

[ShareThis](#)

## Course helps families understand mental cost of battle

Thursday, August 27, 2009 3:26 AM

BY **MISTI CRANE**

### THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The damages of war reach beyond the mind of the soldier, to mothers and fathers and spouses and children, to anyone close to someone coping with the often difficult return home.

In the years since the Iraq war started, the psychological well-being of military family members is garnering increasing attention.

In Columbus, a partnership between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Alliance on Mental Illness has provided a forum for learning, sharing and support since last year.

The free 12-week course, called Family to Family, starts again Sept. 3 and is open to anyone close to a mentally ill veteran.

It's impossible for people who haven't been there to understand what a veteran has gone through and what the adjustment to civilian life feels like, said Shari Erickson-Young, the clinical social worker who organizes the program at the VA Ambulatory Care Center on James Road.

"When you're in a situation like Iraq, the rules are different. You do whatever it takes to keep people alive; you use resources differently. There's a thing called *battle mind*," she said.

The degree to which veterans suffer mental fallout from what they've been through can vary tremendously, she said. Sometimes, soldiers return with previously undiagnosed symptoms of mental illnesses, including bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

### Resources for military families

- Department of Defense's After Deployment site: [www.afterdeployment.cc](http://www.afterdeployment.cc)
- Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress: [www.cstsonline.org](http://www.cstsonline.org)
- Defense Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury: [www.dcoe.health.mil/def](http://www.dcoe.health.mil/def)
- Mental Health Self-Assessment Tool: [www.militarymentalhealth.org](http://www.militarymentalhealth.org)

[Story continues below](#)

An East Side couple who attended the first class last year said they left with a better understanding of mental illness and are more at peace with what they can and cannot do to help. They asked that their names not be used to protect their son's privacy.

Since their son returned from Iraq three years ago, he has undergone treatment and continues to struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder and the effects of traumatic brain injury.

"The stress it puts on a family is severe," his father said.

The class helped alleviate that stress and united the couple with others who could empathize, he said.

"We're still friends with everyone that was in the class. There's always an open ear and an open heart and a shoulder to cry on if you need it."

His wife said she struggled to come to terms with the fact that she couldn't fix everything that had gone wrong for her son.

"You realize that he'll never be the same, having been through war," she said.

The class taught her how to manage her own frustration and avoid behavior that would frustrate her son, she said.

"I learned how to treat him more as an adult than as a hurt child."

The goal of the class is to provide education, resources and the comfort of a group of peers, Erickson-Young said.

"The VA has decided that, if you want to help the veteran, you have to help the people who are around the veteran," she said.

The prevalence of traumatic brain injury and the current economic downturn are contributing to the problems facing those returning from service, said Suzanne Robinson, director of programs for NAMI Ohio.

The mental health of the people who make up veterans' support systems has a direct effect on their well-being, she said.

The military is providing a variety of resources to families, and the focus on the soldier's mind is greater than ever before, said Kathleen Moakler, government relations director for the National Military Family Association in Virginia.

"We're trying to erase the stigma that usually comes attached to those seeking mental-health

## Advertisement

**Busted: The Rise of Art Schlichter**

A live interview with award-winning *Dispatch* Projects Desk Reporter Mike Wagner

Join at 10:30pm Sept 1st

ART SCHLICHTER MIKE WAGNER

**Make your reservation**  
[www.columbusmetro.com](http://www.columbusmetro.com)

- National Center for PTSD:  
[www.ncptsd.va.gov](http://www.ncptsd.va.gov)

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

resources," said Moakler, whose husband was in the Army for almost three decades and whose daughter is an Army nurse who has been to Iraq twice.

"Believe me, you need that support from other people who understand what you're going through. It's very difficult to go through this by yourself."

*To register for the veterans' Family to Family class, call Shari Erickson-Young at 1-614-257-5695.*

[mcrane@dispatch.com](mailto:mcrane@dispatch.com)

## Read 1 comment »

Type in your comments to post to the forum

**Name**  
(appears  
on your  
post)

**Comments**

Type the numbers you see in the image on the right:

**Post Comment**



Please note by clicking on "Post Comment" you acknowledge that you have read the [Terms of Service](#) and the comment you are posting is in compliance with such terms. **Be polite.** Inappropriate posts may be removed by the moderator. [Send us your feedback](#).

## Ads by Yahoo!

### Obama Urges Homeowners to Refinance

\$180,000 Refinance \$939/mo. See Rates- No Credit Check Req.

(SeeRefinanceRates.com)

**Refinance and Save \$1,000's**

\$200K Mortgage for \$917/month. No Obligation. Refinance Requests Only.

([www.pickAmortgage.com](http://www.pickAmortgage.com))

**Refinance Now at 4.25% Fixed**

\$160,000 Mortgage for \$633/mo. Free. No obligation. Get 4 quotes.

([MortgageRefinance.LendGo.com](http://MortgageRefinance.LendGo.com))

---

©2009, The Columbus Dispatch, Reproduction prohibited