

Integrative **B**ehavioral **C**ouple **T**herapy with **C**ombat **V**eterans

National VA EBT Rollout

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Resilience, Families, and Combat Deployment

- The most extraordinary statistic of combat deployment: 66-80% of soldiers do not develop long-term MH difficulties.
- Resilience implies a natural healing or stress resistance process.
- Families are part of that process.

Family Systems and Resilience

- Recovery (or deterioration) does not take place in isolation.
- What affects a veteran dramatically affects a family system; what affects a family system dramatically affects a veteran.
- Transactional process.
- Divorce rates are high (50% and up).

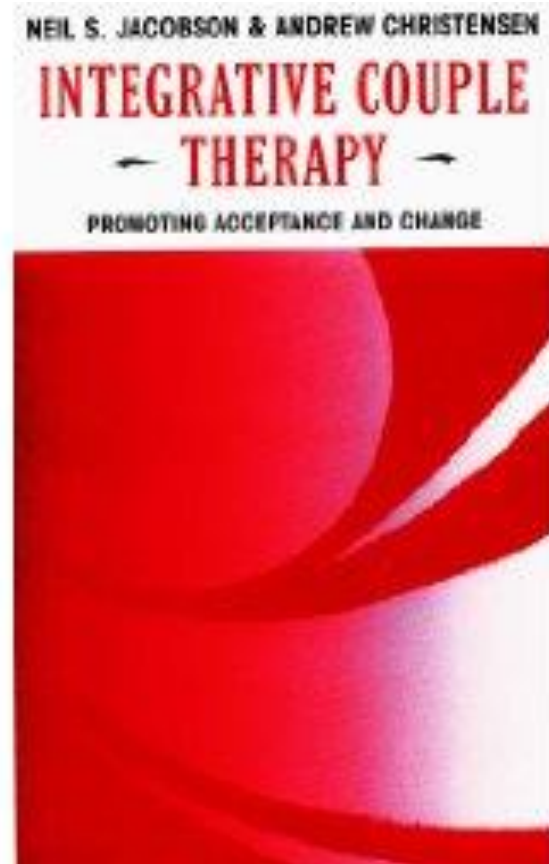
Family Stress in the Context of Combat Deployment:

- BEFORE DEPLOYMENT
 - Preparations for being alone; single parenting
 - Anticipation and worry
- DURING DEPLOYMENT
 - Managing household without the soldier
 - Managing fear/anxiety; communication process
 - Infidelity and betrayal; “Dear John” letters
 - Dealing with fears and behavior changes in children
- AFTER DEPLOYMENT
 - Readjusting to soldier/veteran being home
 - Renegotiating roles
 - Dealing with changes in the soldier/veteran & partner

Role of Couple and Family Interventions

- Better family functioning leads to greater support for veterans—better outlook and functioning.
- The more distress a veteran experiences, the more disruption may occur in the family.
- Couple and family interventions remove barriers to recovery and promote resilience.

Department of Veterans Affairs National Rollout IBCT



Developed by Neil Jacobson and Andy Christensen

Why Choose IBCT?

- Acceptance Focus
 - From Traditional Behavioral Couples Therapy to IBCT: Acceptance and Change
 - Principle-based rather than set protocol
 - Idiographic and tailored
- Evidence-Based Approach
 - Efficacy with chronically distressed couples
 - Research ongoing with individual problems; Depression & PTSD

General Therapeutic Goals

- FROM Dysfunctional Interaction Patterns
 - Demand-Withdraw (accuse/defend)
 - Mutual Attack/Arguments
 - Mutual Withdrawal
- TO Constructive Interaction Patterns
 - Compassionate; Analytical; and Practical Discussions

IBCT Principles

- Problem Definition and Targets
 - Molecular vs. Molar
 - Specific, defined, & easily understood targets vs. Identifying broad patterns and response classes
- Types of Change
 - Traditional Change vs. Acceptance as Change
 - Increase/Decrease in frequency, intensity, or duration of behavior vs. Change in emotional reactivity
- Types of Behavior
 - Rule-governed vs. Contingency Shaped
 - Arbitrary vs. natural reinforcers

Acceptance in IBCT

- Acceptance is NOT
 - Resignation, submission, giving in, or permission to be abusive
- Acceptance IS
 - Problems as a window into vulnerability
 - Problems as a vehicle for intimacy
 - Letting go of the struggle to change
 - Reducing adversarial relationship

Overview of IBCT Procedures

- Assessment
 - Conjoint session & Individual sessions
 - Confidentiality
 - Questionnaires
- Feedback Session
 - Level of distress, commitment, strengths
 - DEEP Formulation of issues

DEEP Formulation of Relationship Problems

- DEEP analysis of issues
 - Differences or incompatibilities
 - Emotional sensitivities
 - External circumstances and stressors
 - Patterns of problematic interaction
- Collaborative

DEEP Formulation Example: PTSD

- DEEP analysis of issues
 - Differences or incompatibilities
 - Comfort with expression of negative emotion
 - Emotional sensitivities
 - Fear of strong emotional reactions; fear of PTSD stimuli
 - External circumstances and stressors
 - Noisy bad area of town
 - Patterns of problematic interaction
 - Avoidant withdrawing followed by explosive reactions

IBCT Treatment Strategies

- Treatment Targets
 - Acceptance before Change
 - Emotionally Salient Issues
- Treatment Strategies
 - Empathic Joining
 - Unified Detachment
 - Tolerance Building

Empathic Joining

- Purpose
 - Promoting expression of feelings that may have not been shared before
 - Partner experiences understanding and validation from therapist and partner
- Therapy strategy (emotional acceptance)
 - Attend to emotional reactions (primary vs. secondary)
 - Prompt personal disclosure

Unified Detachment

- Purpose
 - Intellectual discussion about significant relationship experiences and interaction patterns
- Therapeutic Strategy
 - Engage couple in descriptive and nonjudgmental discussion
 - Distinguish intentions from effects
 - Problem as an “it” versus “you”

Direct Change Strategies

- Behavior Exchange
 - Increasing relationship focus and positive reinforcement
- Communication Training
 - Enhancing expressive and listening skills
- Problem Solving Training
 - Problem definition; brainstorming; experimenting

Tolerance Building

- Tolerance is on continuum of acceptance:
grudging tolerance ←-----→ embracing differences 😊
- **Goals of tolerance interventions**
 - Make partner's behavior less painful.
 - Enhance ability to cope.
 - Decrease intensity of conflict or shorten duration of recovery.
- **Types of tolerance interventions:**
 - Highlight positive features of negative behavior.
 - Rehearsal of negative behavior (desensitization).
 - Faking of negative behavior (relapse prevention).
 - Self-care: Promotion of independence, self-reliance.

Considerations

- Order of interventions
 - Acceptance before change
- Inappropriate couples
 - Severe interpersonal violence
 - Untreated substance use disorders
 - Lack of commitment
- Termination
 - Spaced joint sessions

IBCT in Couples with PTSD

- PTSD affects veterans, but it also affects their families.
- Veterans with PTSD report:
 - Poorer relationship adjustment
 - Reduced couple satisfaction
 - Less intimacy
 - More frequent conflict
 - Higher rates of divorce
 - More problems in parenting

Partners of those with PTSD report...

- Increased distress including depression, anxiety, and somatic complaints
 - “Compassion Fatigue”
 - “Secondary Traumatic Stress”
 - “Caregiver Burden”
- “Walking on egg-shells”
- Having to do things for or without their partner
- Feeling isolated and lonely
- Feeling confused, helpless, or frightened

IBCT with PTSD

- Unified Detachment around the PTSD
- Emotional exposure / empathic joining to increase emotional experiencing
- Behavioral exchange as in vivo exposure
- Decrease isolation
- Limited review of trauma

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