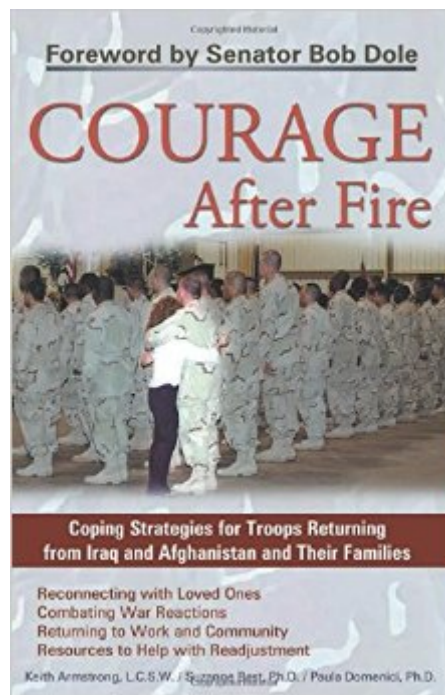


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Courage After Fire: Coping Strategies For Troops Returning From Iraq And Afghanistan And Their Families



Synopsis

The bravery displayed by our soldiers at war is commonly recognized. However, often forgotten is the courage required by veterans when they return home and suddenly face reintegration into their families, workplaces, and communities. Authored by three mental health professionals with many years of experience counseling veterans, *Courage After Fire* provides strategies and techniques for this challenging journey home. *Courage After Fire* offers soldiers and their families a comprehensive guide to dealing with the all-too-common repercussions of combat duty, including posttraumatic stress symptoms, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. It details state-of-the-art treatments for these difficulties and outlines specific ways to improve couple and family relationships. It also offers tips on areas such as rejoining the workforce and reconnecting with children. A crucial tool for the men and women who have been serving our country so VALIANTLY during these past years. • "Senator Bob Dole, from the foreword"; This extraordinary work will help the men and women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan find the COURAGE to rebuild their lives and be successful. • "Honorable Anthony J. Principi, Former Secretary of Veterans Affairs

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Customer Reviews

My husband deployed for Baghdad in '03, shortly after the war broke out. We are both active duty, but I did not deploy during that time. Not being there to experience all the same things, I never fully understood the severity of daily events over there. He came home a completely different man: not sleeping or waking up from nightmares when he did sleep, drinking & smoking more heavily, distant and just overall jumpy/more alert. He was immediately diagnosed with PTSD upon return. He gave

many attempts to explain the things he was feeling and how detached he felt from the things he used to know before the war. It has been frustrating as a spouse, not knowing how to help or what to do to help him get through the things he is experiencing, even still today. He found this book in the store and brought it home, suggesting that I read it. I could not put it down...it totally hit home! It put everything that a veteran (especially a PTSD sufferer) thinks, feels, and experiences...things my husband had tried so hard to talk about, but often couldn't. It is very well written, and gives you many example scenarios of the things our deployed soldiers experienced abroad, as well as upon their return. This book also has exercises for the veterans and their loved ones to try, to help everyone get thru this, one step at a time. I fully recommend this book to anyone who has come home from Iraq, as well as their loved ones helping them cope with the remaining fragments that war has left embedded in their memory.

As a clinical psychologist who retired from the VA a few years ago, I was interested to read this book targeted at returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. The book uses short, well composed exemplary vignettes to focus the reader on particular issues such as cognitions, coping behaviors or emotional reactions necessarily affected by the demands of functioning and surviving in a war zone. Common problems such as stress-response syndromes, depression, anger dyscontrol, and substance abuse are explored carefully. These sections are always accompanied by practical suggestions and exercises the veteran can use to evaluate and modify these areas. The list of readings and websites at the end of the book will be particularly helpful for veterans and their families wanting further information on a particular topic. This is an excellent and accessible compilation of wisdom, ideas and techniques that VA mental health professionals use successfully to help veteran clients seeking help with reintegration into their families and society.

This book was written by a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and two PhD psychologists. All three have provided therapy for those who have been exposed to traumatic events such as war and for the families and friends who love them. As Major Andy Jackson of the US Army Special Forces stated in the introduction "it is essential reading for all combat veterans, their families and friends, military chaplains, employers and clinicians at VA Hospitals and vet centers." It has often been said that knowledge is power. As the book points out "it's natural for people who have experienced trauma to avoid anything that might remind them of the event, because these memories make them feel uncomfortable or distressed. But this kind of avoidance reinforces the symptoms of posttraumatic stress because it prevents them from learning a vital lesson: These reminders are not

dangerous. They are merely "triggers" to uncomfortable memories of posttraumatic stress. " Learning that one can learn to control their reaction to the triggers can be very empowering. In Chapter 1 Reactions to War the authors describe both Positive and Negative Effects of War. Under Negative Effects such problems as anxiety, posttraumatic stress, panic attacks, phobias, anger, substance abuse and depression are clearly defined with examples of most given. Chapter 2 Strengthening Your Mind and Body reinforces the survival skills and strengths veterans of war already have to help them with combat related stress. It gives an overview of relaxation drills to help reduce anxiety in the readjustment to stateside living. One special section of this chapter is the Sleep Tips: 19 Ways to Get Better ZZZZs area. When I myself briefly worked with returning National Guardsmen from Iraq, I noted that one of their most frequent complaints had to do with insomnia. Many seemed to be willing to do just about anything just to get a decent night's sleep. Effective recommendations in this area were always welcome. Chapter 3 Coping Strategies explains to combat veterans HOW their avoidance of certain activities, places, people or situations actually reinforces their posttraumatic stress. This chapter presents a gradual way for the body and mind to learn that the trauma is, in fact, over. It further details HOW to cope with unwanted images and memories, and HOW to combat panic, anger, alcohol or drug abuse, depression and negative thinking. It contains a section with anger management tips entitled "Combat Strategies for Ruling Anger". I like that this chapter also explains to returning veterans what exactly "professional help" is, what are therapists and what is therapy." In our culture seeking help for emotional problems is too often discouraged. In Chapter 4 Grief and Loss the authors explain that although numbing feelings or denying the truth might be adaptive DURING a combat situation later emotional numbness may well interfere with relationships and the ability to enjoy the things that used to bring one pleasure. The authors detail "In war zones like Iraq and Afghanistan-or Vietnam-it's especially important to stay calm and not let your emotions interfere with your duties. As you focused on surviving the next fire fight or sniper attack and getting back to the base, you didn't have time to process the traumatic death you heard about or watched. You buried your grief in the struggle to survive. It was part of your military training. You were taught that showing emotions was a sign of weakness, so you were discouraged from grieving." This chapter importantly gives veterans permission TO grieve, to process those feelings in an effort to heal. It even contains a set of GRIEF EXERCISES in the form of recommendations such as creating a memory book, a ritual, writing a letter to the deceased and to the loved ones of the deceased. Chapter 5 Changed Views of Self, Others and the World discusses such important issues as safety and trust, control and power, self worth and self esteem, redeployment anxiety, relationships and closeness, meaning and purpose in life, spirituality and faith and positive change.

Significantly this chapter also includes a section detailing Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), what it is, what the effects of it are, how it is diagnosed and how it is treated. Chapter 6 Returning to Civilian Life contains a most important section on What Employers Should Know or Do to Help Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Return to Work. It makes recommendations on readjusting to work, suggests what to do if one is coming home to NO job, or is considering school. I was amused but thought it showed real wisdom for the authors to include the section "Dumb" Questions Civilian Asks and How to Respond to Them. The book concludes with Chapter 7 Restoring Family Roles and Relationships. Even though EVERY chapter in this book finishes with Tips for Partners, Family Members and Friends this last chapter is especially relationship focused. It even contains a section Tips for Adult Family Members: How to Respond When Your Veteran Talks About War. There is a special focus on Reconnecting With Children who are often themselves traumatized when their mother or father marches off to war. It makes specific suggestions to the soldier how to help their toddler, preschooler, elementary school-age child, or middle or high school age child adjust. It even makes recommendations on how to discipline your child. This is a great book. It really tries to reach out and connect with the returning combat veteran by being understanding, supportive and comprehensive. I would really recommend it to all servicemembers returning from deployment and veterans of war and, of course, their families and friends.

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