

How to Help a Veteran Struggling with Mental Health Issues

In the United States, there are more than 21 million veterans, the majority of who deal with the unfortunate aftermath of their time in the field. The experience of war is devastating, and can leave veterans feeling emotionally unstable, which can develop into mental health issues. Many struggle in returning to civilian life, and their loved ones might feel powerless to help them. While the healing process may take time and effort, there is hope.



Veterans and Mental Health Issues

Before opening a discussion, it is important to understand the nature of mental health issues in the veteran community. As a friend or family member, you may not have experienced combat, but you can educate yourself before reaching out.

It is estimated that 22 veterans commit suicide every day. This staggering figure is caused by a number of complex factors, including:

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Concussion
- Anxiety
- Depression

There are various factors—things experienced in the field— that contribute to these issues, some of which are:

- Detonations
- Death of those around them
- Constant fear
- Sexual assault
- Injuries

The [transition](#) from military to civilian life is an additional stressor, and can be very difficult. The drastic change may leave them feeling isolated and confused, despite loved ones being around.

These factors create the opportunity for mental health issues to consume a veteran's life. These issues may go untreated because of the fear or stigma of seeking help. Fortunately, there are ways to open a line of communication, which can help veterans overcome their emotional struggles.

How to Open a Dialogue

Instead of speaking to friends and family about their experience in war and their current struggles, veterans often resort to [anger](#), violent behavior, [substance abuse](#), and social withdrawal.

These actions may make it difficult to offer help, but you can try the following techniques:

1. Learn about the veteran's experience: Gain insight into their experience. Talking to other veterans may help you understand what your loved one experienced. Once you know the facts, you can find the right words, which may help facilitate a discussion on their current emotional struggles.
2. Observe the veteran: Take the time to observe the veteran in your life and what [triggers](#) might send them into unhealthy behaviors or feelings. Through this technique, you can also learn when they might be most relaxed and open to discussion.
3. Don't be afraid: Fear of a discussion can lead you to over or underreact. If you lash out at the veteran, it may send him or her deeper into a negative emotional state. If you don't say enough, they may not understand that you care. Thus, it is important to listen carefully and then react appropriately with a meaningful response.
4. Create a safe space: During military service, a veteran may have constantly feared for their safety, as well as the safety of their peers. So, while friends and family may want to visit the newly returned veteran, it may not be the best time to have a revolving door of visitors. Instead, create a safe space that a veteran can call his or her own. In this space, the two of you can talk, pray, or simply sit in silence together until the veteran feels comfortable. This space can even be in the office of a mental health professional that can help facilitate conversation.

Overall, it is important to remember that the healing process takes time and effort. While it can be hard dealing with changes in your loved one, it is possible for them to regain the life they once had.

Steve Johnson has always been dedicated to promoting health and wellness in all aspects of life. Studying in the medical field has shown him how important it is for reputable health-related facts, figures, tips, and other guidance to be readily available to the public. He created PublicHealthLibrary.org with a fellow student to act as a resource for people's overall health inquiries and as an accurate and extensive source of health information. When he isn't hard at work in his studies, Steve enjoys playing tennis and listening to his vintage record collection.

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