

## MORE ABOUT OPERATION FAMILY CAREGIVER:



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### BACKGROUND

Those who care for injured service members and veterans – whether those injuries are physical or psychological – most likely have not had time to prepare for such a turn of events.

While recently returning service members have no choice but to confront the changes they face, their caregivers often just do what needs to be done, regardless of how it might affect their own health and well-being.

Psychological injuries, in particular, take a toll on caregivers. Research has suggested that family caregivers of people with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress often experience reduced quality of life as they take on this new role. Recent studies have shown that training caregivers and equipping them with better problem-solving skills can reduce depression and health complaints among caregivers while increasing life satisfaction.

### EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF PROBLEM-SOLVING TRAINING

Evidence shows that caregivers who are good at problem-solving are less likely to develop depression, anxiety, and poor health in their first year of caring for a family member. Those who have strong problem-solving skills are better at regulating their emotions, staying positive about their ability to cope with problems as they arise, and are better able to be realistic about what they can and can't do.

A study published in 2008 suggested that training caregivers in problem-solving skills helps them better manage their challenges (Rivera et al). The initial study focused on caregivers of those with TBI, but additional research showed it held true for caregivers of people with spinal cord injuries, stroke, and severe physical disabilities as well. Our veterans and their families deserve to have access to programs that are proven to work.

### INTRODUCING OPERATION FAMILY CAREGIVER

The Rosalynn Carter Institute for caregiving (RCI) has a track record of translating research into practice. In 2011, RCI launched two evidence-based programs: one focused on caregivers of those with Alzheimer's disease and a second focused on caregivers of post 9/11 service members – the beginning of Operation Family Caregiver. In September of 2011, OFC began near Fort Benning, an army post outside of Columbus, GA, which supports more than 120,000 service members, veterans, and families.

The pilot program in Georgia lasted 18 months, and had the same results as the original research study: reduced caregiver depression and burden, increased satisfaction with life, and fewer health complaints. With support from [Johnson & Johnson](#), Operation Family Caregiver now is being offered in [multiple sites across the United States](#). Problem-solving training has consistently proven to be helpful in teaching caregivers how to stop reacting to challenges and begin solving problems more effectively. They also report improved confidence in their ability to manage the day-to-day challenges of caregiving, resulting in enhanced satisfaction with life.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Rivera P, Elliott T, Berry J, Grant J. Problem-solving training for family caregivers of persons with traumatic brain injuries: a randomized controlled trial. Arch Phys Med Rehabil. 2008 May;89(5):931-41. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2518069/>.

Rivera P, Elliott T, Berry J, Oswald K, Grant J. Predictors of caregiver depression among community-residing families living with traumatic brain injury. NeuroRehabilitation 2007;22:3-8. Dreer L, Elliott T, Shewchuk R, Berry J, Rivera P. Family care-givers of persons with spinal cord injury: predicting caregivers at risk for depression. Rehabil Psychol 2007;52:351-7.

Grant J, Weaver M, Elliott T, Bartolucci A, Giger J. Family caregivers of stroke survivors: characteristics of caregivers at-risk for depression. Rehabil Psychol 2004;49:172-9.

Tanielian, Terri, Rajeev Ramchand, Michael P. Fisher, Carra S. Sims, Racine S. Harris and Margaret C. Harrell. Military Caregivers: Cornerstones of Support for Our Nation's Wounded, Ill, and Injured Veterans. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013. [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR244](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR244).

## **ABOUT THE ROSALYNN CARTER INSTITUTE FOR CAREGIVING:**

*Located in Americus, Ga., the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving is a division of Georgia Southwestern State University. RCI was established in 1987 in honor of former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, a GSW alumna who serves as president of the Institute's Board of Advisors. RCI supports caregivers – both family and professional – through advocacy, education, research, and service. It establishes local, state, national, and international partnerships committed to building quality, long-term, home and community-based services.*

*For additional information about the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving or the REACH program, visit [www.rosalynncarter.org](http://www.rosalynncarter.org). For more information about Operation Family Caregiver, visit [www.operationfamilycaregiver.org](http://www.operationfamilycaregiver.org).*



**OPERATION  
FAMILY CAREGIVER**

A program of The Rosalynn Carter  
Institute for Caregiving