VETERAN FAMILIES IN TRANSITION: FOSTERING RESILIENCY

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

• Gain knowledge of post 9/11 military culture and the impact of military related transitions on the family system.
• Identify family systems and relational play therapy modalities that promote resiliency and lessen the effects of trauma.
• Identify behaviors in children that are related to military transitions and practice strategies to help caregivers navigate the behaviors.
• Learn attachment-based interventions that increase family connection and resilience before, during and after military transitions.
• Explore ways to connect military and veteran families to resources in their community.

POST 9/11 OVERVIEW

• Post 9/11 time frame 9/12/01 to Present
• Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF; March 2003 - November 2011)
• Operation New Dawn (OND; September 2010 - December 2011)
• Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF; October, 2001 – December, 2014)
• Multiple deployments and length
• 41% of Post 9/11 veterans have a service connected disability
• Service connected disabilities are more common among all post 9/11 veterans (33 percent) compared to pre 9/11 (15 percent)
(National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2015)

POST 9/11 MILITARY FAMILY CULTURE

• Challenges related to military service
• Multiple deployments
• Combat stress
• Dual/military
• Family Care plan
• Lack of community resources
• VA/Vet Centers

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

• Resilience is either born or you don’t have it
• “Just bounce back”
• Easy going temperament and higher intelligence are essential components to resiliency

Basic principle grounded in family systems theory:
• Resilience is complex multidimensional and multifaceted
• Dynamic family processes foster resilience by buffering stress
• (Walsh, 2016)

TRANSITIONS

• Overall life transitions
• Transitions unique to the military
• Birthday, Holidays, new birth, graduation, anniversary, developmental milestones
• Issues related to reintegration to civilian culture
**TRANSITION TIMELINE**

- Create a timeline reflecting a transition in your life.
- Try to avoid the most disturbing times.
- Add color to express emotions.
- Purpose:
  - Understand each individual family member’s experience and their collective experience.
  - Identify how the transition narrative is expressed to young children.
  - Identify ruptures/grief associated with ruptures.

**SEPARATION FROM MILITARY**

- Types of separation – Discharge:
  - Med Board, Chapter (Honorable vs Other than honorable),
  - ETS (Expiration of Term of Service)
  - Military cut due to the needs of army (over strength)
- Time given for separation:
  - Branches
  - Returning to civilian life

**IMPACT ON FAMILIES**

- Identity (individual, family)
- Spouses as caregivers
- Mental health
- Invisible Wounds
- Finances
- Health Care
- Mental Issues/Disease
- Children

**COMMON BEHAVIORS IN MILITARY/VETERAN CHILDREN**

- Infancy
- Toddlers
- Preschool/Pre-K
- School Age
- Middle School
- High School
- Early College

**COMMON DIAGNOSIS**

**DIAGNOSTIC**
- Adjustment Disorder
- Depression
- Separation Anxiety
- ADHD
- GAD
- ODD
- PTSD
- Secondary Trauma
- Substance Use Disorder

**MISDIAGNOSIS**
- Discuss with families how misdiagnosing can occur and impact resiliency
- Labeling

**BUILDING RESILIENCE USING FAMILY AND PLAY THERAPY MODALITIES**

**FAMILY THERAPY**
- Parent-therapist relationship
- Strengths based approaches
- Exploring and changing the family narrative
- Holistic Approach
- Systems based interventions
- Family sculpting
- Resiliency groups

**PLAY THERAPY**
- Developmental Needs
- Utilizes both sides of the brain
- Allows involvement of young children
- Modalities that focus on parent-child family
- Therapy, CPRE, First Play-Felt Therapy
ASSESSING THE FAMILY

- Provide opportunities to get to know the family
- Identify communication styles
- Identify parental attachment style
- Family of Origin History
- Interventions:
  - Genograms
  - Kinetic Family Drawing
  - Non-directed free play
  - Formal Assessments (e.g., Marschak Interaction Method [MIM])

FAMILY WORRY WEB

- Materials needed (yarn, post it notes, marker or pen)
- Identify up to 3 worries per family member
- Have each member write the worry on the post it note
- Yarn size will vary based on level of worry
- Therapist role: Acts as a facilitator and container

ATTACHMENT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- Providing psychoeducation to increase resiliency
- Types of attachment – Secure and Secure is the military
- Family of Origin attachment style
  - Impact on couple and parent child relationship
  - Ruptures and Repairs can change attachment

THERAPLAY: HEALING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH PLAY

- Created by Ann Jernberg
- Structure – to organize and regulate the child’s experience. Adult sets limits, defines body boundaries, keeps the child safe, and helps to complete sequences of activities.
- Engagement – to connect with the child in a playful, positive way; to focus intently on the child and encourage the child to enjoy new experiences.
- Nurture – help the child know they are worth the care from caregivers and that adults will provide care without having to ask.
- Challenge – help the child take age appropriate risks in order to foster feelings of competence and mastery.

THERAPLAY–EXAMPLE ACTIVITIES

- Structure Activity – Older Children
  - Toilet Paper – Bust Out – Wrap the child’s legs, arms, or whole body with toilet paper or crepe paper. Give signal when the child can break through.
- Engagement Activity – Young Children
  - Sticker Match – Put a colorful sticker on the child and have the child put stickers on parent in same place.
  - Cotton Ball or Feather Guess – Touch child’s arm with cotton ball or feather, have them notice the two sensations. Ask the child to look away or close eyes. Child will guess between which item you are touching them with.
- Challenge Activity – All Ages/Family
  - Balloon Toss – Pick a body part to keep the balloon up, see how long you can keep it up.

TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT TRANSITIONS

- What to say
  - Age appropriate language
  - Simple clear words
  - Be honest, children can sense when they are not being told the truth
  - Take time to listen and reflect on a child’s experience
  - Bibliotherapy and Role play
FOSTERING RESILIENCY WITHIN THE FAMILY SYSTEM

- Using strengths based language in family session
- Increase reflective capacity of family
- Increase engagement opportunities within the family system
- Identifying support systems in local communities
- Integration of spirituality/cultural beliefs of family
- Flexibility within the family

FAMILY RESILIENCY WEB

- Materials needed (yarn, post it notes, marker or pen)
- Identify strengths, traits or supports
- You can utilize sentence stems to help families identify strengths, traits or supports
- Ex: I am proud of...
- Create connections within the family

RESILIENCY BUILDING INTERVENTIONS

- Creating a family story
- Strengths Family Tree/Genogram
- Family Sculpting
- Sandtray with family
- Family quilt
- Family Shield
- Sentence Stems

COMMUNITY IMPACT

- Employment
- Homelessness
- Domestic Violence/Child maltreatment
- Local economy
- Shortage of mental/health care services
- Lack of support for veteran children

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- Needs vary based on community
- Active Duty
- Retired Veterans
- Veterans
- Family members
- Organizations/Non-profits
- Ex: http://www.vettrip.org/

TEXAS VETERAN RESOURCE DISCUSSION

- We would like you to get together and discuss the services in your community
- What services are missing?
- Who lives in your community?
- What services are available for children and spouses (families)?
- What support/measures do you need as a clinician to help veteran families?
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REFERENCES

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