Operation Injured Soldiers Webinar
Families in the Fight: Raising Kids and Restoring Joy at Home

Purpose

The mission doesn't end when you come home. Many military and first responder families discover that the battles they expected aren't the ones that threaten them most. The greatest challenges often happen around dinner tables, during bedtime routines, in marriages strained by exhaustion, and in children trying to understand parents who have changed. Children don't need perfect parents. They need emotionally safe parents who know how to repair, reconnect, and restore joy.

What Kids Remember

- **"When your kids remember growing up, what do you hope they remember about being in your home?"**
- **"What do you fear they'll remember?"**
- Most parents don't fear not providing enough.
- They fear:
  - Dad always angry
  - Mom always overwhelmed
  - Walking on eggshells
  - Never knowing what mood someone was in
  - Constant tension
  - Emotional distance
- Children don't remember every conversation.
  - They remember the atmosphere.
  - The emotional climate becomes their normal.
- The Family Emotional Thermostat
  - Children become experts at reading adults.
- Long before they understand PTSD...
  - They understand tension.
- They notice:
  - facial expressions
  - voice changes
  - closed doors
  - silence
  - short tempers
  - withdrawn parents
- Kids ask one question continually:
  - "Am I safe?"
  - Not merely physically.
  - Emotionally.

How Trauma Comes Home

- Military training teaches:
  - vigilance
  - control
  - scanning for danger
  - rapid response
  - emotional compartmentalization
- Those skills save lives.
- But they don't always help families.
- Home requires:
  - flexibility
  - emotional presence
  - curiosity
  - patience
  - gentleness
- The nervous system often struggles to switch gears.
- Parents may become:
  - overly controlling
  - emotionally unavailable
  - hyper-reactive
  - numb
  - constantly exhausted
- Children personalize this.
  - Instead of saying:
  - "Dad has PTSD."
  - Children think:
  - "Dad is mad at me."
  - Instead of:
  - "Mom is overwhelmed."
  - They think:
  - "I must have done something wrong."
- **Key Teaching**
- Children explain adult behavior by making themselves the cause.
- That is why healthy communication matters so much.

What Kids Need

- **1. Predictability**
- Kids thrive when life feels consistent. Simple routines matter.
  - Dinner. Bedtime. Family traditions.
- Consistency communicates:
  - "I'll be here."
- **2. Emotional Availability**
- Presence matters more than perfection. Five minutes of full attention often outweighs thirty distracted minutes.
- Practice:
  - Phones down. Eye contact. Listening.
- **3. Repair**
  - Every parent loses patience. Healthy families don't avoid conflict. Healthy families repair conflict.
  - Parents saying: "I'm sorry." "I shouldn't have yelled." "Can we start over?"
- This teaches children:
  - Mistakes aren't the end of relationships.
- **4. Joy**
- Joy isn't entertainment. Joy is shared delight.
  - Laughing. Playing. Cooking. Fishing. Board games. Bike rides. Reading together.
- The brain heals through safe connection.
- **Joy builds resilience.**

Parenting After Pain

- **Children often inherit what parents never intended to give them.**
  - Not genetics.
  - Patterns.
- Examples:
  - "If something goes wrong...
  - ...raise your voice."
  - "If emotions happen...
  - ...shut them down."
  - "If conflict happens...
  - ...leave."
- Children learn more from observation than instruction.
- The good news:
  - Patterns can change.
  - Healing parents raise healing children.
- Practical Skill
- Before correcting behavior ask:
- "What does my child need right now?"
- Sometimes:
  - Discipline.
- Sometimes:
  - Connection.
- Often:
  - Both.

Restoring Joy

- **Joy doesn't accidentally happen.**
- It is intentionally cultivated.
- Introduce the
- Daily 10-10-10 Rhythm
- 10 Minutes
  - One-on-one with each child.
  - No agenda.
  - Just connection.
- 10 Words
  - Every day intentionally speak life.
- Examples:
  - "I'm proud of you."
  - "I love spending time with you."
  - "I'm glad you're my son."
  - "I'm thankful you're my daughter."
  - "You matter."
- 10 Seconds
  - Before bed.
  - Hand on shoulder.
  - Prayer.
  - Blessing.
  - Affection.
- **Small moments shape lifelong memories.**

Last Things

- **Reflection Questions**
- What atmosphere describes my home today?
- What is one stress pattern my children may be experiencing?
- When was the last time I apologized to my child?
- What brings genuine joy into our family?
- What one change will I begin this week?

- **Recommended Resources**
- **Books**
  - The Whole-Brain Child
  - No-Drama Discipline
  - Raising Emotionally Strong Boys
  - Raising Worry-Free Girls
  - The Anxious Generation
- **Family Practices**
  - Family gratitude at dinner
  - Weekly family meeting
  - Technology-free evening each week
  - Parent-child one-on-one time
  - Shared prayer before bed
  - Monthly family adventure
- **Take-Home Challenge**
  - This week, ask each of your children one simple question:
  - "What helps you feel most loved by me?"
  - Then don't defend yourself.
  - Don't explain.
  - Just listen.
  - Because restoring joy doesn't begin with doing more.
  - It begins with knowing your children well.