

## VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION

What are the signs that someone may be considering suicide?

Many Veterans don't show any signs of an urge to harm themselves before doing so. But some may show signs of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, or hopelessness, like:

- Seeming sad, depressed, anxious, or agitated most of the time
- Sleeping either all the time or not much at all
- Not caring about what they look like or what happens to them
- Pulling away from friends, family, and society
- Losing interest in hobbies, work, school, or other things they used to care about
- Expressing feelings of excessive guilt or shame, failure, lack of purpose in life, or being trapped

They may also change the way they act, and start to:

- Perform poorly at work or school
- Act violently or take risks (like driving fast or running red lights)
- Do things to prepare for a suicide (like giving away special personal items, making a will, or seeking access to guns or pills)

I want to help a Veteran adjust to life at home, but I don't know how. Can I get support?

Yes. If you're a family member or friend of a Veteran who's having trouble adjusting to life at home, we can help. Through our national Coaching Into Care program, our licensed psychologists and social workers will talk with you by phone, free of charge, to help you find your way around the VA system and figure out the best way to help the Veteran you care about. All calls are confidential (private).

To speak with a VA coach, call 888-823-7458, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET, for assistance.

If you feel unbearable stress or feel like you want to commit suicide call the Veteran Crisis Line: Dial 988 then press 1 or text 838255



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## Holidays and Veterans

Hello again. I hope all is well and that the holidays are finding you and your family good cheer and spirit this season. During this time of year, it is always a wonderful time of the year for most people, but many see it as a stressful and conflicting time due to past events in their lives. Many veterans have deployed many times during the holidays, and currently, many soldiers are deployed during this holiday season.

I personally experience an array of emotions during this time of year as I was injured in combat during the holiday period. So, I try to think of the holidays in whimsical feelings of warmth, comfort, and good cheer to help compensate for the negative experiences I have had in the past. How do I do this, you ask? It is not easy, but there are many ways in doing so. Being with family is a great way to help distract these negative feelings. The holidays offer a unique opportunity for families to connect and spend quality time together having fun, both locally and away from home.

Another way is to decorate the house for Christmas both inside and outside to spread the good cheer to other neighbors. This can become infectious in the neighborhood and fun for everyone if you do it in a creative and constructive manner. Another great way is to volunteer or donate to a veteran's organizations. During this time of year, they have Christmas Tree Wish Lists, Christmas Dinners, Shelters, and other events that need help to provide for veterans and their families which are having either tough times or may be experiencing stress from deployments overseas.

That brings up another subject of the Soldiers who are currently deployed. Do not forget about them. We were those guys too at one time in the past. We know how it feels to be deployed during the holidays. They need words of encouragement from people who have been there and can relate with what they are going through. Here are some helpful tips in letter writing to deployed service members. This is both therapeutic for them and well as it is for you.

### Tips on writing letters to deployed military personnel...

- **Send a letter soon...and keep writing!** If they are deploying, get a letter out as SOON as you can when you do get the address. I would say just keep writing, even if it is only one time a week.
- **Ask how they can encourage their spouse and children** - I am strongly encouraged when I see my wife encouraged, more so than when someone speaks to me directly.
- **Words of encouragement and words of appreciation** - Tell them we appreciate YOU! Your service, support, and sacrifice. Thank them.

- **Talk about positive things** - Don't write about any drama at home.
- **Bible verses and inspirational quotes** - Include uplifting, motivating quotes and Bible passages. See below for some suggestions.
- **Sports** - Write about sports or anything to make them feel connected to home and get their mind off where they are at.
- **Always include accomplishments**, no matter how small.
- **Talk about you** - Write about your day, the weather, your job, your family.
- **Ask about plans after deployment** would be encouraging to me, I think. I know thinking about plans after multiple month TDYs\* is encouraging.
- **Kids** - Artwork and cards are always appreciated! For the younger ones, feel free to utilize these free coloring pages.
- **Personal contact information** - If you would like to provide an opportunity for your Soldier to respond, feel free to include your return address and/or e-mail address. However, do not expect that you will get a response. Remember, they are serving in a combat zone.
- **Photos** - Yes, include photos! And did you know you can send a photo postcard right from your iPhone, Android or computer? Check out the convenient [Postagram!](#) Here's a special offer to send five free.
- A listing of organizations that receive cards and letters to distribute to the military community (deployed military personnel, wounded warriors, home front families, veterans) - Also be sure to check with your church, classroom, and other local organizations. While the above tips are guidelines, DO check to see what specific requirements are required by the organization that you will be sending your cards and letters to.
- **If you do not know who will be receiving your letter, you may begin your letter** by writing "Dear Service Member" to be inclusive of all branches of service and both male and female service members.
- **Free mail program for the U.S. Armed Forces** - If you choose to enclose a self-addressed envelope for the recipient to respond, don't bother to include stamps if they are serving in the countries listed on this USPS article (effective Feb. 10, 2011).

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS!**

## BIGGEST PROBLEMS FACING VETERANS RETURNING HOME

Some of the most significant problems are health-related. A considerable number of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have suffered traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), with about one in five experiencing a mild form of TBI commonly known as a concussion. Other common problems include posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, problematic alcohol use, and thoughts of suicide. Many veterans suffer from more than one health condition. In addition, many women and men experienced sexual trauma, including harassment and assaults, while in the military. That can have both mental and physical effects.

### Are Veterans Getting the Help They Need?

In many ways, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), which provides health care to many veterans, offers care that is as good as or better than that provided by private or non-VHA public practices. But the accessibility and quality of services vary across the system. Several studies have shown, for example, that a large number of veterans don't receive any treatment following diagnoses of posttraumatic stress disorder, substance use disorder, or depression. Many veterans don't know how to apply for veterans' mental health care benefits, are unsure if they are eligible, or are unaware that mental health care benefits are available.

### Are There Other Barriers to Getting Good Care?

Yes. Veterans have reported other barriers to seek VHA health care services, including:

- difficulty getting to medical facilities because of their inconvenient location or a lack of transportation;
- concerns about taking time off work and potentially harming their careers; and fear that discrimination (due to the stigma around mental health issues) could lead to a loss of contact with or custody of their children or to a loss of medical or disability benefits.

### Specifically, What Services Do Veterans Need?

They need a full spectrum of health care services—including prevention, diagnostics, treatment, rehabilitation, education, counseling, and community support—to deal with a wide-ranging set of physical and medical issues.

These services need to be focused on the problems specific to veterans. In some cases, that means increasing the number of health care providers offering a particular service. For example, many veterans don't have access to mental health care professionals, so increasing the number of clinicians with expertise in this area could be helpful. In other cases, focusing specifically on veterans' needs means providing more effective treatments, which may require new research to accomplish. For instance, improved treatments for posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and substance use disorders need to be developed.



### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a debilitating anxiety disorder that occurs after experiencing a traumatic event involving a real threat of injury or death. This can include combat, a natural disaster, an assault, physical or sexual abuse, or other traumas.

People with PTSD have an amplified sense of danger and impending doom. Their ordinary "fight or flight response" is damaged, causing them to feel stressed in safe conditions. PTSD occurs due to chemical changes in the brain, not due to character flaws or weakness. *Symptoms of PTSD*

The most common symptoms of PTSD:

- Re-experiencing the trauma through nightmares and flashbacks
- Insomnia because of nightmares
- Intrusive thoughts – unwanted, uncontrollable thoughts that often pertain to disturbing themes
- Concentration problems
- Numbness usually results in depression
- Feelings of distancing from others; wanting to be alone
- Hypervigilance – always being on alert; ready to fight
- Sudden startling
- Irritability; angry; panic
- Feel anger; shame; guilt (to include survivors' guilt)
- Avoids situations
- Increased anxiety in general

One of the primary reasons people do not report these symptoms is that these can be easily mistaken for signs of mental illness. Many people fear a PTSD diagnosis, its stigma, and all the consequences involved. Therefore, less than 50% of veterans seek help.

### Secondhand Trauma

People with PTSD are usually not the only ones affected by trauma. Those in helping professions like medical personnel, first responders, therapists, social workers, and reporters can experience the effects of trauma because of an empathic connection. Being responsible for helping others, seeing suffering every day, and being exposed to horrific trauma or inhumane acts can eat at the soul. Hope can be lost, causing "compassion fatigue" to set in, often leading to burnout. The person who is dedicated to assisting others loses hope and can also become depressed him or herself.

### War: A rite of passage

Historically, going to war to protect family or nation was seen as a rite of passage. War today is much more destructive and has lingering effects; physical and emotional lingering effects are bombs, Gunfights, and other forms of attack that can affect soldiers in battle and after returning home. Soldiers often return to a society of denial, like in the Vietnam War. Rituals for healing are non-existent, and vets are often isolated with no sense of community. They do not get to tell their story to aid in recovery. Denial is what occurs. Does this potentially contribute to the development of PTSD?

### Injury to the soul

PTSD can develop after a trauma to the soul. The primal urge to survive controls the human experience. In times of trauma, people will do anything to survive. A person may be robbed or raped, assaulted, or beaten and surrender to stay alive. In times of war, innocent people may be killed, horrific things may be done, or a soldier can survive when others did not. The soul can distinguish between good and evil or right and wrong. The above examples are impossible dilemmas. The same things they used to do to survive may be causing conflict with their core ethical and moral beliefs. A person may have to go against their conscience and find it challenging to believe in their worth and goodness afterward. Shame and guilt may result, which may add to their PTSD as well.

### What is Reiki?

Reiki is a Japanese technique to help reduce stress and promote healing. It is managed by "laying on hands" and is based on the "life force of energy" that runs through us and causes us to be alive. If this energy becomes low, we get sick or feel stress, and if it is high, we achieve happiness and good health. Reiki is a non-invasive, utterly gentle healing technique that is becoming more popular.

### Reiki in Practice

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# Reiki and PTSD

I have been researching alternative therapies to help with mental health. Reiki has been one I have found to have some exciting results and outcomes, especially when dealing with PTSD. However, before we proceed, let me recap some facts on PTSD.

**NOTE:** This article may be directed toward Veterans, but it can be used for everyone who experiences stress, anxiety, trauma, etc.

Reiki benefits the military population and people with PTSD by eliciting a relaxation response. People who have experienced trauma and are anxious have difficulty reaching this healing state independently. The relaxation response is a form of peace that allows the body and mind to reset themselves and heal.

Reiki is growing for consideration by military medicine as a treatment for PTSD. Like so many therapy options, Reiki could be considered a core treatment for PTSD because of its holistic approach to combat symptoms of PTSD.

### How Reiki helps with PTSD

Reiki calms the person's spirit. It promotes relaxation and reminds the body how to feel calm again. Sharing Reiki also reminds the body that physical touch is nurturing and therapeutic. Reiki supports inner peace and calm. When the spiritual self can be calmed, the physical begins healing the body.

Emotions are often buried to assist the person through the traumatic experience. Feelings can get trapped and stored in the body as cellular memory. Those trapped emotions and trauma can be gently released through deep relaxation and calming spirit.

Reiki heals the soul! So, a person's experience or outcome can never be predicted. Trusting and the following energy will always provide direction and address the person's needs at that moment.

### Reiki for Veterans

Many veterans have shared their perspectives on Reiki and how it has affected their lives. Here is what they said:

*"Reiki helps me sleep through the night."*

*"My focus is better, and I look at life more positively."*

*"No panic attacks in four weeks and have not woken from a nightmare."*

*"Reiki has helped me to become more open with my spouse. I am talking more."*

### Summary

PTSD is a complex condition that many people will experience sometime in their life or in the lives of their loved ones. The more knowledge we gain, the more we will understand and can help. As public awareness of PTSD rises, more resources are becoming available. Reiki is an excellent method to calm and nurture the spirit of someone experiencing PTSD.

# Military Spouses Transition & Resources

Many of you may know from the last issue, that I have a book that talks about Veteran Resources and Transition. In this book I for Military Spouses. because Veterans could not do what they do without the support and sacrifice of their families and spouses.

Although not directly mentioned, many portions of this guide are for spouses, like the Military 101 Presentation (Chapter) and the Survivors Benefits (Chapter). Here is one of the articles in the book.

## Tips for the Transitioning Spouses

Your spouse is retiring from the military. Although congratulations are occurring, there are trepidations as you prepare to exit into an uncertain world that you have not been in for twenty-some years. Here is a list of helpful hints for the retiring spouse to help in the next chapter of your journey. Prioritize accordingly as some things are best to do as soon as possible, and others have more lenient on their time frames.

### 1. Tricare

From a spouse's perspective, retirement and Tricare must be continued by enrolling yourself and your family in Tricare Prime and paying the corresponding rates. If available, you will be assigned and seen at a military treatment facility, or a civilian physician will be provided

within your network. If your new job offers medical benefits after retirement, this health insurance becomes your primary insurance, and Tricare is the secondary. The most significant advantage of Tricare Prime is its portability, which means you can move around without having to worry about your insurance catching up.

### 2. Other Benefits

As far as Dental coverage, for a fee, there is Tricare Retiree Dental Program. This program is voluntary, and you must register within 120 days of retirement. A benefit to this program is that the traditional 12 month waiting period before receiving any major dental work does not exist.

### 3. Where to Live?

Decisions of a "forever house" on your final move are always tricky. Maybe you have dreams of moving back to your "hometown." Although, the thought of picking one place to live for the rest of your life may be scary to think about. The best advice for choosing a new place to live is to figure out what you want from that place. Consider the job market, weather, cost of living, potential commute times, etc. Then find a place that fits the majority of those wants.

### 4. Transition to "Home."

A word of caution on moving "home." As we grow in our lives as military spouses, we quickly realize that home is not what we

what we thought it was. When going home during deployments, you will know it is not the same. Although, going home to the family can help you transition out of the military due to their ability to understand, comfort, and help with the moving process. But things are not the same, and you will have to prepare your spouse for this transition. Emotions will be high, expectations will fall short, and family will need support during these stressful and exciting times.

### 5. Find a way to be involved

One of the most challenging things for veterans, and spouses, is the feeling of not belonging anywhere after retirement. They are no longer on Active Duty, but they are not exactly a civilian. There are many organizations for retired service members, like the American Military Retirees Association. But what about spouses? Some installations have Retired Spouses Clubs, and most installations have Community Spouses Clubs. But if you are not close to an installation, you need to look for community organizations to volunteer or join, like local book clubs, bowling groups, or other social groups. Get out there and make new friends.

### 6. Volunteer Opportunities

Your spouse is going to struggle in many areas. They will want to serve their community in some capacity. **Complete article is in the book. Please go to [www.theveteransdoctor.com](http://www.theveteransdoctor.com) for information on how to order.**

## EYE ON IT

### Veterans And Dogs

Many brave soldiers return home with visible and invisible scars that make it challenging to transition back into civilian life. Simultaneously, millions of wonderful companion animals wait in shelters for a forever home.

When a Veteran is appropriately matched with the right dog, both of their lives change for the better. The Veteran saves the animal from their demise and welcomes them into a loving home. The pet provides the Veteran with support, and unconditional love, relieving stress, depression, loneliness, and anxiety.

While there are multiple options one could choose for treatment, nonprofit organizations like K9s for Warriors and Southeastern Guide Dogs have championed a treatment method that veterans can't receive directly from the VA: **Service Dogs**.

These trained animals can perform a range of tasks such as tactile stimulation to help the veteran cope with anxiety or panic attacks or standing directly in front of their handler in a crowd to give the veteran space from other people. The goal is to empower veterans who are living with PTSD.

"The dogs are never going to be a cure for it; they are simply going to be a tool to help them in their recovery with it."



## Resource Monthly Picks

[VetsandPlayers.org](http://VetsandPlayers.org)

**Mission:** Our nation's warriors - from every field of battle - possess a sense of strength, of excellence, and of commitment that we seldom see here at home. However, far too many of them are struggling to transition their abilities towards a new mission - leading themselves, their families, and their communities off the field. MVP was designed to address this challenge and ensure that all of our nation's warriors can be as productive off the field as they were on it.

By merging vets and players, we create an environment where these warriors can share each other's strength and experience and can support each other in building fulfilling lives of service and strength. Your support will enable us to continue building our program and unlocking the potential of these great individuals.

MVP empowers combat veterans and former professional athletes by connecting them after the uniform comes off; providing them with a new team to assist with transition, promote personal development, and show them they are never alone.

MVP is built on our team's years of experience coaching, mentoring, and leading men and women to their highest level of performance - in every sphere of life. If you are a combat veteran, including veterans who served in combat zones, or a former player, sign up to take part in this effort. Available in 7 cities and in a virtual online format. Please visit website for more information.

## This Month's Q&A Veteran Tips

**Q: MYTH: All Veterans have PTSD.**

**A: FACT:** Approximately 30% of Vietnam War Veterans experience PTSD over the course of their lifetimes, and approximately one in five Service Members who return from deployment operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have symptoms of PTSD.

**Q: MYTH: Veterans are prone to violence.**

**A: FACT:** While some factors related to military experience (combat exposure, certain symptoms of PTSD) put some Veterans at greater risk for violence, the majority of Veterans are not at greater risk of violence than the general population. Veteran status alone does not predispose an individual to violence.

**Q: MYTH: Veterans are invincible.**

**A: FACT:** It is true that Veterans are trained to endure

many hardships and to be resilient; however, like all of us, they are affected by their experiences and appreciate compassion and understanding from others.

**Q: MYTH: Veterans get TBI in combat and are permanently damaged.**

**A: FACT:** More than 1.7 million mild TBIs occur in the civilian community; most patients with mild TBI experience no long-term effects.

**Q: MYTH: Most Veterans are not well educated or skilled.**

**A: FACT:** The current generation of veterans exceeds, on average, national norms in education and intelligence; more veterans seek some post-secondary education than do their non-veteran peers. Military experience imparts key vocational tasks, skills and characteristics that are highly valued for success in business and industry.



### Positive Thinking Brings Positive Outcomes.

“The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.” G.K. Chesterton

“There is nothing nobler than risking your life for your country.” Nick Lampson

“I have long believed that sacrifice is the pinnacle of patriotism.” Bob Riley

“This nation will remain the land of the free only so long as it is the home of the brave.” Elmer Davis

## Upcoming Local Events

- Findlay VW First Friday Toy Drive - A VVHF Takeover – Findley Volkswagen Henderson – Friday, December 2, 2022 @ 6-8pm
- SNVCC Veterans Coffee Connections – Mothership Coffee / Green Valley – Tuesday, December 6, 2022 @ 9am
- Wreaths Across America – Southern Nevada Veterans Cemetery – Saturday, December 17, 2022 @ 9am
- Glittering Lights at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway - Las Vegas Motor Speedway - November 10, 2022 through January 8, 2023 from 4:45-9pm (Monday through Thursday) and 4:45-10pm on weekends.
- Ethel M Chocolate Factory Holiday Cactus Garden - November 4, 2022 through January 1, 2023
- Santa’s Wonderland at Bass Pro Shops - November 5 - December 24, 2022.
- Magical Forest at Opportunity Village - November 25 - December 31, 2022.
- Summerlin’s Holiday Parade - Fridays and Saturdays at 5:30pm from November 18 - December 17, 2022.
- The Ice Rink at The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas - November 15, 2022 - January 2, 2023. Hours vary. All-day skating access (including skate rentals) is \$20 for locals, military, and first responders (Monday through Thursday).
- Bellagio Conservatory and Fountains Holiday Displays - November 19, 2022 - January 1, 2023. The Conservatory is open 24 hours a day.

The Veteran Doctor - Issue 02 December 2022



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