



# How to Support a Veteran Facing Mental Health Challenges

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Veterans sacrifice so much in service to their country, but many return home facing battles that are not as visible as those fought on the battlefield. Mental health struggles, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety, are common among veterans. If you have a friend or relative who is a veteran dealing with these issues, your support can make a significant difference. There are some practical and compassionate ways to help them through their journey to healing.

Understanding the mental health challenges veterans face is a crucial first step. PTSD, depression, and anxiety can manifest in various ways, including nightmares, flashbacks, withdrawal from social interactions, mood swings, or difficulty maintaining employment. By learning more about these conditions, you can better understand what your loved one is going through and offer more effective support.

There are many resources available online from organizations such as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and the Wounded Warrior Project. These organizations provide valuable information about symptoms, treatments, and coping strategies.

Many veterans struggle with opening up about their emotions, either due to stigma or a sense of duty to remain strong. Let them know you are there to listen without judgment. When they do choose to talk, listen actively—avoid offering immediate solutions or minimizing their feelings. Sometimes, just being present and acknowledging their experiences can be incredibly healing.

You can start a conversation by saying something like, “I’ve noticed you’ve been struggling lately. I just want you to know I’m here for you if you ever want to talk.” Keep the conversation open-ended and allow them to share at their own pace.

While your support is invaluable, professional help is often necessary for long-term healing. Encourage your loved one to seek therapy, counseling, or medical treatment. The VA offers a range of mental health services, and there are numerous veteran-focused organizations that provide free or low-cost care.

Sometimes, taking the first step is the hardest part. Offer to help them find a therapist, accompany them to an

appointment, or assist with navigating VA benefits. If they resist seeking help, gently remind them that professional support does not mean weakness—it means taking control of their well-being.

Healing from mental health issues is not a linear process. There will be good days and bad days. Be patient and understand that your loved one may not always respond to support in the way you expect.



Respect their boundaries. If they need space, give it to them, but also reassure them that you are available when they are ready. Avoid pushing them too hard to open up or participate in activities they are not comfortable with.

Encourage activities that promote mental and physical well-being. Exercise, proper nutrition, and sleep can have a significant impact on mental health. Invite your loved one to join you in physical activities such as hiking, yoga, or even simple walks. Engaging in shared activities can provide a sense of normalcy and comfort.

Additionally, be mindful of their substance use. Many veterans turn to alcohol or drugs as a coping mechanism. If you notice unhealthy behaviors, express your concern with kindness and offer alternatives for managing stress and emotions.

Veteran peer support groups can be incredibly beneficial. Talking with others who have had similar experiences can reduce feelings of isolation and provide valuable coping strategies. Organizations like the VA, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and Team RWB offer support groups, community events, and counseling services specifically for veterans.

Supporting a veteran with mental health challenges is not a one-time effort—it requires ongoing commitment. Continue checking in, even when they seem to be doing better. Let them know they are not alone and that you are in their corner for the long run.

Your support, patience, and compassion can help a veteran navigate their mental health journey. By being a reliable and understanding presence in their life, you can make a profound difference and remind them that they are valued, appreciated, and never alone.