



## The Role of Faith and Faith Communities in Veteran Healing

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- Challenges veterans face
- PTSD and Moral Injury
- Role of spirituality in veteran wellness and healing
- Show how Faith-Based Communities can get involved in veteran healing

- Isolation
  - Fear of Large Crowds
  - Over stimulating environments (noise)
- Internal struggle
  - Dealing with stages of grief from loss of friends
  - Necessary actions for survival during combat
- Feeling Disconnected
  - Having a hard time relating to others (civilians)
  - Having a hard time relating to family
- Employment and education
- Family Challenges
- Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Trauma

- Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, rape or other violent personal assault.
- Moral injury is a relatively recent term used to describe a crisis that soldiers have faced for centuries, the internal suffering that results from doing something against your moral code. In essence it is a wound to the conscience.

# PTSD and Moral Injury



# What is Moral Injury

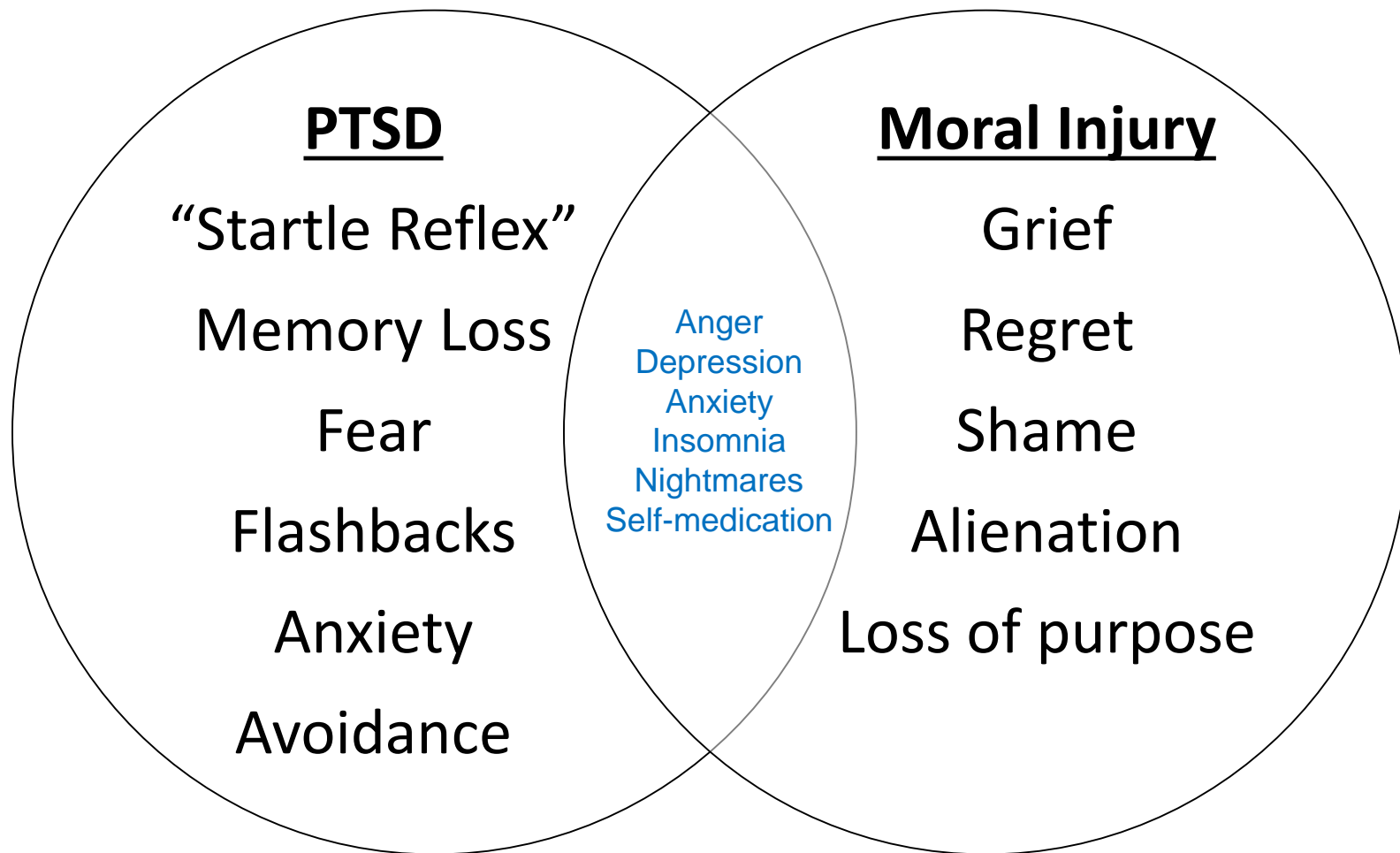
- Moral injury:
  - The pain that results from damage to a person’s moral foundation.
  - “Moral injury is not officially recognized by the Defense Department. But it is moral injury, not PTSD, that is increasingly acknowledged as the signature wound of this generation of veterans: a bruise on the soul, akin to grief or sorrow, with lasting impact on the individuals and on their families.”
    - David Wood, “The Grunts: Damned If They Kill, Damned If They Don’t” March 18, 2014
- Its symptoms include:
  - Sorrow, Grief, Regret, Shame, Alienation

# Moral/Spiritual Distress

- Alienation from one's Higher Power
- Religious or existential guilt/shame (inappropriate)
  - Often attempts to blame self to create an illusion of control
- Withdrawal from family/community
- Difficulty forgiving self/others/Higher Power
- View of Higher Power or faith community as abandoning/punishing
- Loss of religious faith and purpose/meaning in life
- Internalizing vs. Externalizing
- More severe psychological disorder symptom/duration
- Spiritual distress predicts PTSD symptoms (reverse not true)

Source: Chaplain Timothy Usset, Research Team Member - Dr. Irene Harris, Minneapolis VA Center Study on the Role of Faith in PTSD Healing

# PTSD and Moral Injury





Spirituality can improve post-trauma outcomes through:

- Reduction of behavioral risks through healthy religious lifestyles.
- Expanded social support through involvement in spiritual communities.
- Lessening of feelings of isolation, loneliness & depression related to grief and loss.
- Enhance coping skills & understanding trauma that result in meaning-making.
- Improve physiological mechanisms (i.e. "relaxation response") through prayer or meditation.
- Places veterans amongst caring individuals who can provide encouragement, emotional support, & financial assistance.

- Suggestions have been made about the pathways by which spirituality might affect the recovery trajectory for survivors of traumatic events. **Spirituality may improve post-trauma outcomes** through: **(1) reduction of behavioral risks** through healthy religious lifestyles (e.g., less drinking or smoking), **(2) expanded social support** through involvement in spiritual communities, **(3) enhancement of coping skills** and helpful ways of understanding trauma that result in meaning-making, and **(4) physiological mechanisms** such as activation of the "relaxation response" through prayer or meditation **(6). Feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression** related to grief and loss may be lessened by the social support of a spiritual community. **Being part of a spiritual community places survivors among caring individuals who may provide encouragement and emotional support**, as well as possible instrumental support in the form of physical or even financial assistance in times of trouble. [//www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/provider-type/community/fs-spirituality.asp](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/provider-type/community/fs-spirituality.asp)

# Unique Role of FBCS

- Faith-based communities can play a major role in healing and reintegration of veterans.
  - FBCs are in nearly every community of our state.
  - Military personnel, veterans and their families may be cautious about who they allow to engage with them; Veteran-competent FBCs can earn their trust.
  - FBCs often have ministries already in place to that can be called on to help military personnel, veterans and their families.
  - Veterans may have spiritual, as well as psychological and physical wounds.
  - Faith communities can provide a supportive “home.”

## Deployed Service Personnel – Some Ideas

- Number one need: visible prayers!
- Create a “prayer board”
- Send “care packages” to deployed troops
- Conduct send off and welcome back services
- Create a “military family support team” and assign one or two people as liaisons to a family
- Put reminders in the bulletin to pray for deployed troops



## Veterans – Some Ideas

- Check in with when veteran returns
- Welcome to faith community
- Provide job assistance
- Provide support groups
- Provide counseling and spiritual direction
- Conduct veterans recognition events
- Partner with veteran organizations and provide volunteers and funding
- Refer to appropriate services and programs – AZ Coalition for Military Families – Be Connected Call In Line



# Faith Community Opportunities



# Faith-Based Initiative

To engage faith-based communities (FBCs) to provide effective care and support to Arizona's 600,000+ service members, veterans & their families and to connect them to the right resources at the right time.



# Faith-Based Initiative

- Raise awareness among FBCs about the contributions and needs of service members, veterans & their families.
- Engage FBCs in providing effective care & support by equipping key staff/volunteers with information, training and resources.
- Connect FBCs into the network of organizations that serve the military & veteran community.
- Train faith-based organizations on the BE CONNECTED campaign to connect service members, veterans and family members to resources and support.

**The goal of the faith-based initiative is a  
CALL TO ACTION.**





## Contact information:

**1-866-4AZ-VETS | [www.BeConnectedAZ.org](http://www.BeConnectedAZ.org)**

**[connect@arizonacoalition.org](mailto:connect@arizonacoalition.org)**

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# Next Steps

1. Discuss what you have learned with your faith community leaders and others in your community.
2. Arrange for a presentation by one of the Faith Based Initiative “ambassadors” for your faith community.
3. Become a faith-based partner to receive training, best practice info and connect with other faith communities.

**If you are interested in learning more please contact:**

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