



AMERICA'S HEROES AT WORK

SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS OF
RETURNING SERVICE MEMBERS WITH TBI & PTSD

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Training, Supervision & Other Natural Workplace Supports

Promising Practices for Supporting Employees with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and/or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

When it comes to employment, several promising practices exist to help transitioning service members with TBI, PTSD and many other disabilities and/or serious combat-related injuries succeed in the workplace. Providing natural workplace supports is one of these practices.

WHAT IS NATURAL WORKPLACE SUPPORT?

Natural support refers to support from supervisors and co-workers that occurs routinely in the workplace. It is called “natural” because it includes supports already provided by employers for all employees, including:

- Supervision (ongoing feedback on job performance);
- Training (learning a new job skill with a co-worker);
- Opportunities to socialize with co-workers; and
- Mentoring

HOW CAN NATURAL SUPPORTS ASSIST PEOPLE WITH TBI AND/OR PTSD AT WORK?

A natural support person—such as a supervisor or mentor—can offer guidance on appropriate interpersonal skills and work behaviors, assist with one-on-one job training at the worksite, problem-solve as needed, and help acclimate the individual to the work environment. As the employee with a disability develops job skills, the interaction with the natural support person often decreases or “fades,” gradually transitioning the employee as he or she learns to perform the job independently.

WHAT ARE SOME NATURAL SUPPORT STRATEGIES THAT MAY HELP PEOPLE WITH TBI OR PTSD?

- Implementing a flexible and supportive supervision style; positive reinforcement and feedback; and adjustments in level of supervision or structure, such as more frequent meetings to help prioritize tasks.
- Providing additional forms of communication and/or written and visual tools, including communication of assignments and instructions in the employee’s preferred learning style (written, verbal, e-mail, demonstration); creation and implementation of written tools such as daily “to-do” lists, step-by-step checklists, written (in addition to verbal) instructions and typed minutes of meetings.
- Conducting regularly scheduled meetings (weekly or monthly) with employee to discuss workplace issues and productivity, including annual discussions as part of performance appraisals to assess abilities and discuss promotional opportunities.
- Developing strategies to deal with problems before they arise.
- Creating written work agreements that include any agreed upon accommodations, long-term and short-term goals, expectations of responsibilities and consequences of not meeting performance standards.

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- Educating all employees about the rights and needs of people with disabilities.
- Offering relevant training for co-workers and supervisory staff, on TBI and PTSD.

HOW DOES NATURAL SUPPORT DIFFER FROM JOB COACHING?

Most natural support providers are not trained to be professional job coaches. A job coach is typically provided by an outside agency to assist the employee. (See the America's Heroes at Work "Job Coaching" fact sheet at www.americasheroesatwork.gov.)

HOW CAN EMPLOYERS ENHANCE THE NATURAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS IN THEIR WORKPLACE?

To learn more about job accommodations, including natural supports such as mentoring, employers should contact their local state vocational rehabilitation agency by visiting www.jan.wvu.edu/sbses/vocrehab.htm. Other sources include:

- APSE: The Network on Employment - www.apse.org
- The Job Accommodation Network - www.jan.wvu.edu
- American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) Center for Workers with Disabilities - www.nasmd.org/disabilities/
- Independent Living Research Utilization Program - www.bcm.tmc.edu/ilru
- MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership - www.mentoring.org

Information about other promising employer practices—including job coaching and customized employment—can be found on the America's Heroes at Work Web site:

www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov.

This fact sheet was developed in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy, the Job Accommodation Network, the Veterans' Employment and Training Service, the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, and the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center.

