



As you arrive to the webinar, please answer the following question in the question pod

What challenges might service member parents with PTSD experience?



MILITARY FAMILIES LEARNING NETWORK

Challenges, Opportunities, and Resources for Parents Living with PTSD

<https://learn.extension.org/events/2399>

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MFLN Group <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8409844>



Today's Presenter

Michelle D. Sherman, PhD.

- Licensed Clinical Psychologist
- Research Scientist, University of Minnesota
- Consultant, Minneapolis VA
- Former Professor at the University of Oklahoma medical school and Director of the Family Mental Health Program, Oklahoma City VA Medical Center



MichelleDSherman2@gmail.com



Learner Objectives

- Understand the impact of parental PTSD on youth
- Increase awareness of resources for service members and veteran parents and their children regarding parental PTSD
- Reflect upon ways in which providers can support service members and veterans in their role as parents

Outline

Brief review of PTSD

How can PTSD impact parenting?

What does research tell us?

Our research project

Methods

Key findings

Implications

Resources for families

Key Take-aways



Thank you for the invitation to join
you today!



And thanks for all you do for
military families.



PTSD:

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Approximately ½ of all people experience a “trauma” at some point during their lives.
- Trauma is defined as experiencing or witnessing “death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence”

Responses to Trauma

- Most people are resilient – and recover!
- Trauma **DOES NOT EQUAL PTSD!**
- Trauma is life **CHANGING**...but does not have to be life **DEFINING**

IMPORTANT

Possible Responses to Trauma

- Depression
- Anxiety
- PTSD
- Increase in substance use/abuse
- Relationship problems





Let's review PTSD symptoms....

- Re-experiencing symptoms
 - Avoidance of trauma-related stimuli and numbing
 - Negative alterations in cognitions and mood
 - Marked alterations in arousal and reactivity
-
- Symptoms must last more than 1 month
 - Prevalence: ~8%



PTSD and Parenthood

- Over 15 million people in the USA today will experience PTSD in their lifetime and have at least 1 biological child
- Having kids in the home is related to higher likelihood of PTSD among veterans
- Parenting can provide purpose/meaning in life

Lauterbach et al., 2007, 2011; Janke-Stedronsky et al., 2015

But PTSD can make parenting hard....let's consider these symptoms:

- Social anxiety
- Angry outbursts
- Emotional unavailability / numbing

Parental PTSD and Child Functioning

- Associations with child internalizing problems, behavioral problems, family functioning difficulties, & impaired parent-child bonding
- Meta-analysis: Medium effect size ($r=.35$) between parental PTSD and child distress and behavioral problems
- Children of veterans: WWII, Vietnam, OEF/OIF

Leen-Feldener et al., 2013; Marsanic et al., 2014; Lambert et al., 2014



Let's hear from Veteran, Rick Collier: About Face

[http://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace/questions--
what-ptsd-did-to-the-people-i-love--2.html](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace/questions--what-ptsd-did-to-the-people-i-love--2.html)



Time to Chat

**In the chat pod,
please tell us your thoughts
regarding the video.**

Research on Parenting

- Parents with PTSD report:
 - More parenting problems
 - Lower parenting satisfaction
 - More family violence
 - Poorer parent-child relationships
 - Kids having more emotional and behavioral problems
- ...than parents without PTSD



Our Study

- Funded by the VA's South Central Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC)
- Collected data from 3 sites: Phoenix, Oklahoma City, Minneapolis
- Design: Mixed methods (qualitative & quantitative)

Methods

- Eligibility criteria
 - 18-80 years old
 - Enrolled in VA care
 - Chart diagnosis of PTSD
 - Has at least one child (age 4-18) living in the home at least half the time
- Recruitment
 - Letters
 - Staff referrals
 - Present at groups

Procedures

- 10 interviews
 - 7 individual interviews
 - 3 focus groups (2-6 veterans/group)
- 15 questions examining
 - Veterans' experiences of parenting with PTSD
 - How VA can help them as a parent
- Self-report measures

Participants

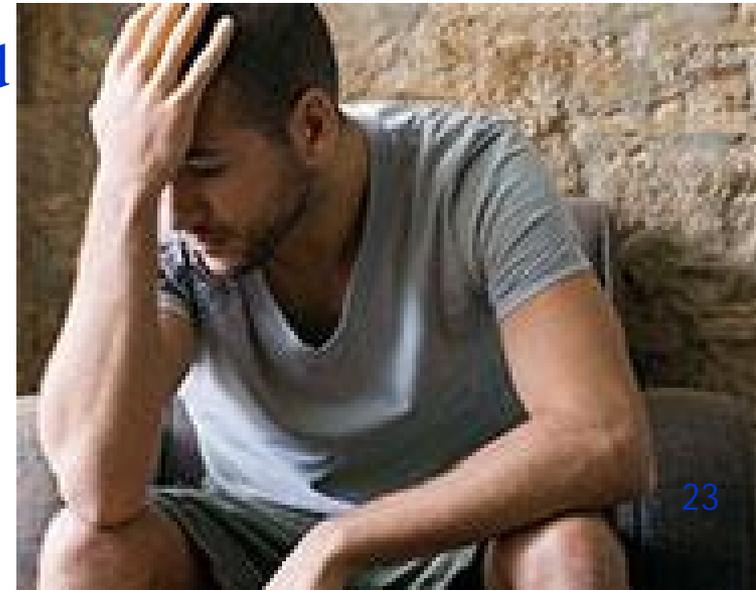
- 19 Veterans
- 89% male, 85% White, 53% married
- 82% unemployed
- Mean age: $39_{\pm 7}$
- 79% had deployed to combat zone (Iraq and/or Afghanistan)
- Child mean age: $11_{\pm 6}$ years

PTSD: (PCL-C): 95% exceeded cut-off (50)

Depression: (PHQ-9): 84% were moderately severe or severe

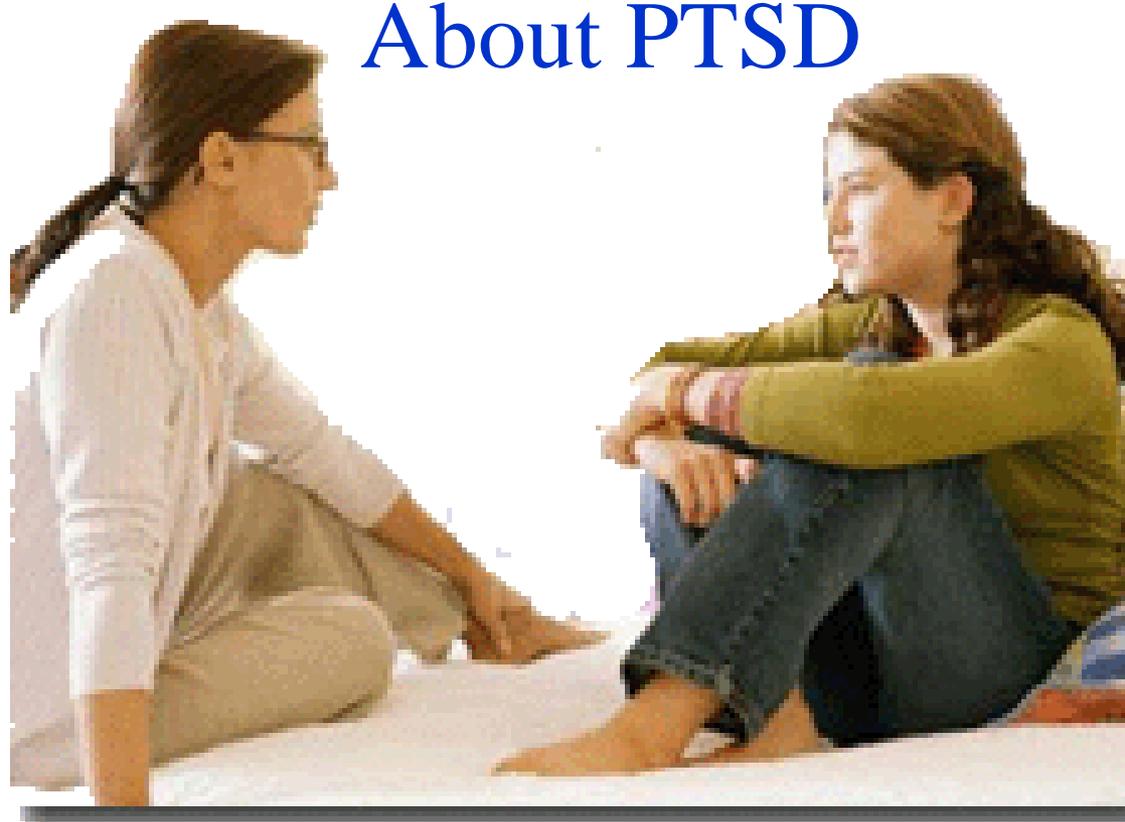
Alcohol Abuse: (AUDIT-C): 42% had positive screen

Anger: (DAR-5): 95% exceeded cut-off for problematic levels



Our Findings

Part One: Parent-child Communication About PTSD





Literature: Parent-Child Communication about Parental Health Problems

- Physical health (e.g., cancer, HIV/AIDS)
- Serious mental illness
- PTSD – none we are aware of....



Overarching Themes

- Motivations for Sharing with Kids about PTSD
- Barriers to Sharing
 - Personal
 - Concern about impact on children
- Positive Outcomes of Disclosure
- Experience at the VA
- Desired VA Services

Motivations for Sharing with Kids about PTSD

- Kids are perceptive
- Desire for children to understand them
- Keeping it a secret hurts veteran
- Desire to reassure kids



*You've got to find a way to communicate with them [kids].
No matter how old or young they are, they have an idea of what
you've been through, so it'll help them to understand and have a
little more sympathy...* - 43-year-old married male





Time to Chat

*What have you found to be reasons why
Service Members say they
don't want to share?*

Barriers to Sharing

- Personal
 - Avoidance of talking about PTSD
 - Own lack of understanding of PTSD
 - Belief that their children cannot understand PTSD
 - Desire to protect their children
 - Shame
 - Belief that they cannot disclose anything about PTSD without describing the trauma

- 
- *I don't want to bring up; I don't want to relive it. I relive it enough; I don't want to relive it in front of somebody else [43-year-old female]*
 - *There's just some things that they should never know...I would not share what happened with my kids if you put bamboo shoots under my fingernails [45-year-old female]*
 - *It is machismo maybe; it's hard to admit that you're weak in an area...I don't want to say take that one to the grave but that's a hard admission to make. [50-year-old male]*

- 
- Concern about consequences of disclosure:
Fear that their children may:
 - Feel upset
 - See the veteran as weak
 - Lose respect for the veteran
 - Feel uncomfortable around the veteran
 - Tell others about the veteran's PTSD
 - Ridicule the veteran or use the information against him/her

- 
- *I don't want them to feel bad...that Daddy has mental problems...that Daddy's crazy [34-year-old male]*
 - *They (my children) might tell their friends....they (other kids' parents) may say you can't go to that birthday party. I don't want you around someone that has PTSD [34-year-old male]*
 - *If your kids ... not respecting you now because they feel you're weak or now you're just- now they're just running rip shod all over the place. Your authority now is...no longer [50-year-old male]*



Content of Disclosure

- Information about the nature of PTSD
- Instilling hope in their children
- Acknowledging the family impact of PTSD
- Empowering their children to cope effectively

- 
- *That it [life with PTSD] can be okay; that you can live and have a fulfilling life and have pursuits and dreams and change your life and be okay...- it doesn't define me. [43-year-old female]*
 - *It really isn't them that is an issue...this is me dealing with my time at war...hey it's not you guys, it's my PTSD [37-year-old male]*
 - *PTSD is like any other sickness...it's a disease...it can be treated [34-year-old male]*

Positive Outcomes of Disclosure

Coming out of the shadows...shedding light on the problem to get some help [46-year-old male]



[Disclosure helped his children be] *more accepting, more supportive...they've got my back so to speak* [50-year-old male].

Experience at the VA

- 21% reported none or few of their VA MH providers assessed **if they had kids**
- 42% reported none or few MH providers **talked about parenting or their children**
- 21% described VA as **not welcoming** to veterans with children

Desired VA Services

- Parenting classes for veterans (90% said likely to attend)
- On-site childcare (47% said they'd use)
- Family therapy
- Workshops for families and youth
- Written resources about parental PTSD



Have them (your children) be a part of the (treatment) process...of hearing it from a professional and they get it.

But it doesn't make you any less valuable in their eyesight. You're still- you're still Mom; you're still Dad.... But you have something and then you [they] don't walk away feeling sorry [for you].

If anything, they walk away saying, "I'm more proud of you today than I ever was."



Part Two:

Impact of PTSD on Parenting and Kids' Reactions





Let's take a look at your responses to the
Question posed when you first arrived
to the webinar

*What challenges might service member
parents with PTSD experience?*

“What is the hardest part about being a Service Member parent with PTSD?”

- Negative thoughts
- Guilt/shame
- Emotional numbing
- Detachment
- Isolation
- Hyperarousal
- Aggression/violence





I don't deserve their (kids') love [43-year-old married female]

Look at their father as- I mean it's- I'm already with a cane and a walker. I mean, my gosh, now this, too. [40-year-old single male]

*It's not that I don't love them;
it's just I'm not really there. [31-year-old married male]*

Makes me so I get angry...to the point that sometimes I want to just punch him (son) in the face [27-year-old married male]

Children's Emotions

- Cry, distress, shock, sadness
- Irritability & frustration
- Confusion
- Resentment
- Feeling uncared for
- Fear of parent
- Anxiety / Incongruent behavior
- Emotional withdrawal





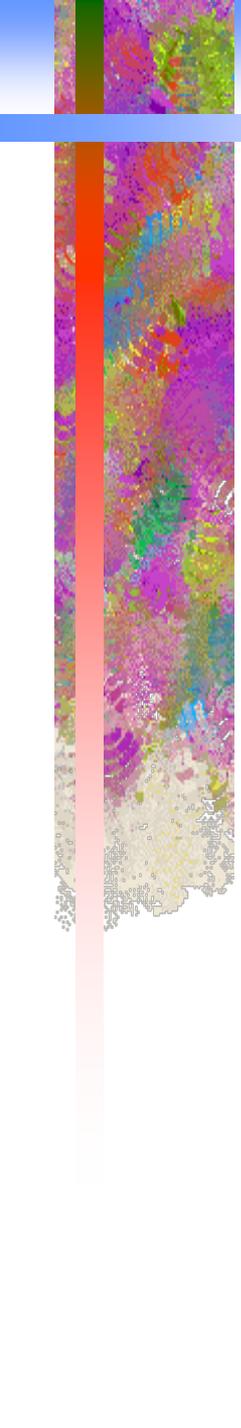
When I have anger...she [daughter] may giggle, laugh or think it's funny...she may just kind of stop and look down & not know what to think [27-year-old married male]

Now they don't even ask me anymore...I think it's acceptance on their part...that's just the way Dad is [40-year-old single male]

They (my kids) still hold a lot of resentment...they think I'm faking it for attention [45-year-old divorced female]

Children's Behavior Changes

- Avoid things that might cause startle
- Mimic veteran's behaviors
- Hide/withdraw physically
- Ignore and don't include in family life
- Provide support
 - Check in with parent, be patient and understanding, express empathy, help with practical things (e.g., meds/appts), be considerate about possible triggers, help ground vet



Based on these findings...

An opportunity for reflection...



In working with military parents living with PTSD, how often do I explore:

- What are their strengths as parents?
- If and how do they talk with their children about PTSD?
- How might PTSD make parenting difficult?
- How often do I examine possible role reversal?
- How might these PTSD symptoms affect their children?
 - Angry outbursts? [Potential “walking on eggshells” by children]
 - Avoidance

Resources

- For Youth
- For Military Parents and Partners/Spouses





Resources for Youth Dealing with Parental PTSD

Daddy's Home. Carolina Nadel (picture book to read to small children)

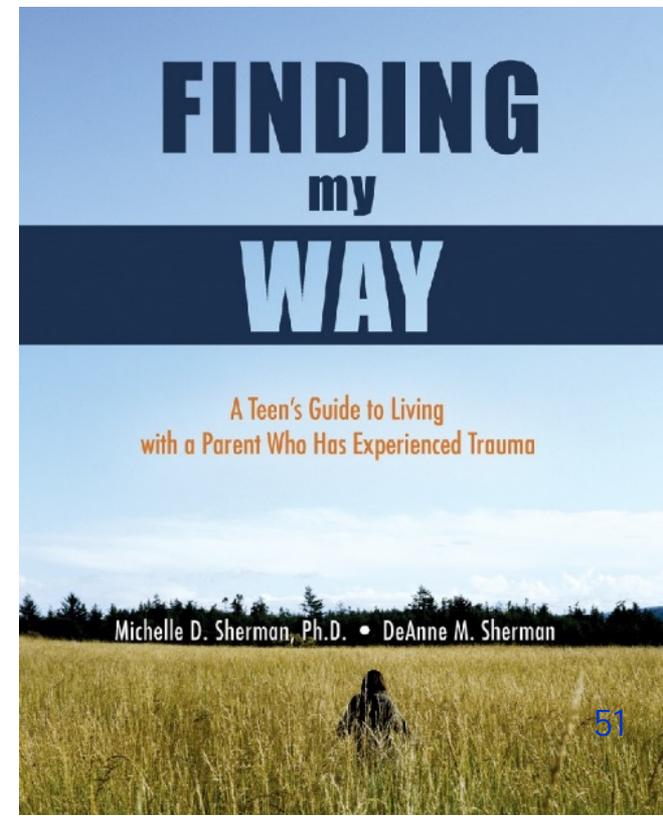
Sparrow. Dorinda Silver Williams. (board book for young children)

Why Are You So Scared? A Child's Book about Parents with PTSD. Beth Andrews (ages 6-10)

***Finding My Way:
A Teen's Guide to Living with a Parent who
has Experienced Trauma***

Michelle D. Sherman, Ph.D. and DeAnne M.
Sherman [for youth ages 12-18]

www.SeedsofHopeBooks.com





Finding My Way Provides:

- Comfort in knowing that they are not alone
- Facts presented in clear, concise language
- Opportunities for reflection and journaling
- Tips on healthy coping skills
- Help in identifying supportive people and in dealing with friends
- Encouragement to take good care of themselves



A Veteran's Guide to Talking to Kids about PTSD

Free, interactive booklet
available for download
on website:

<http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn16/clinicalEducationProducts.asp>



Booklet Sections

- What Do You Enjoy About Parenting?
- How Can PTSD Affect Families?
- Should I Tell My Kids About PTSD?
- How Might I Prepare?
- What Should I Tell My Kids?
- What Should I Do If I Get Upset?
- What Should I Do If My Child Becomes Upset?
- How Do I Deal With Questions My Child Asks?
- How Can I Be an Effective Parent?



Other Parenting Resources

- Two other **general** parenting resources for military families
- These are NOT specific to PTSD but may be useful in your work with military families

Parenting for Service Members and Veterans



- Free, online 6-module parenting course
 - Back into the family
 - Promoting positive parent-child communication
 - Helping your child with difficult emotions and behaviors
 - Positive approaches to discipline
 - Managing stress and emotions as a parent
 - Parenting with emotional and physical challenges
- Developed by partnership between the DoD and VA: <http://militaryparenting.dcoe.mil>

Veteran Parenting Toolkits

(Sherman et al., 2010)



- 5 age-based toolkits for OIF/OEF/OND veterans & family members
- Focused on dealing with reconnecting with children after deployment
- Funded by the South Central MIRECC
- Free download: www.ouhsc.edu/VetParenting

Key Take-Aways

- Parenting with PTSD can be challenging, with ripple effects on the parent, child, parent-child relationship, and broader family unit
- Many parents WANT to talk with their kids about PTSD, but often
 - Don't know how
 - Experience many fears and barriers to doing so
- Opportunity: We can help families have these important discussions
- Resources are available to help these families!

Extended Chat Time....

In the chat pod on the left

*Please share your thoughts,
questions, or insights.*

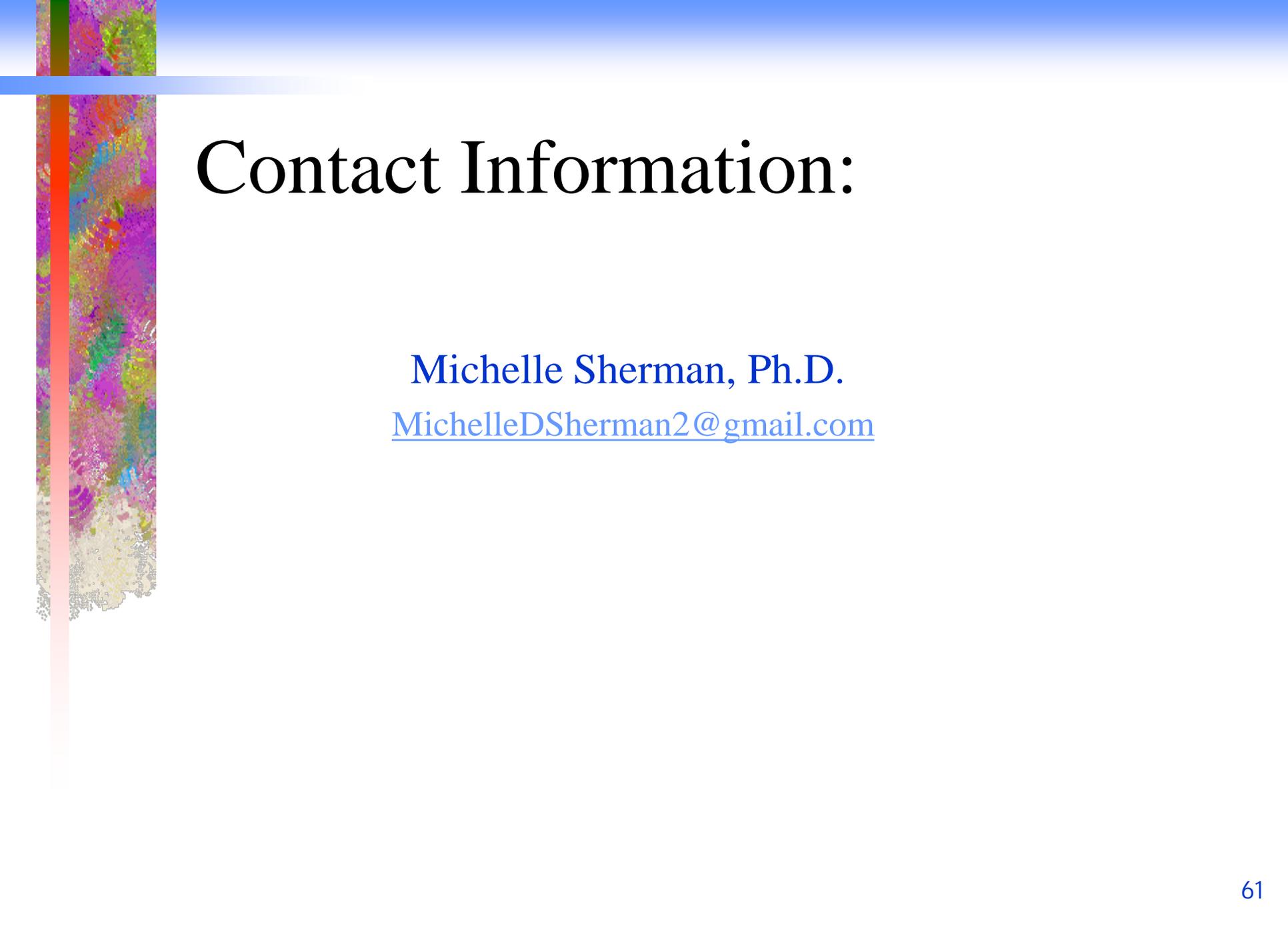
*What other strategies are you
aware of?*

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Contact Information:

Michelle Sherman, Ph.D.

MichelleDSherman2@gmail.com

Evaluation and Certificate of Completion

MFLN Family Transitions is offering a certificate of completion for today's webinar.

To receive the certificate of completion, please complete the evaluation at:

https://vte.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_2bP7NQ8KOSq41Sd

MFLN Family Transitions

Upcoming Events

Parenting In Times of Transition Part 2 – Promoting Effective Parenting During Deployment and Reintegration

- Wednesday, February 24, 2016
- Time: 11AM Eastern
- Location: <https://learn.extension.org/events/2400>

Building Community Partnerships to Meet Transitioning Service Members & Family Needs

- Thursday, March 31, 2016
- Time: 11AM Eastern
- Location: <https://learn.extension.org/events/2410>

For more information on MFLN- Family Transitions go to:

<http://blog.extension.org/militaryfamilies/life-cycle-transition-support/>



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