

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

ACT-Based Parenting Group for Veterans With PTSD: Development and Preliminary Outcomes

Casselmann, R. B., & Pemberton, J. R. (2015). ACT-based parenting group for veterans with PTSD: Development and preliminary outcomes. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 43(1), 57-66. doi:10.1080/01926187.2014.939003

SUMMARY: Pre- and post-treatment data were utilized to examine parenting outcomes (i.e., parenting behaviors, parenting satisfaction, and psychological flexibility) of veterans who participated in an acceptance and commitment therapy group. Participants reported increased levels of warmth and less aggression at the end of the class. Although these pre-post survey data revealed some positive trends, findings are tentative given the very small sample and lack of a comparison group.

KEY FINDINGS:

- All participants in the parenting group reported increased acceptance and warmth and decreased aggression and hostility at the end of the group.
- Two of the three Veterans reported increased parenting satisfaction.
- Mean levels of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms did not change for any of the participants.
- Participants reported that they liked the mindfulness breathing exercises and information about parenting, but wished the classes were longer and more in depth.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer parenting classes for Service members and their partners to support them in effective discipline, childrearing, and bonding with their children
- Host family-based activities in which parents could have enjoyable outings to promote positive interactions with their children
- Publicize the availability of a range of parenting resources on the installation, including mobile apps, parenting support groups, and behavioral health resources

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that help Service members and their partners with effective parenting, especially around high-stress times such as deployment
- Recommend education for professionals around parenting stress and deployment to provide better support for Service members who are parents
- Encourage training for professionals who work with military families about unique factors that contribute to parenting difficulties among combat-exposed Service members

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METHODS

- Veterans were recruited from an outpatient PTSD clinic at a large Veterans Affairs hospital.
- Veterans participated in eight weekly one-hour therapy sessions that focused on mindfulness, coping strategies, and parenting skills.
- Both before and after the treatment, Veterans completed measures of positive parenting behavior, parenting satisfaction, psychological flexibility, and PTSD symptoms.
- Upon completion of the parenting class, Veterans provided written responses to five open-ended questions about what was most and least helpful in the treatment.

PARTICIPANTS

- Although 5 male Veterans began the treatment, only three completed the group and the measures before and after treatment.
- All Veterans had served in Iraq or Afghanistan.
- All participants had been previously diagnosed with PTSD.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample size (N = 3) was extremely small, so results may not extend to a more general population.
- All participants had previously been diagnosed with PTSD, but it is unclear what kind of treatment (if any) they were receiving; results may have, in part, come from these other possible treatments.
- The study had high levels of attrition; it is unknown how those that discontinued treatment may have differed from those that completed treatment.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Replicate the study with a larger group of Veterans
- Include a comparison group to more specifically examine the effectiveness of this group
- Examine differences in mothers and fathers regarding their experiences in such a parenting group

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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