

PTSD and Divorce – Understanding the Options and Resources

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Q&A with [Kaine Fisher](#), Chairman of Rose Law Group [Family Law Department](#)

“My husband will be returning from Iraq any day now but I feel like our marriage is already over. I’m certain he is suffering from PTSD. He is distant and combative. I want to be fully educated and prepared about PTSD so I can try to fix our marriage before I consider divorce as a serious option.”



Veteran statistics show that at least 20% of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and/or Depression, and astoundingly, less than half of these individuals seek medical help to treat it. This is troubling and deserves more attention. I suspect the average American cannot even begin to comprehend the trauma a service member endures while serving our country, which is why the general public should make more of an effort to be educated about this and other troubling disorders that plague our veterans. The recent tragic events that unfolded at Fort Hood expose the urgent nature of this problem.

Various research and studies show that PTSD causes more unemployment, can lead to homelessness, can tend to lead to more instances of domestic violence, increases the rate of suicide - and what I am addressing with this article – can destroy a marriage.

Many of us know of a friend or family member who has returned from active duty, and for us, it's a heartwarming feeling. For the soldier, however, the experience likely poses a mixed bag of emotions. The emotions might range from feeling invincible and indestructible to feeling immense guilt about the things they had to do in combat or extreme sadness about the friends they have lost. Just as with every relationship, communication is key. You should strive to be open and honest with your veteran spouse and encourage them to open up while at the same time being careful not to pressure them. Undoubtedly, you will never understand what your spouse is going through so all you can do is be supportive. Make them feel welcome and try to make their return home as comfortable as possible.

HelpGuide.org lists the three main symptoms of PTSD as re-experiencing the traumatic event, avoiding reminders of the trauma, and increased anxiety and emotional arousal. It also says that one might lose interest in activities and life in general. If you start seeing signs in someone that they may be suffering from PTSD it's very important to seek help as soon as possible.

In more cases than I'd like to admit, returning soldiers are resistant to seeking proper medical attention. This may have a lot to do with pride or embarrassment, a lack of awareness of how they are feeling or acting, or a lack of awareness of the treatment options that are available to them. The soldier may also have turned to drugs or alcohol in an effort to cope, which often makes their symptoms worse, leads to criminal charges, and undoubtedly, causes the soldier to be a bad spouse and an unfit parent.

In January of 2014, the Maricopa County Superior Court kicked off their Veterans Court Calendar. Presiding Judge Norman Davis said, "Veterans Court will not relieve a veteran from responsibility for a criminal action, but will better protect the community and honor the veterans' service by connecting them with services designed to reduce the rate of recidivism and strengthen the family dynamic." It's refreshing to know that our court system has identified PTSD as a unique problem and is taking steps to address it, and I'm optimistic that the public's awareness will continue to grow, and perhaps, such programs will work their way into Family Court.

Making the decision to leave your spouse is sad and heartbreaking and I always commend married couples who do everything in their power to make it work. That said, leaving may be the only option when your spouse is reluctant to address issues that might endanger your family. If you do decide that divorce is your only option, you need to understand that there are always additional stressors and factors that play into a divorce. PTSD might make the situation more challenging but having the proper resources and professionals on your side will help ensure that the process will go as smoothly as possible. The [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#) is also a helpful starting point for spouses of soldiers, and their loved ones, to go to learn about how to best deal with PTSD.

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