

TOOLKITS from NOD and Give an Hour

# COMMON EMPLOYER QUESTIONS ABOUT VETERANS WITH TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY & POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER



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## **Common Employer Questions about Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) & Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

*Reprinted with permission from America's Heroes at Work, a U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) project that addresses the employment challenges of returning service members living with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and/or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). You can download questions and answers on these and many related topics at [www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov/resources](http://www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov/resources).*

### **What is a TBI?**

A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is defined as a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the function of the brain. Not all blows or jolts to the head result in a TBI. The severity of such an injury may range from mild/concussion (i.e., a brief change in mental status or consciousness) to "severe," (i.e., an extended period of unconsciousness or amnesia after the injury). A TBI can result in short or long-term problems, although most people with TBI are able to function independently.

### **What is PTSD?**

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can develop in response to exposure to an extreme traumatic event. These traumatic events may include military combat, violent personal assaults (e.g., rape, mugging, robbery), terrorist attacks, natural or man-made disasters, or horrific accidents. The event, directly experienced or witnessed in another person, involves actual or threatened death, serious injury or threat to one's physical integrity. The person's response to the event is one of intense fear or helplessness.

### **What are some possible behaviors associated with PTSD?**

Many people with PTSD repeatedly re-experience their ordeal in the form of flashback episodes, intrusive recollections of the event and nightmares. A stress reaction may be provoked when individuals are exposed to events or situations that remind them of the traumatic event. Avoidance of those triggering cues is a very significant feature of PTSD. Feeling detached from others and emotional numbing are common. Symptoms of PTSD may also include difficulty sleeping, problems concentrating, irritability, being hyper-alert to danger, feeling "on edge," and an exaggerated startle response. PTSD symptoms usually emerge within a few months of the traumatic event, however symptoms may emerge many months or even years following a traumatic event.

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### **Are all TBIs severe?**

No. "TBI" is an umbrella term that spans a wide continuum of symptoms and severity. In fact, the large majority (80%) of combat head injuries sustained in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom are mild concussions as opposed to severe, debilitating TBI.

### **What should employers expect from a person with PTSD? Will they have violent outbursts?**

PTSD develops differently in different people. Some returning service members with PTSD may suffer from memory deficits, lack of concentration, time management issues, disorganization, panic attacks, sleep disturbance and outbursts of anger, among other challenges - all of which can interfere with everyday activities inside and outside of the workplace. Most symptoms will decrease over time. People, by virtue of having a diagnosed PTSD condition, do not pose a direct threat to themselves or others. Employees who manage their symptoms through medication or psychotherapy are very unlikely to pose a threat. Employers may help reduce the overall stress in the work environment or mitigate known vulnerabilities to stress by providing a job accommodation.

### **There's a lot of negative stigma associated with PTSD. How can employers separate myth from fact?**

The *America's Heroes at Work* fact sheet, "[Dispelling the Myths About PTSD](#)," helps debunk some of the stigma associated with combat stress. Employers should realize that most people with PTSD recover naturally over time, and that employment plays a vital role in the recovery of people with PTSD.

### **What should employers expect from National Guard and Reservists who return to their jobs with TBI and/or PTSD?**

As TBI and PTSD are the signature injuries of the Global War on Terror, it is possible that many National Guard and Reservists will return to their civilian jobs with these conditions. However the effects of TBI and PTSD vary widely from person to person depending upon the severity of one's injury or traumatic experience. To educate yourself, read through the [free materials](#) on the *America's Heroes at Work* Web site.

### **Are TBI and PTSD conditions that are exclusive to veterans?**

TBI and PTSD within our military populations are getting a great deal of well-deserved attention. However the conditions are not new -- or exclusive to veterans. Some first responders, for example, are among the millions of people who experience post-traumatic stress. And according to the Brain Injury Association of America, more than 1.4 million people sustain a brain injury every year in the United States. The **America's Heroes at Work** initiative is designed to help any employee with TBI, PTSD and other invisible conditions succeed on the job.

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