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Caring for Yourself While Helping Support Your Service Member



The Real Warriors Campaign promotes a culture of support for psychological health by encouraging the military community to reach out for help whether coping with the daily stresses of military life, or concerns like depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder. Founded in 2009, the campaign supports the Defense Department's Psychological Health Center of Excellence in its mission to break the stigma associated with psychological health concerns and encourage those who are coping with a psychological health concern to seek help. The campaign links service members, veterans and their families with care and provides free, confidential resources including online articles, print materials, videos and podcasts. If you or someone you know is coping with any concerns, know that reaching out is a sign of strength.

For More Information

 **Psychological Health Resource Center (PHRC) Live Chat** - Visit the 24/7 PHRC Live Chat to speak directly with a trained psychological health resource consultant. Conversations are free and confidential.

►► For resources, articles and videos go to the Real Warriors Campaign web page at www.health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Centers-of-Excellence/Psychological-Health-Center-of-Excellence/Real-Warriors-Campaign

Military Deployments and Reintegration

Military deployments are emotionally and physically demanding. The experiences of living in high-stress combat environments can continue to affect service members as they return home. They may have trouble adjusting to living in a comfortable, relaxed and loving environment. Additionally, you may notice your service member feeling and acting differently than they did before they left. These feelings may not be temporary and might not disappear the moment they return home. Your service member may need your support to help him or her adjust to living and feeling at home again.

Families and friends of returning service members provide the majority of support for both physical and emotional wounds. The level of support provided differs depending on the severity and the physical location of the person. Live-in family members such as spouses, parents or children may take on more responsibility simply because they are more available and accessible to offer help. Whatever your role may be, it is important to remember your own psychological and physical wellness.

Use the following information to help make your reintegration experience as healthy and rewarding as possible.

Take Time for Yourself

Focusing all of your attention on your service member is not beneficial. Creating a balance in the home is an important step for moving forward. Allowing yourself this time will recharge your batteries as a strong support system. If you are unsure how to take time for yourself, try:

- Spending time with family and friends outside the home
- Scheduling time to relax with a book, gardening or through yoga
- Volunteering at your favorite local charity or community organization

Communicate Openly

Healthy communication involves processing feelings, sharing new information and relieving stress.^[1] Your service member might be resistant, desire isolation and wish to avoid talking about feelings. Creating an open line of communication will help

develop a trusting environment for expressing feelings and frustrations. Use these general guidelines when communicating with your service member^[2]:

- Use "I" phrases. "You" phrases can appear to be blame and negative.
- Try not to interrupt or get defensive.
- Be specific in your examples.
- Remain calm and patient.

Stay Healthy

It's easy to forget your own health when offering support to a loved one. However, your body needs support and care as well. Health care professionals encourage maintaining a fit, nourished and healthy body for our minds and bodies to function better. Allowing yourself to become unwell will decrease the amount of support you will be able to provide. The following are some tips for remaining healthy during this transition:

- **Try not to cancel your own medical appointments.** It is ok to ask for someone to fill in for you. This will allow others to show their support for your loved one as well as help you continue to care for yourself.
- **Eat healthy, well-balanced meals.** Choose food mindfully and consciously. Mindless eating and snacking gives empty calories without any nutritious benefit to provide you energy and nourishment. Proteins, healthy fats and complex carbohydrates throughout the day will increase your energy and concentration. Eat breakfast, drink plenty of water and try to avoid simple sugars.
- **Develop a routine sleeping schedule.** During sleep, the body restores tissue, builds bone and muscle, and strengthens the immune system. A lack of sleep can cause memory and concentration issues as well as physical side effects. Your body needs this time to help your brain function at its peak.
- **Keep active.** Finding time to exercise for extended periods of time can be challenging. Fortunately, it only takes a little bit of activity to make a big difference. Staying active can help reduce the risk of chronic diseases with just 30 minutes of physical activity a few days a week. If 30 minutes at one time is too long, try breaking your time into two 15- or 30-minute sessions in the morning and the evening. Sports teams and group fitness classes are great ways to expand your support network and maintain physical fitness.

Remain Positive and Patient

It's common to want our loved ones to feel better as soon as possible. Remind yourself to be patient and positive; successful transitions require time and negotiations. Maintaining a positive outlook will encourage others to remain hopeful and energized as well. Spend time focusing on happy memories shared together through stories, photos and videos. Continuing to plan family activities will encourage participation and positive support from the whole family.

Show Strength, Ask for Help

Recognizing a need and asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Reaching out to your resources will increase the quality of support you can provide to your service member. It is ok to ask for help preparing meals, running errands and other small tasks. Remember, you are not alone in your efforts. Build your own support network with people such as friends, family members, social groups, faith groups and neighbors. Various specialized networks and services are available in each community to support you as well. If you are unsure how to effectively ask for help, remember the following:

Tips on How to Ask

- Resist asking the same person repeatedly.
- Reach out to the appropriate sources, such as asking for help with meals from a friend who enjoys cooking.
- Ask for help during calm and quiet times.
- Prepare for resistance.
- Be strong in your requests.

All military installations and organizations provide specialized information, resources and services - such as outreach call centers - and provide health care professionals to answer questions on discussion boards. Check out the following websites for more information:

Psychological Health Center of Excellence (PHCoE)

PHCoE maximizes opportunities for warriors and families to thrive through collaborative global networks promoting resilience, recovery, and reintegration for

psychological health and traumatic brain injuries. PHCoE provides informational fact sheets, research updates, and highlights events and conferences for more detailed information. Additional services include:

- **Brainwaves Newsletters:** produced by the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center (DVBIC)
- **Psychological Health Resource Center:** 24 hours/7 days a week (24/7): **866-966-1020**
- **[Military OneSource](#)** is a 24/7 resource for military members, spouses and families filled with information, podcasts, webinars, videos, interactive tools, self-check tests, announcements and discussion boards.

Your guidance and support will make a lasting mark on your loved one's road to recovery. If you find yourself struggling with your role as a caregiver, reach out to those around you. The resources available to you can help you achieve success as you help others.

[The National Caregiver Support Line](#) can assist in answering questions about your loved one and providing information on local resources that can help. Call toll-free 855-260-3274 to locate assistance tailored to your unique situation.

Additional Resources

- [Becoming a Couple Again: How to Create a Shared Sense of Purpose after Deployment](#)
 - [Boosting Family Readiness](#)
 - [Maintaining Relationships with Loved Ones During Deployment](#)
 - [National Guard and Reserve Family Readiness Toolkit](#)
 - [Post-Deployment Stress: What Families Should Know, What Families Can Do](#)
 - [Preparing for Deployment](#)
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