

What Should Families Keep in Mind for Their Returning Veteran?

Written by Editors

Thursday, 08 November 2012 21:03

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The Ghosts of Combat Haunt Every Warrior; Vietnam Vet Discusses Ways to Help

News & Experts— No matter how well-adjusted returning or returned veterans appear, they are like



ly carrying wounds that cut deep, and that pain sticks with them for the rest of their lives, says Vietnam veteran Ord Elliott.

“When I came back from the war, I filed all that pain away as ‘personal,’ but it invariably came out in my creative writing, and I think that kept me much more sane,” says Elliott, a former platoon commander with the Marines and author of “The Warrior’s Silence.” (<http://tinyurl.com/96cv8xj>).

“I still feel a sense that something was lost within me from that war, and it kills me to think that our country’s most recent wars have done the same to the latest generation of military personnel. When I hear reports of alarming suicide rates among soldiers and problems with drugs and homelessness, it reminds me of friends I’ve lost, and the lives they weren’t able to have.”

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While intending to write books about business, Elliott found himself writing poems about his war experience. Through the years, writing became an extremely helpful, therapeutic activity, he says.

“It just came out of me about five years after coming home,” he says. “Unfortunately, for many of today’s younger veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, they are expressing their pain through alcoholism, drugs, crime, depression and violence.”

There are many avenues available to vets if they’re having a hard time adjusting to civilian life after combat, he says.

“In some ways I was lucky; I had a good education from Princeton, a sense of purpose and I never had a full-blown case of post-traumatic stress disorder,” Elliott says. “But I think it’s safe to say all vets who have seen combat are haunted by what they’ve endured.”

Although most civilians can never understand the horrors of war— of perpetually wondering what that last moment of life might be like— there are ways in which the families of veterans, and others, can help:

- **Make creative expression available:** Elliott has heard story after story involving vets who simply do not want to talk about their combat stress. Many simply do not know how to find catharsis in constructive ways. Thoughts and emotions, however, can also be expressed – released – in creative pursuits such as writing, art, music, even cooking.

- **Patience and understanding:** “You won’t go wrong with loving tolerance while seeking the help of a trained professional to help your veteran work through problems like depression and anxiety,” Elliott says. “It’s important to provide emotional support, including helping vets who need it to get to appointments and joining in on family sessions.”

- There are many outstanding efforts going on with non-profits that help today’s returning

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vets, but the best medicine is prevention, he says. In 2001, when the Iraq War was gearing up, that same feeling of anticipation – excitement – washed over Elliott that he experienced before entering Vietnam. “I was surprised that I could feel that way, but then I quickly remembered all that I’ve been through with the reality of war,” he says. “If families and citizens really want to help the men and women of the U.S. military, they will be wary of politicians who haven’t been in combat and who are all too quick to the war trigger.”

As a Princeton graduate; a Marine Rifle Platoon commander in Vietnam; and Purdue Ph.D. in Management, Ord Elliott writes from an unusual perspective. He has four decades of experience as an internal and external management consultant, specializing in change management, strategy implementation and executive coaching. He has advised companies such as Procter and Gamble, General Electric, Allied Signal, Shell Oil, Pacific Gas and Electric, Intel, Philips, Cisco Systems, and numerous Silicon Valley technology companies and start-ups.

Elliott is also the author of several books.