



US DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

## BLAST INJURY RESEARCH PROGRAM COORDINATING OFFICE

# Neurocognitive and Psychological Health Treatment Strategies

## Treatment of Social Competence in Military Veterans, Service Members, and Civilians with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Impairments in social competence are among the most prevalent sequelae after TBI. Without successful social skills a person is often isolated, in conflict with others, and denied access to social and vocational opportunities. This project was funded under the Psychological Health/TBI Research Program (PH/TBIRP) managed by the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP) and was performed at Craig Hospital in Englewood, Colorado. The objective of the study was to evaluate Group Interactive Structured Treatment (GIST), a holistic cognitive-behavioral group intervention aimed at improving social competence impairments for individuals with brain injury. This evidence-based, manualized, 13 week intervention addresses the underlying cognitive, communicative, and emotional impairments impeding social competence following TBI through blending a structured curriculum with a group therapy process emphasizing self-awareness, individual goal setting, group interaction and support, family involvement, and real world applications. Specifically, researchers performed a two-armed, multi-center randomized control clinical trial to study the effectiveness of GIST compared to control treatment (which consisted of the content from GIST presented in lecture format) to improve social competence in participants with social skill deficits after TBI. The study was completed in FY16 and concluded that both the GIST intervention and the control intervention were associated with improved social competence and individual goal attainment. The researchers drafted a consumer brochure, “Social Skills after Traumatic Brain Injury”, designed to disseminate their findings to lay persons, and are developing a separate brochure specifically for the military/Veteran population. Additionally, 14 therapists across the country were trained to implement the intervention, expanding the availability of this social competence intervention. A GIST intervention workbook and GIST training is now available from the GIST developers. The findings from this study have a high degree of relevance for returning Service Members and Veterans who have suffered from TBI due to the high prevalence of social reintegration difficulties in this population. The GIST intervention has demonstrated the ability to assist our Service Members and Veterans in returning to full participation in their Families and communities.

