

# COURAGE TO CARE

A Health Campaign of Uniformed Services University, [www.usuhs.edu](http://www.usuhs.edu), and the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Bethesda, Maryland, [www.CSTSonline.org](http://www.CSTSonline.org)

## REINTEGRATION ROADMAP

### *Shared Sense of Purpose*

#### Reintegration Challenges

Uniformed Services University applauds the educational efforts and programs our Department of Defense community is providing to assist troops and their families in the reintegration process post deployment. To enhance these efforts, our military trauma experts have prepared this concise and friendly, two-part fact sheet that is based upon recent interviews with affected families. You may forward this Provider Fact Sheet and the attached Fact Sheet for Couples electronically, or download them for distribution to military health and community leaders, and the military families they serve. Local contact information can be added to the Couples Fact Sheet in the space provided by hand or using the full version of Adobe Acrobat. We encourage you to reach out to the many spouses of young soldiers who returned to families of origin and other sources of support not connected to military communities.

#### Real Issues

The changing nature and complexity of the Iraq war has contributed to reintegration stresses experienced by service members, their spouses, and families. The military operation in Iraq, a conventional conflict between armies for only a few weeks, became a predominantly guerilla war with no front-line, constant threat, and a disguised enemy. Humanitarian and peace keeping missions such as rebuilding schools, hospitals, and training police forces have and continue to put our troops in harm's way. Many service members and families have encountered confusion and stress due to this variety of missions compounded by extended or open-ended return dates.

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#### Reframing the Challenge:

##### **Shared-Sense-of-Purpose Paradigm**

The challenge of reintegration can be summed up in three words: sense of purpose.

The biggest task for the returning service member is to transform a sense of purpose created by the intensity of war into the routines and safety of everyday life. Similarly, the service member's family has established a sense of purpose sustaining the home and its routines in the absence of the spouse. Helping couples respect each other's perspective and reestablish a shared sense of purpose is a constructive paradigm that addresses standard concepts such as emotional changes, expectations, and adjustments, and reframes them into an action-oriented, positive approach for moving couples forward.

#### Roadmap for Reintegration

The attached fact sheet presents a four-step guide on how couples can reestablish a shared sense of purpose. It can be distributed as a takeaway after educational debriefings, or used with existing programs. The four steps to achieving a shared sense of purpose are:

1. Understand common factors that have shaped the service member's and spouse's sense of purpose during separation.
2. Recognize common concerns shared by service member and spouse resulting from the separation.
3. Be aware of relationship breakers: common, sensitive issues that can distance couples.
4. Focus on relationship makers: ways to build shared experiences, shared sense of purpose and closeness.

*Courage to Care* is a health promotion campaign of Uniformed Services University and its Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS). CSTS is the academic arm and a partnering Center of the Defense Centers of Excellence 5DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.