a parent's injury may be difficult, but it is the first step toward helping them understand and cope. It's best to tell your child as soon as possible. Children, no matter how young, sense when something is wrong and will become frightened if they don't know what has happened. How you talk with your child about a parent's injury will depend on the child's age and ability to understand the injury, your own emotional state, and the emotional and mental state of the injured parent.

*Here are some tips for finding the right time to talk with your child:*

- **Talk with your child as soon as possible after the injury has occurred.** It's natural to want to protect children by withholding bad news, but children can sense from adult behavior when something bad has happened and will become anxious without knowing why.
- **Explain what happened when you feel you can be calm and there will be no disruptions.** Children take cues from a parent's behavior. Whatever the child's age, sit down and talk at eye level. If you talk calmly about the injury, your child will be better able to understand what has happened and what has changed.
- **Use language your child can understand and don't provide details** to a child who isn't ready to hear them.
- **Protect your child from hospital trauma.** It is important to prepare your child before visiting the hospital. Check the hospital's website as it may have information or resources on preparing your child and avoiding exposure that can unduly frighten them.
- **Reassure your child** that the injured parent is receiving the best of care, and provide examples.

*For more detailed information on talking to children about war injuries and/or preparing children for hospital visits, go to: [www.CourageToTalk.org](http://www.CourageToTalk.org).*

## Talking with Healthcare Providers



Talking with doctors, nurses, and specialists about your loved one's injury can be an overwhelming experience. *Many families of injured warriors say they often don't know what questions to ask!* These are common concerns, especially when families are under great stress.

Remember there are people in the hospital who understand how you are feeling, and want to help you through this challenging time.

*Here are some tips for talking with healthcare providers that can help you get the information you need while in the hospital and throughout the recovery process. Specific questions you can ask are on the back of the brochure.*

- **Do not be embarrassed or shy to ask a doctor, nurse or healthcare professional to repeat, explain or say in simpler language anything you do not understand.** You deserve to understand everything that is important about this injury, its treatment and your role in the recovery process.
- **Have paper and pen or pencil with you to write things down.** If you do not have anything handy, ask a doctor or nurse for it, and for their help in writing down any important information.
- **For any medical conversations of importance or length, try to obtain childcare for young children that are accompanying you.** That way you can process the information and protect them from hearing something that might frighten them.
- **If English is not your primary language, ask for an interpreter.** Hospitals should have someone who can speak your language, or bring a friend who speaks English who can assist you. *Even if English is your primary language, many people find having a friend present helps to write things down for them and/or to help you hear and process everything that is said.*