

Post-Deployment Readjustment Guide for US Virgin Islands Veterans and Their Families



Department of
Veterans Affairs

This guide is for returning US Virgin Islands service men and women who proudly served in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and for their families. We heard many personal stories about the challenges of life after returning home from serving in the wars. From those stories, we created this guide to help Veterans, their friends, and family readjust to life post-deployment. The information throughout this guide has been reviewed and verified by a panel of experts. Members of this panel included healthcare professionals, active service men and women of the military, and Veterans from the US Virgin Islands.

We appreciate the assistance of everyone who collaborated with us to develop this guide. This guide is our way of thanking all returning Veterans and their family members living in the US Virgin Islands. We hope this guide helps you understand what to expect after deployment and encourages respect and understanding among Veterans, friends, and their family.

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For Employers





A GUIDE FOR VETERANS AND FAMILY

Advice for Effective Communication

Returning home from the war is a time for joy. However, that does not mean that the homecoming will be easy. Service members must adjust to many changes. These changes can put a strain on relationships with family and friends. Good communication is key to successful readjustment.

What are forms of communication?

Communication is more than just the words that are said. It also includes non-verbal or wordless messages. We send these messages through facial expressions, body language, and eye contact. Even tone of voice can affect the meaning of our words.

What You Need to Know

- **It is important to talk openly.** You may not want to talk about the period of deployment. But, talking improves your relationships with others. Talk about changes that happened in your family. Talk about physical problems, finances, and how to make decisions. Keeping the lines of communication open will help you adjust to changes.
- **Communication is a two-way process.** Effective communicators send clear messages and are good listeners. Learning to communicate effectively takes practice and effort.

What are ways to support good communication?

- **Wait until everyone is calm to talk.** Discussing issues when you are angry often leads to arguments. Find something you enjoy together. Then, talk when everyone is in a good mood.
- **Stay focused on the issue at hand.** Avoid bringing up the past as this may stop conversation. You cannot change the past. Focus on the present.
- **Be clear and direct.** Assuming that the other person knows what you think and feel leads to poor relationships. Be honest and talk openly. Do not make others guess what you are feeling.

How can you be a good listener?

Being a good listener is an important skill to have. It can help avoid conflict and strengthen your relationships with others. To be a good listener:

- **Focus on the speaker.** Avoid reading or watching TV when someone is talking. Stop what you are doing and listen. Good eye contact is important.
- **Avoid interruptions.** Allow the person time to finish speaking. Save your questions and comments for after they have finished.
- **Listen closely to the message and feelings behind the words.** Pay attention to non-verbal clues like body language.
- **Ask the person to repeat anything that is not clear.** This shows that you are interested. Next, state in your own words what you heard. This improves understanding between you and the speaker.
- **Offer advice only when you are asked.** Giving your opinion often shuts down communication.

Tips for Better Communication

- **Respect the needs of one another.** Try to find common goals. Be positive.
- **Let others know you want to understand their feelings.** Through your words and behaviors, show your interest.
- **Use "I" statements.** Focus on the behavior, not the person. For example, "I feel sad that we don't go out" is effective. Statements such as "you never do anything" stop further communication.
- **Accept another person's rights to his or her own feelings.** Do not judge. Instead, try to understand how they feel. Everyone experiences things differently.

When should you get help?

Get help for communication problems that persist. It is time for professional help when most conversations lead to arguments or attacks on one another.



REMEMBER...

Be honest and talk openly. Do not make others guess what you are feeling. Keeping the lines of communication open will help you adjust to changes. Effective communicators send clear messages and are good listeners.

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.





A GUIDE FOR OEF/OIF/OND SOLDIERS RETURNING FROM COMBAT

From Battlefield to Home: Letting Go of the Battlemind

To deal with the stress of combat, you must be mentally strong. This is called “**Battlemind**.” It helps you stay safe and survive your time in combat. Now that you are home, “Battlemind” behaviors are not needed. It will take time to let go of this mindset.

What is “Battlemind”?

“Battlemind” allows a soldier to face fear and danger with courage. The key parts of “Battlemind” include:

- 1) **Self-Confidence:** Taking calculated risks and dealing with challenges.
- 2) **Mental Toughness:** Overcoming obstacles or setbacks and maintaining positive thoughts.

What You Need to Know

In combat there were certain thoughts that kept you safe. Now that you are home you must learn to adapt your way of thinking. This table will help you transition from war to home.

When you were in combat...		Now that you are home...
Sticking close together resulted in strong bonds with fellow soldiers.	➤	Try to build bonds with family and friends. It will take time for relationships to return to normal.
The enemy was the target.	➤	Remember that you are no longer in a combat situation. There are no enemies.
Staying safe required being alert and paying attention.	➤	It takes time to learn to relax. Find a favorite hobby, or take up a new one.
It was dangerous to be unarmed.	➤	It is not always necessary to carry a weapon.
Emotional control was necessary.	➤	Hiding your emotions can cause stress in your relationships. Be as open as you can with those you trust.
Aggressive driving was needed to avoid danger.	➤	Drive safely and follow the laws. Aggressive driving is unsafe for you and others.

Giving and following orders involved a clear chain of command.

➤ Treat your loved ones as equal members of your support team.

You may have used alcohol as a way to cope with your deployment.

➤ Learn to relax without alcohol. Using alcohol to cope is not healthy.

Tips for Readjusting to Life Post-Deployment

- **Be patient.** Your deployment was hard for you and your loved ones. You and your family need time to “get back to normal.”
- **Share what you are going through.** Talk with friends, family, and fellow soldiers. This relieves stress and helps you see that you are not alone.
- **Do something positive.** Get involved in activities that encourage unity and comfort. You could go to church or do volunteer work.
- **Take care of your health.** Eat healthy foods, get plenty of rest, and exercise. Avoid drinking too much alcohol and/or using drugs.

When should you get help?

Seek help if your behavior is causing problems in your daily life. This can include problems at home, work, and church. Problems with family, friends, and/or co-workers may signal a serious problem. The sooner you get help, the easier your return to a “regular” life will be.

REMEMBER...

Now you are at home and among friends and family. Battlemind behaviors are not needed anymore. It will take time for you and your family to “get back to normal.” Be patient and share what you are going through. If you are having problems adjusting, contact your local healthcare provider. The sooner you get help, the easier your return to a “regular” life will be.

The information for the creation of this document was obtained from Walter Reed Army Institute of Research-Psychiatry and Neuroscience (WRAIR-PN).

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.





A GUIDE FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Managing Stress

Military families are under a lot of stress. During deployment, family members must take on new roles and responsibilities. Adjusting to these changes can be difficult. When the soldier returns, relationships and routines must be reestablished. Learning to manage your stress is important.

What is stress?

Stress is the body's response to a change or a demand. We all experience stress. Some stress is helpful. It allows us to focus on a goal. This is true for short-term stress, like giving a speech. Long-term or chronic stress results from situations like divorce or illness. Chronic stress can negatively affect your health. It can raise your risk of stroke and heart attack. It can lead to anxiety and depression.

What You Need To Know

Stress affects everyone differently. You may not realize that you are feeling stressed. Pay attention to your body's signals:

- Tight muscles, especially in the neck and shoulders
- Headaches and upset stomach
- Problems sleeping
- Feeling worried, hopeless, or depressed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Weight gain or loss

How can you start to manage your stress?

Military families face special challenges. Deployments and relocations can strain finances. At times, the stresses you face may seem overwhelming. It is important to take one day at a time. To help keep your stress level under control:

- **Seek out social support.** Search out other military families. They will be able to relate to your feelings and experiences.
- **Share your worries.** Talking with family and friends can relieve stress. Be open with how you are feeling. Writing in a journal can help relieve stress.

- **Slow down.** The day to day stresses can take a lot out of you. Give yourself permission to take a break. Ask for help when you need it.
- **Take time for yourself.** Do something that you enjoy, like reading a book. Take a nap or listen to music. This will help reduce stress.

Tips for Fighting Stress

- **Get active.** Regular physical activity can relieve tension. Go for a walk or bike ride. Go for a swim at the local pool. Try to do something active every day.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Eat meals at regular times. Make sure to eat foods that are rich in vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Limit fats, salt, cholesterol and sugar. Drink plenty of water.
- **Learn to relax.** Practice deep breathing to relieve stress. Join a yoga class. Calm yourself through prayer or meditation.
- **Be sure to laugh.** Joke with your family and friends. Laugh out loud. Read a funny book or watch a comedy on TV.

When should you seek help?

Too much stress can make you feel trapped. It can affect your ability to work through daily problems. Seek help when the stress becomes too much to handle. Talk to your healthcare provider. Talk about how the stress is affecting you. Together you can work towards managing the stress in your life.

Where can you get help?

VA and most military groups have a family service and support center. These services can help you access information. You can get a referral for counseling and receive help for crisis intervention. Getting help is not a sign of weakness.



REMEMBER...

Chronic stress can negatively affect your health. It can raise your risk of stroke and heart attack. It can lead to anxiety and depression. The day to day stresses can take a lot out of you. Give yourself permission to take a break. Ask for help when you need it. Talk to your healthcare provider when the stress becomes too much to handle. Together you can work towards managing the stress in your life.

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.



My HealthVet

<http://www.myhealth.va.gov>



VA My HealthVet Website:

A way for Veterans and their families to manage healthcare

My HealthVet is a website devoted to serving Veterans and their families. It allows Veterans to take an active approach in their health care.

What You Need to Know

My HealthVet offers many tools to help you manage your health care. You can:

- Refill your VA prescription medicines
- View your VA appointments
- Find links to federal and VA benefits
- Find information about readjustment post-deployment
- Take online courses to improve your physical and mental health
- Create and print your own personal health record
- Track changes in your health

How do I use My HealthVet?

Type www.myhealth.va.gov in the browser address bar and press enter. Click on “Go to My HealthVet—Enter Here.” This will take you to the Home Page.

If you just want to look up health information, you do not need to register. To get the full range of services for My HealthVet, you do need to register. Registration is easy. Just follow the simple steps listed on the website.

Keep all your health information in one handy place. It is very simple. After you log in, you can enter the following information in My HealthVet:

- Military health history
- Medications
- Allergies
- Medical events, like diseases and surgeries
- Family health history

- Emergency phone numbers
- Contact information for your healthcare team members

Use the Health Tracking Tools

You can keep up-to-date information about your health. Just click on the “Track Health” tab. Then enter your health information. This will help you see your health progress.

- Blood pressure
- Heart rate
- Temperature
- Weight
- Pain levels

Keep Track of Lab Values and Test Results

You can enter and then print records of your lab results. Just click on the “Track Health” tab and then the “Labs & Tests” tab. This feature is especially helpful if you visit a new healthcare provider. Also, you can print out graphs to see how your health changes over time.

Keep Health Journals

To improve your health, keep a health journal of what you eat and how much you exercise. Just click on the “Track Health” tab and then the “Journal” tab.

Make a Medical Information Card

Enter your blood type, the drugs you take, and other information. Print and cut out the card. Carry it with you in case of emergency.

Find Good Health Information

My HealtheVet has lots of medical information that you can trust. Just click on the “Research Health” tab. You will find links to healthy living tips, advice about diseases and mental health topics, and a medical library.

Log on Today!



Battlemind Checklist

**Battlemind checks allow soldiers to identify if they need help.
Read each question and select 'YES' or 'NO'.**

POST-DEPLOYMENT READJUSTMENT

I felt close to my buddies while serving. Now I feel alone.	YES	NO
I have not shared my service experiences with those closest to me.	YES	NO
Certain memories of the deployment keep bothering me.	YES	NO
I am still feeling guilt about things that happened in combat.	YES	NO
I am still jumping at loud noises and/or staying on alert.	YES	NO
I am having trouble sleeping and/or having bad dreams.	YES	NO
I get angry when someone asks about my service experiences.	YES	NO
I do not know how to share what I am feeling.	YES	NO
Sometimes when I am angry, I want to reach for a weapon.	YES	NO

STRESS, COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS

I am lonely even when I am around my loved ones.	YES	NO
I have lost interest in the things I used to enjoy.	YES	NO
I feel like I do not have control over my life.	YES	NO
I cannot control my temper.	YES	NO
I am having problems in the relationships with my loved ones.	YES	NO
Friends and loved ones tell me I have changed.	YES	NO
It is hard to be the same with my spouse or partner.	YES	NO
I have trouble with making decisions.	YES	NO
I am getting into fights with my loved ones over simple things.	YES	NO
I do not have patience with my kids.	YES	NO
Since I came home, I am driving more aggressively than before.	YES	NO
I am using alcohol or drugs to help me relax.	YES	NO

RED FLAG

If you answered 'YES' to some of the items above, you may be having a natural stress reaction to your combat experience. If you are still having this stress 1-2 months after you return home, talk to your healthcare provider about it.



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Reconnecting with your Service Member Post-Deployment

Coming home can be a joyful time. Keep in mind that things do not always go as planned. Roles and relationships may have changed. It will take time for everyone to adjust.

What You Need To Know

The adjustment time post-deployment can be long. It may last for weeks or even months. Knowing what to expect can make this period easier. Below are phases that many people go through:

- **Pre-entry** occurs in the days before your service member comes home. You may be excited as you prepare for the homecoming.
- **Reunion** is often called the "honeymoon" phase. This lasts for the first few days after the service member returns. This is a time to relax and celebrate his/her homecoming.
- **Disruption** occurs when problems are noticed. You may realize that your relationship has changed. You may feel as if nothing is the same.
- **Communication** is the phase of readjusting to new roles and routines. It is a time to reconnect with your service member.
- **Normalcy** is the return to a routine. You and your service member must learn to accept changes. There will still be problems. Over time, the relationship with your service member should grow stronger.

What can hinder reconnecting with your service member?

Your service member may not act like the same person you remember. It may be difficult to reconnect because your service member:

- May be tired and stressed
- May withdraw and have trouble trusting others
- May feel unwanted and be unable to show warmth to others
- May act strangely and appear nervous or awkward

What are ways to make the homecoming less stressful?

- **Keep the homecoming celebration simple.** Having a small get-together at home may be the best choice. Remember that the homecoming may not match your plans and hopes.

- **Give each other time.** You may feel uncomfortable when first talking together. The most important thing is to be loving and show respect. Go slowly and make a special effort to talk. It takes time to get back to where you once were.
- **Realize that the service member may be guarded.** He or she may have trouble trusting others. Be available and listen carefully, but do not pry. Be aware of the service member's need for privacy.
- **Encourage individual conversations.** Everyone needs time to talk with the service member. This includes parents, siblings, and close friends. Let the service member control how much and how soon he or she wants to share stories and feelings.

Tips for Reconnecting With Your Service Member

- **Leave room for flexibility.** The service member has had a strict daily routine. At home, the service member may rebel against schedules and planned events. This is a normal response.
- **Be patient.** In a war zone, the service member could not relax. He or she had to be self-sufficient to survive. It will be hard to stop these behaviors at home. Talk about your concerns without blame.
- **Be sensitive and limit your criticisms.** Do not say comments like "I told you so." Avoid comparing your service member to others. Try not to bring up past events.
- **Expect some disagreements.** Go slowly and allow time for everyone to speak. It takes working together to solve problems. Take a "time out" when arguing. Return to discussions when everyone is calm.
- **Offer your help to the service member.** Providing small favors shows your support. Offer to babysit, prepare a meal, or perform a household chore. This allows the service member time to relax alone or with others.

When should you get help?

Expect about 6 weeks to adjust to new roles and relationships. Seek help if you notice that problems persist or worsen. Do not try to diagnose or solve serious problems on your own. The service member may not ask for help. He or she may have fears of admitting a problem. It is important to seek help if the following behaviors continue:

- Arguing and verbal abuse
- Withdrawal and distrust of others
- Nightmares, flashbacks of trauma, and constant fear of impending danger
- Drinking too much alcohol or taking drugs

Seek immediate help if there is physical abuse or violence.

REMEMBER...

Your service member may not act like the same person you remember. Roles and relationships may have changed. It will take time for everyone to adjust. It takes working together to solve problems. Take a "time out" when arguing. Return to discussions when everyone is calm. Give each other time. The most important thing is to be loving and show respect. Go slowly and make a special effort to talk.

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.





Substance Misuse

Returning home after deployment is a stressful time. Service members may use alcohol or other drugs to cope. The line between substance use and misuse is sometimes unclear. However, when using alcohol or drugs begins to interfere with daily life it is time to get help.

What You Need to Know

There are many reasons why people turn to drugs and alcohol. People sometimes see it as a way to escape their stress. Possible reasons for substance use include:

- Stress or not being able to sleep
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), or other mental health concerns
- Head or brain injury (Example: Traumatic Brain Injury [TBI])
- Physical pain from injury
- Poor relationships

What are the negative effects of substance use?

The degree of substance misuse varies from person to person. At first, it may seem like it is helping. However, over time it can harm all aspects of life. It can affect relationships with family, friends, and co-workers. It can also put you at higher risk for:

- Serious injuries or accidents
- Poor physical or mental health
- Loss of job and income
- Homelessness

How do you know if you have a problem?

Ask yourself these questions to help determine if your substance use is a problem.

- Have family or friends made comments about your drinking or drug use?
- Have you unsuccessfully tried to stop drinking or using drugs?

- Is your use of alcohol or drugs increasing?
- Does your use of alcohol or drugs interfere with work?
- Have you harmed family and friends due to your substance use?

If you answer “YES” to any of these questions, you may have a problem.

Tips to Help You With Substance Use Problems

- Seek support from family and friends.
- Talk to other Veterans who are recovering from substance use problems.
- Consider family therapy. It may be helpful for you and your loved ones, especially children.
- Stay active with exercise, hobbies, and education.
- Meditation, massage, yoga or soft music may help reduce stress.

When should you seek help?

Some combat Veterans may need help with substance misuse. Quitting is hard, but it can be done with help. Contact your local healthcare provider if:

- Use increases or using drugs or alcohol cannot be stopped
- Using substances is disrupting home or work life
- Loved ones have shown concern about substance use
- You have feelings of irritability, nervousness, or sudden personality changes
- Using substances is more important than anything else



REMEMBER...

The line between substance use and misuse is sometimes unclear. Over time substance misuse can harm all aspects of life. It can affect relationships with family, friends, and co-workers. Quitting is hard, but it can be done with help. Contact your local healthcare provider.

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.



Local Resources for Veterans and Their Families

Local Veterans Affairs Clinics and Services

VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic- St. Croix

Box 12, RR-02, The Village Mall, #113 Kings Hill, VI 00850-4701

(340) 778-5553

http://www.caribbean.va.gov/visitors/st_croix.asp

VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic- St. Thomas

VI Medical Foundation, Suite 101, 50 Estates Thomas, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00802

(340) 693-0005

http://www.caribbean.va.gov/visitors/st_thomas.asp

VA Vet Center

VI Medical Foundation, Suite 101, 50 Estates Thomas, St. Thomas, U.S.V.I. 00802

STT (340) 774-5017

The Village Mall, RR 2 Box 10553 Kingshill, St. Croix, VI 00850

STX (340) 778-5553

Military Sexual Trauma Coordinator

Social Work Service, D-227

10 Casia Street, San Juan, Puerto Rico 00921-3201

1 (787) 641-7582 Ext: 12331

VA Caribbean Healthcare System in Puerto Rico

Veterans Affairs Medical Center

10 Casia Street

San Juan, PR 00921

1 (787) 641-7582

1 (800) 449-8729

www.caribbean.va.gov

Local Resources for Veterans and Their Families

VA Women Veterans Program Manager

VA Caribbean Healthcare System

10 Casia Street, San Juan, Puerto Rico 00921-3201

Phone: 1 (787) 641-4559 Ext: 31422

Fax: 1 (787) 641-4559

Toll-free: 1(800) 449- 8729

www.va.gov/womenvet

Local Office of Veterans Affairs

US Virgin Islands Office of Veterans Affairs

1013 Estate Richmond, Christiansted, St. Croix Virgin Islands 00820

(340) 773-6663 or (340) 774-6100

<http://www.nasdva.net/group/usvirginislands>

Veterans Affairs Benefits Information

VA Veterans Benefits Administration

1 (800) 827-1000

Montgomery GI Bill Benefits Information and Assistance

1 (888) GIBILL-1 [1 (800) 442-4551]

www.gibill.va.gov

VA Veteran Healthcare Eligibility Information

1 (877) 222-VETS [1 (877) 222-8387]

www.va.gov/elig

Veteran Military Records

www.archives.gov/research_room/vetrecs/index.html

Local Resources for Veterans and Their Families

Local National Guard and Department of Defense Services

National Guard Family Organization VIAANG

Virgin Islands National Guard, JFHQ
4031 La Grande Princesse, Lot 1B
Christiansted, V.I. 00820-4353
(340) 712-8022

Transitions Assistance Advisor

Virgin Islands National Guard, JFHQ
4031 La Grande Princesse, Lot 1B
Christiansted, V.I. 00820-4353
(340) 712-7781

Virgin Islands NGB PHP Director of Psychological Health

Joint Forces Headquarters #34 Aldersville, Christiansted, VI, 00820
(340) 773-5113

Non-VA Clinics/ Services

Schneider Regional Medical Center (SRMC)

9048 Sugar Estate, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands 00802
(340) 776-8311

info@rlshospital.org

<http://www.rlshospital.org>

Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Center

P.O. Box 8312, St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands 00831
(340) 693-8900

<http://www.rlshospital.org/myrah.htm>

The Charlotte Kimmelman Cancer Institute

9048 Sugar Estate, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands 00802
(340) 775-5433

Local Resources for Veterans and Their Families

Gov. Juan F. Luis Hospital & Medical Center

4007 Estate Diamond Ruby, Christiansted, Virgin Islands
(340) 778-6311

Virgin Islands Department of Health

Department of Health St. Croix

Charles Harwood Complex 3500 Est. Richmond, Christiansted, VI 00820
(340) 773-1311

<http://www.healthvi.org>

Department of Health St. Thomas/St. John

1303 Hospital Ground Suite 10, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, VI 00802
(340) 774-9000

<http://www.healthvi.org>

Local State Departments

U.S. Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority

STT (340) 777-4432

STX (340) 772-4432

U.S. Rural Development

5030 Anchorway, Ste 4

Christiansted, VI 00820-4962

(340) 773-9146 ext. 4

Social Security Administration

Sunny Isles Shopping Center

Nisky Shopping Center

1 (800) 772-1213

Local Resources for Veterans and Their Families

Department of Human Services

Family Preservation Grants, Financial Assistance, Protective Services, Burial Assistance

STX (340) 773-2323

STT (340) 774-0930

Department of Labor

STX Vet Rep W. Doctrine (340) 773-1440 ext: 209

STT/STJ Vet Rep Kayyon Harley (340) 776-3700

Education

University of the Virgin Islands

STT (340) 776-9200

STX (340) 778-1620

American Legion

Enrique Romero Nieves Post No. 102

#1 Est. Peters Rest.

Christiansted

Saint Croix, VI 00820

(340) 692-2066

Myron Goldstein Danielson Post No. 85

No.2 Hospital Ground

Christiansted

Saint Croix, VI 00820

(340) 692-2066

Bromley Berkley Post No. 133

P.O. Box 1331

Frederiksted, VI 00841

(340) 772-3139

Local Resources for Veterans and Their Families

Patrick U. George Post No. 90

#18 Sub Base Wapa Bldg
St. Thomas, VI 00802
(340) 776-2332

Viggo E. Sewer Post No. 131

P.O. Box 37
St. John, VI 00802
(340) 776-6445

Community Organizations

Women's Coalition of St. Croix

7 East Street, Christiansted, St. Croix, USVI
(340) 773-9272
wsc@pennswoods.net
<http://wcstx.com/>

Lutheran Social Services

STT (340) 776-7499
STX (340) 772-4099

Red Cross

8000 Nisky Center, Suite 222, St. Thomas, USVI 00802
(340) 774-0375
6035 Castle Coakley, Christiansted, USVI 00820
(340) 778-5104
<http://www.usvi-redcross.org/>

Help for Homeless Veterans

10,000 Helpers of St. Croix

Homeless Shelter for Mentally Ill
(340) 719-2828

Local Resources for Veterans and Their Families

Catholic Charities of the Virgin Islands

STX Soup kitchen, homeless shelter for women and children (340) 773-0132

STT Homeless shelter for men (340) 777-8518

Methodist Training and Outreach Center

Soup Kitchen, counseling, rental assistance

Market Square, St. Thomas (340) 776-4455

Salvation Army

Soup Kitchen

STT (340) 776-0070

STX (340) 773-6162

Family Assistance

Family Resource Center

Bunker Hill, St. Thomas

(340) 776-3966

Help With Substance Misuse

St. Croix Mission Outreach

Off-island Substance Abuse Treatment

(340) 778-4357

The Village Partners in Recovery

Substance Abuse Treatment

(340) 719-9900

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

(340) 776-5283

Narcotics Anonymous

(340) 998-6481



Managing Stress

Many brave men and women risk their lives in combat. During this time, service members are exposed to stressful events. The amount of lasting problems depends on many factors.

What You Need to Know

When returning from war, it is normal to feel stressed. Stress is the body's way to protect you. When working properly, stress helps you stay alert. Too much stress can wear down your physical and mental health. Common signs of excess stress are:

- Muscle tension
- Mood swings and rapid or shallow breathing
- Trouble concentrating or remembering things
- Difficulty sleeping and fatigue
- Upset stomach, diarrhea or constipation

RED FLAG

Seek help if you are experiencing symptoms of severe stress. This could be a sign of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). There are treatments available. For more information refer to the PTSD fact sheet in the "For Family and Friends" section.



What things influence your stress tolerance?

Each person deals with stress differently. Past experiences, relationships, and your mindset affect how you deal with stress.

- **Knowledge and preparation.** It is important to educate yourself with information about stress. Knowledge is the first step to managing your stress in a healthy way.
- **Support group.** A strong group of friends and family can help buffer stress. Isolation puts you at more risk for excess stress.
- **Attitude and outlook on life.** Being positive can help you when dealing with stress. Accept the changes in your life since deployment and embrace the challenge.

What are some common triggers for stress?

Identifying your triggers can help you avoid excess stress. Everyone is sensitive to different things. Below are common triggers for stress. You can use the empty spaces to write in your triggers.

Personal Influence

- Negative mindset _____
- Impossible expectations _____
- Poor self-esteem _____
- Avoiding challenges _____
- Isolation _____

Outside Influence

- Major life changes _____
- Relationship difficulties _____
- Financial problems _____
- Employment _____
- Children and family _____

What are some ways to cope with stress?

It is important to take care of your mental and emotional needs. The following suggestions may help you.

- **Try to identify what is causing your stress.** Write down what triggers your stress. Make a list of ways to solve each stressor and try the best one.
- **Seek out social support.** Sharing your feelings can help reduce stress. Spend time with friends and family.
- **Share your worries.** Talk with other Veterans. They probably have a lot of the same feelings you do.

Tips for Managing Your Stress

Below are some other tips that may help to relieve stress.

- **Address your spiritual needs.** Some people find strength in prayer. Some seek help from a religious or spiritual advisor.
- **Have a sense of humor.** Laughter makes you feel good and relieves stress. Humor can help you look at stressful situations in a different way.
- **Try deep breathing and meditation.** This can relax both your body and mind. You may have trouble concentrating at first. Do not worry. Meditation often becomes easier with practice.

When should you get help?

Feeling stressed after deployment is normal. Symptoms may last for 1 to 2 months. Seek help if these symptoms last longer or interfere with activities in your daily life. This may mean a normal stress reaction is becoming a problem.

REMEMBER...

Stress is a normal response. It is the body's way to protect you. Each person deals with stress differently. Identifying what triggers your stress is helpful. Too much stress can wear down your physical and mental health. Seek help if symptoms last longer than 1 to 2 months or interfere with daily life.

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.





Mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI)

What is mild Traumatic Brain Injury?

When someone suffers a traumatic brain injury (TBI), everyone in the family is affected. TBIs can range from mild to severe injuries. Depending on the severity, TBI victims can experience long-term disability. A TBI occurs when something hits the head with a lot of force. This causes the brain to shake inside the skull. TBI's are one of the most common injuries that affect OEF/OIF/OND Veterans. In combat, a TBI is most often caused by:

- Explosive devices
- Bullets
- Vehicle accidents
- Falls

What You Need to Know

Most TBIs are mild. An example of this is a concussion. Symptoms can vary depending on the individual and the injury. The effects of the TBI may not appear until weeks after the injury. Usually symptoms resolve on their own within hours to days. It is important for families to know what the symptoms are.

Physical Symptoms

- Headaches or seizures
- Lack of balance and dizziness
- Stiffness or weakness
- Difficulty speaking and performing simple tasks
- Loss of bladder or bowel control

Cognitive Symptoms

- Memory loss or slowed thinking
- Impaired judgment or concentration
- Difficulty learning
- Communication problems

Emotional or Behavioral Symptoms

- Irritability, anger, and sudden mood changes
- Anxiety, depression, or trouble coping
- Difficulty completing or finishing tasks
- Sexual dysfunction
- Difficulty reading social cues

When should you get help?

Sometimes mild TBIs are overlooked or not reported. Someone can suffer a TBI and not be knocked unconscious. Unlike other injuries, usually you cannot see a TBI. It is important to know the symptoms of a TBI. When symptoms do not naturally go away within 1-3 months, you need to seek help. Contact your healthcare provider.

REMEMBER...

When someone suffers a TBI, everyone in the family is affected. TBIs are one of the most common injuries that affect OEF/OIF/OND Veterans. Sometimes mild TBI is overlooked or not reported. Usually symptoms resolve on their own within hours to days. When symptoms do not naturally go away within 1-3 months, you need to seek help.

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.





Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

What is PTSD?

PTSD refers to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. It is an anxiety disorder resulting from a traumatic or life-changing event. Examples of traumatic events include:

- Combat or war experiences
- Sexual assault
- Car accident or plane crash

PTSD can occur even if the traumatic event happened to someone else. For example, a loved one being seriously injured or killed. Even witnessing a stranger going through trauma can result in PTSD.

What You Need to Know

PTSD is not a sign of weakness. It is the body's attempt to cope with extreme stress. It is unclear why some people develop PTSD while others do not. For some people, PTSD symptoms start soon after the traumatic event. For others, symptoms show up weeks, months, or even years later. Learning what symptoms to look for is important.

Re-experiencing Symptoms

- Frequent, painful memories of the traumatic event
- Reliving the traumatic event through flashbacks and nightmares
- Strong feelings of distress brought on by the memories
- Strong physical reactions from memories including increased heart rate and sweating

Avoidance Symptoms

- Trying to stay away from reminders of the trauma such as people or places
- Avoiding talking about the traumatic event or watching the news
- Seeming emotionally numb and distant, especially from those he/she was close to
- Losing interest in activities he/she once enjoyed

Hyperarousal Symptoms

- Feeling anxious and “on edge”
- Being irritable and having angry outbursts
- Having difficulty paying attention or concentrating
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Feeling jumpy or easily startled

What are other problems commonly associated with PTSD?

Symptoms of PTSD disrupt the service member’s life. Relationships with family and friends become strained. PTSD can make it hard to even get through the day. This can lead to:

- Drinking or drug related problems
- Depression, guilt and shame
- Family problems like divorce and domestic violence
- Difficulty holding down a job

When should you get help for your service member?

If your service member is suffering from PTSD, seek help right away. Early treatment is important because PTSD can worsen over time. There is no single solution for PTSD. Treatment may include therapy as well as medication. Treatment can help the person cope with painful memories. It can give the service member back a sense of control.



REMEMBER...

PTSD is not a sign of weakness. It is the body’s attempt to cope with extreme stress. Symptoms of PTSD may start right away or show up weeks, months, or even years later. If your service member is suffering from PTSD, seek help right away. Early treatment is important because PTSD can worsen over time.

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.



Online Resources for Veterans and Their Families

Battlemind

Battlemind by the US Army

<https://www.battlemind.army.mil/>

Find information on pre and post-deployment and psychological debriefing. Also, there are video resources, such as for when family members deploy.

Caregiving

Department of Veterans Affairs: Caregiver Support

<http://www.caregiver.va.gov/>

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers assistance to caregivers. Caregivers provide a valuable service for Veterans and are "partners" with VA in providing excellent health care. Caregivers allow Veterans to remain in their own home and also play an important role in supporting Veterans who are hospitalized or living outside their home.

Employer Assistance

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve

<http://www.esgr.org/>

Find information on employer support for Guard and Reserve service. It provides information on employer outreach, how to reduce or resolve employer and/or employee problems through a nationwide Ombudsman program.

1555 Wilson Blvd.

Arlington, VA 22209

1 (800) 336-4590

Americas Heroes at Work

<http://www.americasheroesatwork.gov/>

Designed for employers and the workforce development system, this website is your link to information and tools to help returning service members and Veterans living with TBI and/or PTSD succeed in the workplace - particularly service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Online Resources for Veterans and Their Families

Family and Community Reintegration

Operation Healthy Reunions

<http://www.nmha.org/reunions/>

Find information on returning home and coping with war and loss. It also provides great resources under “Resources and Links” such as deployment, readjustment and outreach services, PTSD, and suicide prevention.

Phone: 1 (703) 684-7722

Toll-free: 1 (800) 969-6642

TTY: 1 (800) 433-5959

Fax: 1 (703) 684-5968

Real Warriors

<http://www.realwarriors.net>

Find information on building resilience, assisting in recovery, and supporting reintegration of returning service members, Veterans and their families.

Military Spouse Resource Center

<http://www.milspouse.org/>

Find information on resources for employment and education for military spouses.

Seamless Transition

<http://seamlesstransition.vssc.med.va.gov/>

Find information on post-deployment, health re-assessment, and educational materials.

Military One Source

<http://www.militaryonesource.com>

Find information on deployment, parenting, relationships, special needs, and transition resources.

1 (800) 342-9647 or 1 (800) 346-9188

En español llame al: 1 (877) 888-0727

Female Veterans

Department of Veterans Affairs: Women Veterans Health Care

<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/womenshealth>

This website provides information on health care services available to women Veterans. This includes comprehensive primary care, specialty care, rehabilitation, mental health and treatment for military sexual trauma.

Online Resources for Veterans and Their Families

General Health Information

My HealthVet

<https://www.myhealth.va.gov>

My HealthVet is a free, online Personal Health Record that empowers Veterans to become informed partners in their health care. Its aim is to have Veterans and families actively participate in their health care.

General OEF/OIF/OND Information

Department of Veterans Affairs: Returning OEF/OIF/OND Veterans

<http://www.oefoif.va.gov/>

This site provides information on Veterans Benefits and compensation. It also includes a wealth of information and resources pertaining to your health. This website serves as your gateway to what the Veterans Affairs has to offer.

Mental Health and Substance Misuse

The Mental Health Assessment Program

<https://www.militarymentalhealth.org>

Find information on screening tools such as depression, alcohol, or PTSD. You can take these screening tests anonymously.

Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

Department of Health: Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

www.sapr.mil

This website provides guidance and other information for victims of sexual assault, the individuals they turn to, unit commanders, first responders and others dealing with this sensitive issue.

Department of Veterans Affairs: Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

<http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp>

This website provides information on VA programs and services available to MST victims.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

US Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

www.ncptsd.va.gov

Find information on PTSD, coping with war, Veterans and their families, and disaster relief resources. Click on “Web Resources” for more useful information such as organizations, trauma types, children and adolescents, and treatment.

Online Resources for Veterans and Their Families

Veterans and Families

<http://www.veteransandfamilies.org/>

Information on PTSD, children of PTSD Veterans, Veterans and families transitioning home from deployment, from military to civilian life, and homecoming preparedness guide.

1 (916) 320-4395

Mental Health America

www.nmha.org

Find information about; locating a therapist in your area, depression, PTSD, military families, how to regain a sense of normalcy, and reconnecting with children post-deployment.

2000 N. Beauregard Street, 6th Floor Alexandria, VA 22311

Phone: 1 (703) 684-7722

Fax: 1 (703) 684-5968

Toll-free: 1 (800) 969-6642

TTY: 1 (800) 433-5959

National Guard Virtual Armory

www.virtualarmory.com/

Find information on understanding PTSD and acute stress disorder, mobilization, and deployment. This website has fact sheets for families.

Stress Management

Hooah 4 Health

<http://www.hooah4health.com>

Find information on stress management, depression, sleep and sleep disorders, self-esteem, and deployment. Click on “New Site Map” under the search tool for an easier website to navigate.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Traumatic Brain Injury: The Journey Home

<http://www.traumaticbraininjuryatoz.org/>

This site provides an informative and sensitive exploration of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), including information for patients, family members, and caregivers.



Sleep Problems

Problems sleeping post-deployment are common. They can have a big effect on your health. They can affect your ability to function during the day. Work and family relationships may suffer.

What are some common causes of sleep problems?

Difficulty staying awake during the day is a sign of poor sleep. Sleep problems also include trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. This could be caused by:

- **Symptoms of physical problems.** Pain due to an injury can make it hard to sleep.
- **Stress or sadness.** Poor mental health can affect your sleep. You may have a hard time falling asleep. You may sleep too much.
- **Medicines.** Sleeping pills and cold medicines that you buy over-the-counter often cause problems. Your healthcare provider may prescribe a sleeping pill. Take the sleeping pill for only two or three nights in a row.

What You Need to Know

Everyone needs about 7-9 hours of sleep each night. Keep in mind, you might not be getting restful sleep if:

- You feel tired during the day. People tell you that you look tired.
- You have trouble staying awake. You doze off while driving or watching TV.
- You have trouble concentrating at work, home, or school.
- You need to nap almost every day.
- You need caffeine to stay awake.

What are ways to get restful sleep?

- **Stick to a routine.** Wake up at the same time each day. Go to bed at the same time each night.
- **Exercise every day.** Go for a walk outside. Natural light helps keep your sleep patterns normal. Stop exercising at least three hours before bedtime.
- **Get out of bed if you are not asleep in 15 to 30 minutes.** Go into another room and do something relaxing. Return to bed only when you are sleepy.
- **Set the mood for sleep.** Keep your bedroom quiet, dark and at a cool, comfortable temperature.

How can you promote better sleep?

- **Learn how to manage stress.** Try deep breathing and relaxation methods. Spend time with family and friends.

- **Avoid napping or nap for only 15 to 30 minutes during the daytime.** If you do nap, the early afternoon is best.
- **Eat foods and drinks that are free of caffeine.** Avoid coffee, tea, certain soft drinks and chocolate.
- **Avoid drinking alcohol close to bedtime.** Alcohol may help you fall asleep. However, it will cause you to wake up and be restless.

Talk with your provider about your health and sleep patterns.

Keep track of your sleep pattern in a diary for 2 weeks. This will help your healthcare provider understand your sleep problems. Include in your sleep diary the following:

- How many times you wake up at night
- Total number of hours you slept
- How you rate the quality of your sleep
- How you feel during the day (wide awake or tired)

Tips for Better Sleep

- **Eat your dinner three hours before you go to bed.**
- **Drink a glass of warm milk before bedtime.**
- **Have a bedtime routine.** Take a warm bath before bedtime. Read a book or listen to soothing music.
- **Use your bed only for sleeping or sex.** Eat, read, work or watch television in another room.

When should you get help?

Sleep problems can lead to increased stress and depression. Some complaints may indicate that you have a serious condition.

Contact your healthcare team right away if you have any of the following:

- Waking suddenly and acting strangely or confused
- Shortness of breath or chest pain
- Frequent, scary nightmares
- Jerking or kicking legs during sleep. These may be symptoms of periodic limb movement disorder.
- Discomfort or tingling feelings in the legs at night. These may be symptoms of restless leg syndrome.
- Loud snoring, choking, and gasping sounds during sleep. These may be symptoms of sleep apnea.

REMEMBER...

Sleeping problems post-deployment are common. They can have a big effect on your health. They can affect your ability to function during the day. Trouble sleeping can be a symptom of a physical or mental problem. Wake up and go to bed at the same time each day. Having a routine will improve your sleep.

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.





VA Benefits

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers military benefits to those who qualify. You may be eligible for VA benefits if you are a:

- Veteran
- Veteran's dependent
- Spouse, child, or parent of a deceased Veteran
- Active duty military service member
- Member of the Reserve or National Guard

What You Need to Know

Benefits will vary depending on your eligibility. This may include health care coverage as well as educational benefits. It is important to find out what you qualify for.

Helpful VA Website for Benefits

Inquiry Routing & Information System (IRIS)

<https://iris.custhelp.com/>

This is a good place to start to find out about:

- How to find a VA facility in your area
- Toll-free numbers for benefits information
- Education benefits
- eBenefits, a one stop shop for online benefits information
- Frequently asked questions

VA Health Care Eligibility and Enrollment

<http://www.va.gov/healtheligibility/eligibility/DetermineEligibility.asp>

This website will help you determine what benefits you qualify for. On this site you can:

- Apply for VA health care benefits
- Update financial or personal information changes on the 10-10EZ, Health Benefits Renewal form
- Find out the limitations for covered services
- Read about co-pays and charges
- Learn about benefits for family members

Returning Service Members (OEF/OIF/OND)

<http://www.oefoif.va.gov/>

If you are an OEF/OIF/OND Veteran, you have earned benefits. Visit this website to find out if you are eligible for:

- 5 years of cost free health care
- 180 day dental benefits
- Education benefits
- Veteran Employment Program

Online Application for Health Benefits

<https://www.1010ez.med.va.gov>

VA Form 10-10EZ allows you to apply online for health benefits.

What health care services are offered by VA?

Health care services offered by VA include:

- Hospital, outpatient medical, dental, pharmacy and prosthetic services
- Home and community-based residential care
- Readjustment and sexual trauma counseling
- Specialized health care for women and homeless Veterans
- Treatment for alcohol and drug use
- Mental health treatment and 24-hour mental health emergency care, including a 24/7 national suicide hotline

What educational benefits are offered by VA?

The Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) provides up to 36 months of education benefits. It is available to those who enlist in the US Armed Forces. Education benefits may also be available for the Veteran's family. Benefits include:

- Tuition help for college, business, technical or vocational school
- On-the-job training programs
- Remedial, deficiency, and refresher training (in some cases)
- The cost of tests for licenses or certifications needed to get, keep, or advance in a job

For more information about MGIB, call Toll-free 1 (888) GIBILL-1 (1-888-442-4551) or visit <http://www.gibill.va.gov>

What is offered locally in the US Virgin Islands?

Health Care Services

There are 2 VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) and 2 Vet Centers in the US Virgin Islands. They are centrally located on St. Croix and St. Thomas. Veterans with service-connected injuries can utilize the clinics free of charge.

*Refer to the "Resources" section of this guide for your local Vet Center and VA CBOC contact information

Education

Tuition assistance may be available to attend the **University of the Virgin Islands**. Contact your Veterans Service Officer at (340) 773-6663.

Benefits Workshops

The VA offers workshops to help you better understand benefits. The workshops are held monthly.

- 2nd Monday and Tuesday of the month at the St. Thomas CBOC.

AND

- 2nd Thursday and Friday of the month at the St. Croix CBOC.

For More Information, call Toll-free 1 (877) 222-VETS (8387)
Monday through Friday, between the hours of 8 AM to 8 PM EST

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.



Personal Health Record

It is very important to keep track of your health to make sure you get the best care possible. A personal health record will help your healthcare team know exactly what your health history is. Working with your healthcare team to stay well is as important as getting treatment when you are sick. To keep track of your health, make sure you know:

Blood Pressure

Check each _____ week (s) / month (s)

My goal is: _____

Cholesterol and Lipids (fats)

Check each _____ month (s) / year (s)

My goal is: _____

Weight

Check each _____ week (s) / month (s)

My goal is: _____ lbs.

Tetanus Vaccine

Every 10 years (for most people)

Date: _____

Flu Vaccine

Usually between September 1 and March 31 each year

Date: _____

Blood Type

(Example: A-positive, O-negative)

My blood type is _____

For Women:

Mammogram

Obtain every 1-2 years

I had mine on ___/___/___

Pap test

Obtain every 1-3 years

I had mine on ___/___/___

My Medicines

Include all medications (prescription, nonprescription, vitamins, supplements, herbs)

Name of Medication _____	Dose (Such as: 2 pills)	How Often and When (Such as: 2 times per day)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

For Persons 50 Years and Older

Screening for colon cancer begins at age 50:

Check every _____ years
I had mine on: _____ / _____ / _____

Pneumonia Vaccine:

Once at age 65 (for most people)

I had mine on: _____ / _____ / _____

The major health problem(s) I have are:

Surgeries (type and date):

Family Medical History:

Disease / Condition

Relationship to you (Example: parent, sibling)

<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

Allergies

My Healthcare Providers:

Name	Phone	Type of Provider
1) _____	_____	_____
2) _____	_____	_____
3) _____	_____	_____

EMERGENCY: DIAL 9-1-1

In case of emergency contact:

Name _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____

Important Documents:

Testament/ Will

No _____ Yes, it is located at: _____

Advance Medical Directives

No _____ Yes, it is located at: _____



Returning to Work Post-Deployment

You may be worried about how you will fit back into the workforce. This is a normal feeling. It will take time to adjust.

What You Need to Know

You may have mixed emotions about returning to work. Below are some common feelings you may experience.

- **Isolated or out of place.** You may miss the trust and bond you had with members of your unit.
- **Difficulty following the rules.** You are used to the military way of doing things. The orders to follow at work may be difficult to adjust to.
- **Boredom or lack of interest.** Your work may be less exciting than your deployment experience.
- **Trouble staying focused.** At first, you may be "on guard" and lack focus. Adjusting to civilian life will take time.

How can you reduce the stress of the workplace?

Readjusting to the workplace is a team effort, but it starts with you.

- **Manage your stress.** Try to ease yourself back into the workplace. Set realistic goals. Make sure you take a few short breaks throughout the day.
- **Be positive.** Focus on the achievements you make each day. Do not be too hard on yourself. Remember, you are readjusting to your new setting.
- **Avoid over scheduling yourself and “taking charge.”** Try and accomplish one goal at a time. If you can, delegate some of the work load if it is too much.
- **Talk to your boss.** Tell your boss if you are feeling stressed. Your boss may help you delegate some of your duties.

Tips for Returning to Work

Be open to the challenges you will face at your workplace. Your co-workers can be a source of support during this transition.

- **Talk with co-workers.** They can help you ease back into the work routine.
- **Talk about your deployment experiences in moderation.** Most people will be interested in hearing about your experiences. Talk about what you feel comfortable with sharing. Do not feel pressured to share everything. Some experiences may take time to want to discuss.
- **Do not criticize your co-workers and/or supervisors.** Everyone does things differently. Remember to be respectful and follow your job's chain of command.

When should you get help?

Readjusting to the workplace can take 6 weeks or more. The time varies from person to person. Seek help if you are not feeling like yourself after 6 weeks.

Where can you get help?

You may have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at work. Your workplace may also have an employee resource program. Talk to your employer or supervisor. Ask for assistance at work during the adjustment period.

Know your re-employment rights!

If you performed voluntary or involuntary service you have re-employment rights.

Pre-service employer must re-employ you if:

- You gave notice to the employer that you were leaving the job for service in the uniformed services.
- The period of service did not exceed 5 years with a single employer, with some exceptions allowed for situations such as call-up during emergencies.
- You were separated from service under honorable conditions (not because of a court martial).
- You return to the civilian job in a timely manner or have submitted a timely application for re-employment.

Law coverage: The law covers nearly all employees.

Pension plan: You have the right to receive pension plan benefits that accumulated during your service.

Health plan: When you return to work, there should be no waiting period in order for you to receive the health plan that you received prior to service.

Whether or not you have work readjustment concerns, there are a variety of benefits available to service members returning home post-deployment. It is important to enroll for benefits even if you do not have a current need or problem. You must enroll with the VA in order to receive certain benefits in the future. Please call your local benefits office to find out more information.



REMEMBER...

It is normal to have mixed emotions about returning to work. Try to ease yourself back into the workplace. Set realistic goals. Keep the lines of communication open with your co-workers and boss.

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.





Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

Both men and women can experience sexual trauma during military service. Sexual trauma can lead to poor mental and physical health. This fact sheet addresses MST and how the VA can help.

What You Need to Know

Military sexual trauma (MST) includes both sexual harassment and sexual assault.

- **Sexual harassment** means unwanted sexual advances. It includes requests for sexual favors. It also includes verbal or physical comments, jokes, or gestures.
- **Sexual assault** means someone touching you or having sex with you when you did not want them to. Other words for this are rape, sexual abuse, or sexual violence.

What are some symptoms a MST victim might experience?

It is important to know that MST is something that happened. It is not a diagnosis or condition. However, after experiencing MST, you may have the following:

- Bad memories, nightmares, or trouble sleeping
- Feeling unsafe and difficulty trusting others
- Feeling anxious, depressed, angry or withdrawn from friends and family
- Issues with drugs, alcohol, or dealing with anger
- Physical health issues

How can you begin to heal from MST?

It is important to remember that MST is not your fault. It may be hard to talk about what you went through. This is often the hardest step when seeking help. Talk to someone you trust. This can be a friend, family member, clergy member, physician or counselor. It is never too late to seek help.

What can the VA do to help?

The VA has programs to help you address the effects of MST. These services include counseling and treatment at no cost. They are free to any Veteran who experienced MST during their military service. The VA covers all mental and physical health

conditions related to MST. It is not necessary for the MST to be previously recorded in your medical record. You can receive help even if MST was never reported.

You do NOT need to be service connected to receive help for MST.

Who can you contact for help at VA?

Every VA facility has an MST Coordinator who can help you find access to VA services and programs. The coordinator can connect you with a suitable counselor. The MST Coordinator for the VA Caribbean Healthcare System can be contacted at:

VA Caribbean Healthcare System
Social Work Service, D-227
10 Casia St. San Juan, Puerto Rico 00921-3201
Phone: 1 (787) 641-7582 Ext: 12331
Toll-free: 1 (800) 449-8729

You can also contact your local VA CBOC or Vet Center for help. Speak to your existing VA healthcare provider.

- St. Croix Vet Center: (340) 778-5553
- St. Thomas Vet Center: (340) 774-6674

RED FLAG

If you are currently experiencing sexual trauma, please call **9-1-1** or contact your MST Coordinator right away. The VA hotline for sexual trauma is: **1 (800) 827-1000**



REMEMBER...

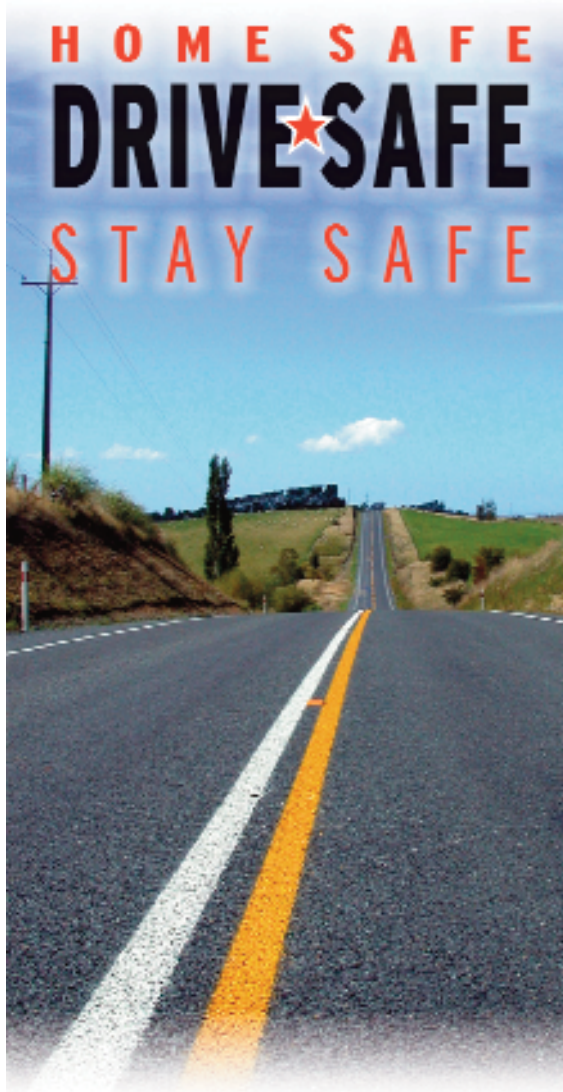
Military sexual trauma (MST) includes both sexual harassment and sexual assault. Both men and women can experience MST. Talk to someone you trust. It is never too late to seek help for MST. The VA has programs to help you address the effects of MST.

You do NOT need to be service connected to receive help.

Refer to the "Resources" section of this guide for your local Vet Center and VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics' contact information.



★★★
— VETERANS' —
SAFE DRIVING
— INITIATIVE —
— — —



 Department of
Veterans Affairs



Home safe. Drive safe. Stay safe.

www.safedriving.va.gov

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death in Veterans in the early years after returning from deployment.

Do not let that happen to you.

- Do not drink and drive.
- Do not ride with a drunk driver.
- Always wear your seat belt when you are driving in the passenger seat or in the back seat of a car.
- If you ride a motorcycle, always wear a helmet and ride sober.
- Mile for mile, your risk of a fatal crash is about 35 times higher on your motorcycle than in your car.

You are home now!

Returning to Work Post-Deployment

Going back to work as a civilian can be hard. Service members may have trouble fitting back into the workplace. As an employer or supervisor you can help make the transition easier.

What You Need to Know

Service members bring many good qualities to the workforce. They have valuable leadership and problem solving skills. They can be assets to your place of business. Most Veterans will adjust to work without problems. However, a small number of Veterans may have trouble due to:

- Family and relationship problems
- Financial problems
- Difficulty letting go of survival skills
- Coping with sadness and loss
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI)

Tips for Helping Service Members Readjust to Work

- **Educate co-workers.** Before the service member returns to work, meet with their co-workers. Explain the importance of being supportive of the service member. Remind employees not to ask sensitive questions. This includes questions about injuries or combat experiences.
- **Update the service member.** Meet with service members to discuss their job duties. Give them detailed job tasks that are manageable. Explain any new policies or staff changes. This will help them feel part of the team again.
- **Educate the returning service member.** This can include any job-related training or education requirements. This will help them feel more confident in their skills.
- **Allow for readjustment time.** Be aware that everyone is different. Some people need more time to adjust. Encourage the service member to ask for guidance and support. Make sure they take breaks throughout the day. This will help reduce excess stress.
- **Provide special accommodations.** Plan for the special needs of those who have been injured. The service member's family can help identify potential problem areas at work.

When should you seek help?

Seek help if the service member has trouble readjusting to work. This can include:

- Poor work performance
- Trouble concentrating
- Anxiety, depression, and fatigue
- Alcohol or other substance abuse problems

Visit www.americasheroesatwork.gov to find useful information for employers and supervisors. This website has:

- Common employer questions
- Fact sheets and reference guides
- Presentations and training tools
- Step-by-step Veteran hiring information

REMEMBER....

Going back to work as a civilian can be hard. Service members may have trouble fitting back into the workplace. Educate co-workers before the service member returns to work. Remind them to be respectful with any questions they ask. Encourage the service member to ask for guidance and support. Seek help if the service member has trouble adjusting to work.

Know Employment and Re-Employment Rights

As an employer you must be aware of the rights guaranteed to members of uniformed services. The law applies to every employer, including small businesses with only one employee. The following is a short summary of the rights guaranteed to employees upon their return from service.

You must re-employ a returning service member if:

- The returning employee notified you in advance that he or she was leaving the job for service in the uniformed services.
- The period of service did not exceed 5 years with a single employer, with some exceptions allowed for situations such as call-up during emergencies.
- The returning employee must have been released from service under honorable conditions (not because of a court martial).
- The returning employee must return to work in a timely manner or have submitted a timely application for re-employment.

Law coverage

The law covers nearly all employees.

Pension plan

You must give the returning employee the pension plan benefits that accumulated during his or her service.

Health plan

When the service member returns to work you must give him or her the pre-service health plan with no delay.

Hiring and firing

You are not allowed to discriminate in hiring and firing based on the employee's membership in the uniformed services.

FOR EMPLOYERS





VA Women Veterans

Veterans Affairs (VA) offers complete health care services for women Veterans.

What services are offered through VA for women?

The VA Women Veterans Health program offers many medical services to OEF/OIF/OND women Veterans who are **enrolled** for *VA Health Benefits. These services include, but are not limited to:

Primary Care Services:

- Nutrition and weight control therapy
- Help to stop smoking and substance abuse programs
- Screening and treatment for heart disease, diabetes, and cancer
- Care or treatment for common disorders such as osteoporosis and fibromyalgia
- Care or treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV and hepatitis

Reproductive Health Care:

- Birth control and family planning
- Initial evaluation for gynecologic (GYN) care with a referral to a provider if needed
- Care for menopause, sexual health, and urinary issues
- Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination
- Limited fertility services (not including in-vitro fertilization)

Referral to Mental Health Services to help with:

- Post-deployment adjustment
- Depression, anxiety, and mood disorders
- Sexual intimacy and military sexual trauma
- Anger management issues and domestic violence
- Parenting, marital problems, and caregiver/family-related stress

Pregnancy Services:

- Prenatal, delivery, and postnatal care is available for eligible women Veterans. Contact your **Women Veterans Program Manager or current VA provider for more information.

Referral to Rehabilitation Services for:

- Physical therapy and exercise therapy
- Occupational therapy
- Speech-language therapy
- Recreational therapy
- Vocational therapy

Who is eligible for VA Women Veterans Health Program?

Women Veterans are **eligible** if they:

- Served in OEF and/or OIF and/or OND **AND** Enrolled for *VA Health Benefits

Who can help me access VA healthcare?

Your **Women Veterans Program Manager can help you understand which VA services are available. They can help guide you through the VA system. You can reach the Women Veterans Program Manager at:

VA Caribbean Healthcare System
10 Casia St. San Juan, Puerto Rico 00921-3201
Phone: 1 (787) 641-7582 Ext: 31422
Fax: 1 (787) 641-4559
Toll-free: 1 (800) 449-8729

For More Information, Call Toll-free **1 (877) 222-VETS (8387)**

Monday through Friday, between the hours of 8 AM and 8 PM Eastern Standard Time
or Visit the Website at <http://www.va.gov/womenvet>

* Refer to “A Guide for Service Members: VA Medical Benefits”
for a step by step guide on how to enroll for VA Healthcare Benefits.





Feelings of Sadness & Loss

Service members go through a range of emotions post-deployment. Difficult and painful memories can linger. Feelings of sadness and loss can cloud even the happy times.

What You Need to Know

Sadness is a response to losing something important. This can be caused by the painful experiences you faced during deployment. Fellow soldiers may have been injured or died. You may feel loss over your own injuries. You may feel loss over the changes at home. It is important to work through these emotions so that healing can begin.

- **Explore your feelings.** Some emotions or feelings can be masked by another. For example, anger can mask sadness and grief. Be open about what is really bothering you.
- **Accept your feelings.** Grief and loss are a normal part of life. Talk about why you feel sad, angry, or guilty. Do not hide your emotions.
- **Allow yourself time to grieve.** Grieving is a necessary part of the healing process. Do not bury away your feelings. It will only prolong the sadness.

How can you deal with sadness in a positive way?

- **Take part in things that relax you.** Take a walk to clear your head. Listen to music. Go to the movies or out to dinner. Practice yoga or meditation. Find what works for you.
- **Stay positive.** Focus on what you can do. Accept what you cannot change. Forgive mistakes and give yourself and others a second chance.
- **Keep a diary or journal.** Some people find it helpful to write their feelings down. Explore your emotions through writing.
- **Share your feelings with others.** Talk to friends and family about what is bothering you. Find someone you can trust and ask them to listen.
- **Practice healthy habits.** Have regular medical checkups. Eat a well-balanced diet and get enough sleep. Avoid alcohol or drugs to make you feel better.

What if the sadness does not go away?

Feeling sad is a normal response to a difficult situation. We have all experienced sadness in our lives. Over time, the sadness should lift and healing should begin. When the sadness lingers, it may be a sign of depression. Below is a list of the signs and symptoms of depression. Five or more of these lasting more than 2 weeks are a warning sign of depression.

- Sadness or an “empty” mood

- Feeling guilty, worthless, hopeless or helpless
- Problems concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Appetite or weight changes
- Lack of energy or feeling tired and “slowed down”
- Problems with sleep: trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much
- Feeling restless or irritable
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities, including sex, that were once enjoyed

When should you get help?

It is important to seek help for persistent feelings of sadness and loss. Ask yourself the following questions. If you answer ‘yes’ to any of these questions, seek help.

- Do these feelings interfere with my daily life?
- Am I becoming more withdrawn from others?
- Am I physically and/or verbally aggressive?
- Am I experiencing signs of depression?
- Am I having thoughts of suicide? *

RED FLAG

Pay attention to the warning signs of depression. Seek help from your healthcare provider. Depression is treatable. Ask about medicines, talk therapy, and support groups that are available. * **If you are having suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself or others seek help right away.**



Where can you get help?

Counseling is available from your local VA Medical Center or Vet Center. Most services are given in an outpatient treatment setting. When needed, individual or group appointments can be made.

REMEMBER...

Grief and loss are a normal part of life. Working through these emotions can help healing begin. When the sadness lingers, it may be a sign of depression. Seek help from your healthcare provider. Depression is treatable. If you are having suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself or others, seek help right away.

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.



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Reconnecting with your Family and Friends Post-Deployment

Readjusting to life post-deployment can be challenging. You are a different person than you were when you left. You are coming home to family and friends who have changed as well. It will take time to rebuild these relationships.

What You Need to Know

Negative thoughts and feelings post-deployment are normal. They can also be a barrier to reconnecting with your loved ones. Below are some thoughts and feelings you may have:

- Thinking that no one understands what you went through
- Feeling resented by family and friends about your deployment
- Wondering if people are afraid of you
- Feeling bitter towards the changes around you
- Worrying that you are no longer needed at home

It is important to share how you are feeling. Allow family and friends to share their feelings as well. Learning to work through negative emotions can improve relationships.

What are ways to improve relationships?

Time apart can put a strain on any relationship. It is important to accept that things are different now. It will take time for everyone to adjust to the changes.

- **Be patient.** Try not to put too much pressure on yourself or others. Take time to get to know each other again.
- **Be sensitive to the needs of others.** Take time to understand what others are feeling. Try to understand how their lives have changed too.

- **Take time to listen and talk.** Make a special effort to reach out to people. Let others know that you missed them.
- **Know that you may miss parts of deployment.** This may include your old friends and controlled lifestyle. It may also include the fast-paced schedule of deployment. Ease slowly into your new routine.

Tips for Reconnecting with Family and Friends

- **Check yourself emotionally.** Be aware of any “extra baggage” you bring from the battlefield. It is normal to have negative feelings at times. Learning to work through these emotions can improve relationships.
- **Show interest in your family and friends.** Ask about any new hobbies. Talk about interests at school or work. Every one needs a little time with you to reconnect.
- **Expect some disagreement.** Keep a cool head. Allow others time to speak. Listen carefully to what they are saying. It takes two people working together to solve problems.
- **Remain calm when there are arguments.** Take time out and return when everyone has calmed down.

When should you get help?

It may take about 6 weeks to adjust to being home. Talk to a professional if you have ongoing problems. Problems include extreme anger, intense arguing, and violent thoughts and actions. Drugs and alcohol are never the answer to problems.

REMEMBER...

Negative thoughts and feelings post-deployment are normal. Learning to work through these emotions can improve relationships. It is important to accept that things are different now. It will take time for everyone to adjust to the changes. If problems are intense or last for more than 6 weeks, seek help.

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.





Reconnecting with your Spouse Post-Deployment

Couples need time to readjust post-deployment. It is important to understand that you both have changed. During this time you will be trying to find what is “normal.” Below is a guide to help you reconnect with your spouse.

What You Need to Know

Expect about six weeks to adjust to each other again. Knowing what to expect can make this period easier. Below are phases that many people go through:

- **Pre-entry** occurs in the days before you come home. You may be excited as you prepare for the homecoming.
- **Reunion** is often called the "honeymoon" phase. This lasts for the first days after you return. This is a time to relax and celebrate your homecoming.
- **Disruption** occurs when problems are noticed. You may realize that your relationship has changed. You may feel as if nothing is the same.
- **Communication** is the phase of readjusting to new roles and routines. It is a time to reconnect with your spouse.
- **Normalcy** is the return to a routine. You and your spouse must learn to accept changes. There will still be problems. Over time, the relationship with your spouse will grow stronger.

What are some common feelings when returning home?

- **Feeling awkward with your spouse.** You may have trouble talking and being intimate.
- **Difficulty resuming previous family roles.** You may find changes in routine and who makes family decisions. You may resent how well your spouse has managed the home.
- **Distrust of your spouse.** You may worry if your spouse was faithful.
- **Resentment for the work you had to do.** You may both feel you “had it worst.”
- **Jealousy about losing your position in the family.** You may feel your kids prefer the “other” parent.

What are ways to make the homecoming less stressful?

- **Expect everything to feel a little awkward at first.** It is a normal part of coming home post-deployment.
- **Be understanding and forgiving.** Your homecoming may not match your plans and hopes.
- **Expect changes in your spouse.** You have changed some, too. Remember that change often means growth.
- **Look at homecoming as an opportunity.** This is your chance to address things about your relationship. Maybe there were things that you or your spouse did not like before. Or, you can build on the love you have always shared.

What are ways to improve your relationship?

- **Do not rush things.** Take time to know each other again. Make intimacy – not sex – the focus of your reunion. Sex can resume when you and your spouse are ready. Intimacy takes longer to re-establish.
- **Be sensitive to your spouse’s needs.** Men tend to focus on the physical relationship. Women tend to focus on verbal communication and affection.
- **Communicate.** Talking about your wartime experiences and feelings may increase understanding.
- **Avoid power struggles.** Take note of the many tasks your spouse did while you were gone. Take time to ease back into your routine. This covers everything from parenting to finances.
- **Do not try to change your financial affairs if they are in order.** Chances are your spouse has been handling them fine.

Tips for Reconnecting with Your Spouse

- **Check yourself emotionally.** Be aware of any “extra baggage” you bring from the battlefield. These can be mood swings or new bad habits. Encourage your partner to do the same. Try to react positively if your spouse points out changes in your behavior.
- **Spend time with your spouse.** If possible, delay reunions with relatives and friends. Leave time for normal routines to become established at home.
- **Expect some anger and insecurity along with love and happiness.** These feelings are normal and need to be expressed.
- **Get a “second opinion” if your relationship is strained.** All couples can benefit from observations of another person. You have many people to choose from. Talk with your faith leader, a chaplain, a family counselor or a mental health professional.

When should you get help?

Reconnecting with your spouse takes time. Problems that continue over several months may become negative habits and lead to divorce. Drinking, using drugs, and being physically abusive are warning signs of trouble. Withdrawing from others and losing your temper are other danger signals. If you are using these harmful ways to cope, seek help.

REMEMBER...

Adapting to family life post-deployment takes time. Expect about 6 weeks to adjust to each other again. It is important to understand that you both have changed. Remember that change often means growth. Get a “second opinion” if your relationship is strained. All couples can benefit from observations of another person.

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.





Reconnecting with your Children Post-Deployment

Children are especially sensitive to changes in the family post-deployment. Allow time for your children to get used to your return home. Ask for help when your return overwhelms you or your children.

What You Need to Know

A child's age affects how they cope with change. Below is a guide to help you understand how your child may be feeling.

	Possible Feelings	Possible Resulting Behaviors
PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Confusion about what they are feeling ➤ Guilt ➤ Joy or excitement ➤ Fear ➤ Anger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clinginess and attention-seeking behavior ➤ Trouble separating from parent ➤ Aggression and angry outbursts ➤ A return to younger, childish behaviors ➤ Frustration
ELEMENTARY CHILDREN	<p>Same feelings as preschool children (listed above), plus . . .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sadness ➤ Worry about redeployment of parent ➤ Worry that remaining parent will also leave ➤ Anxiety over changing roles in family ➤ Feelings of competition with returning parent (role-change) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A return to younger, childish behaviors ➤ Rapid mood swings ➤ Changes in eating and sleeping patterns ➤ Anger at both parents ➤ Attention-seeking behavior ➤ Attempts to initially split parents
ADOLESCENT TEENAGERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Anger ➤ Sadness ➤ Anxiety ➤ Fear ➤ Relief ➤ Resentment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Rebellion ➤ Problems at school ➤ General lack of interest ➤ Significant weight loss ➤ Drug or alcohol use ➤ Increased importance of friends

What are some ways to help you reconnect with your child?

Remember that change is often more stressful for children than for adults. Children have little experience coping with change. Listen to their concerns. Try to spend extra time with your children as they adjust.

- **Tell your children how much you missed them.** Let them know you are happy to see them again. It may seem like they should know this. However, hearing it from you is important.
- **Let them share how they helped while you were gone.** Praise them for helping out with family chores.
- **Allow children to express their feelings.** Children do not know what to expect from a returning parent. They may fear you will leave them again. Let them talk about their worries and fears. Do not try to force positive responses.
- **Older children usually understand deployment better than younger ones.** They may seem distant at first. This does not mean they did not miss you. Show interest in things that are important to them. This may include schoolwork or social activities.

Tips to Help You Reconnect with Your Children

- **Be patient.** This period of adjustment will last several weeks. It will take time for everyone to reconnect as a family.
- **Allow your children to slowly adjust to your return home.** Avoid power struggles with both your spouse and your children. Work with your spouse and agree on rules and discipline.
- **Enjoy how your children have grown and changed.** These are not the same children as when you left. Take time to watch and learn your children's new behaviors.
- **Be caring and firm.** You may feel guilty about being away. This does not mean you have to give in to all of their demands. Your children need loving parents who set rules and routines.

When should you get help for your children?

Ask for help if you see the following signs in your children:

- Crying and withdrawing from others
- Lack of interest in play or school. Watch for lower grades and skipping classes.

- Trouble sleeping
- Large amount of weight gain or loss
- Attempts to hurt themselves or others

When should you get help for yourself?

Get help right away if you have any of the following:

- Trouble showing warmth and love to your children
- Being overwhelmed and not able to provide safe care
- Problems controlling your anger toward your children
- Not able to stop yelling and screaming at your children
- Hurting your children physically

Where can you get help?

Talk to a trusted professional if you are having trouble. This could be a social worker, counselor, healthcare provider or clergy member. If you notice signs of stress in your children talk to a teacher or a school administrator. The school nurse, psychologist, or social worker may also be helpful. Remember that there is help through the VA or in your community.

REMEMBER...

Children are especially sensitive to changes in the family. Allow time for your children to get used to your return home. Allow children to express their feelings. Let them talk about their worries and fears. Do not try to force positive responses. Ask for help when your return overwhelms you or your children.

For more information about this topic, please refer to the Resources section at the end of the guide.

