



A BRAVE FACE

TRIGGER & SAFETY SHEET

FOR VETERANS AND SERVICE PERSONNEL

» The Trigger and Safety Sheet pre-warns audience members about show content and themes, helping to minimise potential triggers for those living with Post Traumatic Stress

Also available free from participating theatre box offices/front of house

⚠ WARNING: THIS DOCUMENT CONTAINS SHOW SPOILERS
For the use of Veterans and those living with Post Traumatic Stress to pre-warn of potential triggers during the show



VAMOS THEATRE A BRAVE FACE

Trigger and Safety Sheet: for the most brave and honest.

A Brave Face is a difficult, universal story. It doesn't try to preach or convert, just to give a voice to those who've been robbed of words, who've experienced atrocities that we can't imagine, who've lost their mates in conflict, and sometimes have even lost themselves. Researching *A Brave Face* over the last two years has been painful and uplifting, but worth every second. Military and ex-military have guided us every step of the way; they've been a guiding light and our admiration and respect for them has grown and grown.

The Trigger and Safety Sheet has come out of this guidance and is aimed to support Veterans and families through the performance, so that there are no surprises. It can't pre-warn about every potential trigger; we know that Post Traumatic Stress presents itself in a unique and personal way. The story may also make you recognise and acknowledge that what you are watching, you are also going through, which you may find hard. It is a total plot spoiler; don't read it if you don't want to. The door is always open for you to walk out of for a while and come back in your own time. Thank you for being here.

SCENE 1: Packing up

Ryan leaves home; with the sad ending of mum and sister, Katie, being left behind.

SCENE 2: Camaraderie and training

A 26 week training course condensed into 5 minutes: bayonet training and first aid, and hierarchy of course. Apart from that, we just hope to get the steps right!

SCENE 3: Journey to Helmand

This is a simple movement scene showing the journey to Afghanistan; from bus to plane to Chinook; and the introduction of our little Afghan girl, Khatera.



Sound: contains radio static and electronic beeps

SCENE 4: First war excitement

This is the lads' first contact with the enemy; they all feel the adrenalin rush; his mates feel the thrill, Ryan doesn't. It's the first time he takes a life and it hits him hard, showing the inner moral battle between doing your duty and your own personal beliefs.



Sound: contains sudden instrumental rhythms to represent gunfire



Projection: contains flickering lights from rear projection

SCENE 5: Playful Khatera

In this scene, Ryan and Khatera make friends (whilst she also tries to flog him stuff). She's a lovely kid and reminds Ryan of his little sister. She has a doll which she isn't willing to sell.

SCENE 6: Letters home

Ryan writes home, mum sends a parcel back. We meet Khatera again, but now she is anxious that she shouldn't be caught hanging out with Ryan. The end of this scene is hard; Khatera has been beaten up by the Taliban for 'collaborating'. She reveals her mask, which is bruised and beaten.

SCENE 7: Daft song

This has been taken directly from those military dance films on You Tube. Whilst fun and silly, they also speak on an emotional level, as often they were made before a difficult mission and sent home to stop families worrying; is that ever possible?

» From here, the story gets harder...

SCENE 8: The worst day

In this scene, Ryan experiences two major traumas (PTS often comes from multiple traumatic episodes). First, he finds the decapitated doll belonging to Khatera, inferring that she has died, and he loses control for a minute and has to ask his best mate to take point. Ravi takes the lead and stands on an IED. When Ryan realises what's happened he flips, trying to take his helmet and armour off, signifying he's had enough. His other mate, Jimmy, tries to get him away safely. Ryan injures his trigger finger badly.

 **Sound:** contains sudden instrumental rhythms to represent gunfire; low frequency booms; radio static; electronic beeps

 **Lighting:** contains high contrast and fast changes of light, and high frequency LED lighting

 **Projection:** contains repeated builds and slow fades of bright light, sudden thin slithers of shimmering light across the stage to represent gunfire.

SCENE 9: Middlesborough nightclub

Back home, Ryan and Jimmy are now flush with cash and are out on the town, drunk. Ryan acts in the way he's been trained to do; in confrontation, he fights. He ends up throwing up in the toilets and when alone he experiences fear.

 **Lighting:** contains flashing colour effects, and high frequency LED lighting

 **Projection:** contains rhythmic pulsing coloured projection

SCENE 10: The lads say goodbye

This scene shows that horrendous moment when Ryan is medically discharged from the army and his mate and colleague goes back to work. His trigger finger doesn't work, he is no longer of use as he can't do his job, and he is left behind feeling worthless and abandoned. His dead mate, Ravi, sits beside him, a constant reminder of his guilt and grief. Unable to understand how he's feeling, his mum is cross and frustrated at his apathy.

SCENE 11: Supermarket

Ryan has a job in ASDA. It's demeaning and not where he wants to be. This scene is taken directly from research of an ex-soldier living with PTS working in a supermarket. Whilst Ryan is working, there is a loud bang when a shopper drops her basket - it makes everyone jump and Ryan drops to the ground, terrified. The civvies stand and stare. He loses his job and his mum takes him home.

 **Sound:** contains a loud crash as a basket is dropped

 **Lighting:** contains high frequency LED lighting

SCENE 12: Pillar to post

This scene moves from Job Centre to GP administration to seeing the doctor and getting prescribed anti-depressants. Nobody understands what his Veterans Certificate is. It shows how hard it is for ex-military to cope with all the systems in Civvy Street, with its one size fits all approach. His mum is there (whilst holding down a job and looking after Katie) and has her own anxieties about Ryan, trying to help him at each step of the way. Who's there to support her?

 **Lighting:** contains high frequency LED lighting

SCENE 13: Living back home - the numb bubble

This scene is taken from research into the 'numb bubble' feeling. Ryan is back at home with Katie and mum, but he's no longer interacting with them. He's not taking his pills because of how they make him feel, but instead self-medicates with alcohol. The scene shows the contagious effect the decline in Ryan's mental health is having on his family. It could be hard to watch if moments are recognisable. Ryan goes to sleep on the sofa; mum knows better than to move him.

SCENE 14: Home under siege

This scene is taken directly from an account of an ex-soldier from Liverpool waking up in a night terror and trying to protect his family, believing his house is under attack. Like in Scene 8, *The Worst Day*, it begins with his trauma of realising Khatera's horrendous fate, and ends in re-living Ravi's death. The pain in this scene is also seeing how his night terrors affect his family.

 **Sound:** contains loud and sudden instrumental rhythms; low frequency booms; radio static; electronic beeps; breathing: there is a sudden, loud crash as Ryan kicks a metal door.

 **Projection:** contains repeated builds and slow fades of bright light

SCENE 15: Binned

The very first article that inspired *A Brave Face* was of parents finding their son, who lived with PTSD, in a wheelie bin. The image and horror has stayed with us throughout the research. The scene is also a metaphor for Ryan's feeling that he has been 'binned' by the army, and is at rock bottom. Obviously this is an impossible experience for a mother, especially when he refuses to accept her help.

SCENE 16: The attempt

Ryan attempts to take an overdose. There's no easy way to say this. He doesn't succeed in his attempt, but his cry for help is met by his little sister waking up. Katie doesn't spot the pills and is oblivious to what Ryan's going through. She's absolutely in the moment and is furious and upset with him because she's wet the bed and is blaming this on Ryan.

SCENE 17: The hope

Ryan cries for the first time. Like so many suicide attempts or thoughts, it's the family, often children that prevent it happening. Katie connects with him on an equal level, she is non-judgemental and adoring of her big brother. Her communication is genuine and truthful. Ryan reconnects with this. We hope that Ryan finds enough reason and meaning in his life. We are not ending on a happy Hollywood note - this wouldn't reflect the years of learning to live with Post Traumatic Stress. We are more than aware that ending our story here is hard, but we want civvies (and everyone) to understand the reality, and the seriousness of this condition. That's why we will take our masks off and speak at the end, to connect with our audience 'unmasked'.

A word from the cast

After the show, the cast will talk briefly about the partnership between Vamos Theatre and NHS Veterans' Mental Health Transition, Intervention and Liaison (TIL) and invite you to give your feedback in the foyer.

If you have been affected by *A Brave Face*, or want advice, information or support, NHS England is working hard to be in the foyer after every show. Alternatively you can call NHS TILS directly; the numbers for each region of the country are:

NORTH: 0191 441 5974

MIDLANDS & EAST: 0300 323 0137

LONDON & SOUTH EAST: 0203 317 6818

SOUTH CENTRAL & SOUTH WEST: 0300 365 0300