



# SELF-HELP EXERCISE: CONNECTIONS TO A FALLEN WARRIOR

## INTRODUCTION



When we lose someone we care about – especially someone who was important to our well-being – that person can stay in our thoughts and memories well after the loss. In this way, we have an ongoing connection with the person who died. This can be haunting for some people but comforting for others. In either case, if you are struggling with healing and recovering from combat and operational loss, it will be helpful for you to think about the nature of your connection to the person and what you would like to see happen in the future.

### How do people maintain a connection to the one they lost?

- ★ Some people have the feeling that the person is still present in their lives, even if only in spirit. This may involve hearing the person's voice, seeing the person, or having the sense that the person is physically nearby.
- ★ Some people have a subtle sense of continued closeness to the person who died, as if they are carrying a part of the person with them.
- ★ Other people may maintain a connection to the person who died by keeping his or her legacy alive. This can involve telling stories about the person, adopting some of his or her values or attitudes, or trying to carry on some of his or her goals or ambitions.

If you feel a connection with a friend you have lost, it is important to consider whether this connection is helpful or harmful as you carry on with your life. You do want to maintain a connection that works for you in a positive way by providing guidance, support, and a sense of meaning and purpose in your life. What you don't want is a connection that is harmful.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**Unhealthy Connection:**  
Check for signs that the connection you have is unhealthy.



- ★ **THE PAIN YOU FEEL IS HARD TO MANAGE:** Being reminded of the loss is so painful that it causes you to feel down and gets in the way of your ability to function. This may be a sign that you need to work on your connection to make it more manageable.
- ★ **YOU CAN'T STOP THINKING ABOUT IT:** You maintain your connection to the person by thinking about it over and over again. Thinking about all the things that happened before, during, and after the death and all the things you or others could have or should have done differently. Connections based on rumination (with anger, guilt, remorse, or regret) can take over helpful thoughts and feelings. They can get in the way of



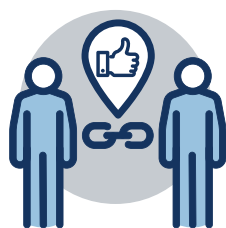
WOUNDED WARRIOR  
PROJECT

accepting the person's death and feeling the emotional pain of the loss — which, although painful, help you to grieve and move on.

- ★ **NO ONE ELSE SEEMS TO MATTER ANYMORE:** Having a connection with someone who has died can be especially destructive if this connection is so strong or so important that it overshadows your relationships with the people around you. This may make it harder for you to improve your quality of life and connect with others around you.

### Healthy Connection:

Think about the kind of connection you would like to have.



- ★ The best way to determine if your connection with the one you lost is helpful and healthy is to assess how comfortable and acceptable the connection feels to you. Does this connection help or hinder your ability to be the person you want to be?
- ★ If your continued connection makes you feel more bad than good, think about what your friend would want for you. If you stop and think about it, you might realize your friend would probably want to see you have a good life and enjoy every second you have.
- ★ Ask yourself what you would want for your friend if you had died and he or she had lived. Would you tell your friend to make the most out of his or her life?
- ★ It's important to understand that making choices about your relationship does not mean you are giving up your connection with the person you have lost. It does, however, mean facing your present life and your future after your friend's death.

The goal is not to be defined by what you did, what you saw, what others did, or how someone was lost. Several things can help with this process. These include writing a memorial about your lost friend, writing a letter to the lost warrior, or carrying out acts of service as part of your friend's legacy.

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE



Learning what kind of connection is best for you may take some time. You don't need to rush — you can return to these materials any time you need a reminder about what a healthy connection involves or to remind you to get help with developing this relationship.

Remember, the one you lost was your friend and a warrior; he or she would not want to hold you back or cause you pain.