



‘Battlemind’ Prepares Soldiers For Combat

By Susan Huseman
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Every soldier headed to Iraq and Afghanistan receives “Battlemind” training designed to help them deal with combat experience.

The Battlemind system includes separate pre-deployment training modules for soldiers, unit leaders, health care providers and spouses. Psychological debriefings are given in theater and upon redeployment. There is also a post-deployment module for spouses and several post-deployment modules for soldiers.

Not every soldier who deploys is at risk for mental health problems; the main risk factor is the level of combat experienced, Adler explained to her audience of medical, mental health and family support professionals.

Army studies show the greater the combat exposure a soldier encounters, the greater the risk for mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anger and relationship problems. When soldiers first return home, they may not notice any problems; sometimes it takes a few months for problems to develop.

The Battlemind system is built on findings from surveys and interviews given to soldiers and Marines returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, many of the researchers themselves have deployed.

The research team gathered soldiers’ accounts of specific events and incidents, turning them into teaching tools that warriors can relate to. “Some of these stories tell more than any briefing ever could,” Adler said.

The first Battlemind product was a mental health post-deployment briefing. It quickly became a training system supporting soldiers and families across the seven phases of the deployment cycle.

As part of her presentation here, Adler discussed various

challenges in developing a relevant pre-deployment mental health briefing for soldiers.

The researchers first chose to identify the reality of combat and deployment. It may sound rudimentary, but earlier research found that soldiers were not telling other soldiers what to expect. Soldiers didn’t want to sound as if they were bragging, Adler said.

Pre-deployment Battlemind tells soldiers what they are likely to see, to hear, to think and to feel while deployed by describing the worst-case scenario.

For the post-deployment phase, Battlemind addresses safety concerns and relationship issues, normalizes combat-related mental health reactions and symptoms, and teaches soldiers when they should seek mental health support for themselves or for their buddies.

The researchers realized that this post-deployment briefing, the original Battlemind, was not enough. The soldiers they talked to were raw, edgy and angry. Another training program, Battlemind II, was developed to be given three to six months into redeployment.

The system reemphasizes normal reactions and symptoms related to combat and “Battlemind checks,” which are signs that indicate mental health support is needed.

“If you’re still carrying a weapon around with you during the three- to six-month post-deployment phase, ... if you’re still looking around for snipers, if your sleep is still really messed up, these might be signs that your transition is not going smoothly,” she explained. “These are signs that you need to get help.”

(Susan Huseman serves in the U.S. Army Garrison Stuttgart Public Affairs Office.)

Space-A Benefit Improved

Space-A rules have been simplified for dependents of service members who have been deployed for 120 days or longer. Under the new policy, family members no longer need to travel with the service member when traveling Space-A.

In addition, family members can travel as many times as they want during the deployment, assuming there is available seating.

Family members will first need to obtain a verification letter from the military sponsor’s commander confirming the sponsor’s deployment. Underage travelers will need to travel with an eligible parent or legal guardian.

For more information on the revised Space-A benefit, visit <http://www.amc.af.mil>.