



SELF-HELP EXERCISE: RECONNECTING WITH OTHERS

INTRODUCTION

Social supports (friends, family, romantic relationships, peers) are the most important resources for helping veterans heal and recover from combat and operational stress and trauma.



Social supports provide material and emotional support in times of need. They provide empathy, understanding, and validation of current struggles and past sacrifices that came from serving the country. They also can help with solving problems and planning for the future. Social supports are sources of fun, good feelings, and self-esteem.

Veterans sometimes struggle with relationships for a variety of reasons. They may not be confident in themselves and may feel less capable of living up to expectations. They may have problems feeling comfortable with others because they feel unsafe or anxious, or it has become awkward to share their experiences. Some veterans have problems with being too critical and easily angered because they don't cope well with demands and frustrations. Such problems create distance from important sources of social support.

The goal of this exercise is to:

- ★ Help you identify what you need from others
- ★ Address obstacles to getting your needs met
- ★ Help you to be open to receiving positive reinforcement

Interacting with others after various combat and operational experiences can be challenging for a number of reasons, including the fact that your friends and family at home don't understand.

- ★ They don't know about the military and your service experiences.
- ★ They may not be able to understand how much you relied on one another or what losing a friend has meant to you.
- ★ You feel annoyed or afraid to talk about your experiences.

If you hold back from talking with your friends and family, you might start to feel angrier, sadder, or more resentful. You will feel more disconnected and isolated.

Why is connecting or reconnecting with others important?

People who are connected with others:

- ★ Cope better with adversity
- ★ Recover from illness more quickly than those who are socially isolated
- ★ Have people available for emotional support, financial help, friendship, and help with solving various life-problems

The more social resources you have, the better prepared you will be to heal and recover from combat and operational trauma and loss.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

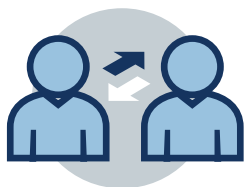
Others want to help:

RECOGNIZE THAT OTHERS WANT TO HELP, BUT THEY DON'T KNOW HOW – CUT THEM SLACK.

The people who are closest to you probably feel especially responsible for supporting you, but may feel helpless about what to do. As a result, you may hear things that aren't very helpful, such as "It'll be all right," "It'll get better," or even things that you find hurtful like, "Well, at least it's over." Even though they are well-intentioned, statements like these might suggest to you they think you should "suck it up" and move on.

People may think that way because they are scared and wish things were back to where they were in earlier times. They are being naive, but in most cases do not intend to be hurtful or harmful to you. Because it is impossible to read your mind, they don't know what you need from them. It is your responsibility to tell them what you need.

Taking it personally:



DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY AND WORK TOWARDS A HELPFUL SOLUTION.

Remind yourself that these kinds of reactions reflect other people's uneasiness. It's very important not to take others' discomfort or awkwardness personally, because chances are they simply don't know the right thing to say. They need your help – they need to know what you need. For that, you need to figure out what you need and find ways of expressing these needs in helpful ways.

Be assertive:



BE ASSERTIVE. Try to make the conversation more useful and positive by telling the person exactly what you need. You may resent having to tell people what they should do to support you, but remember that they haven't been in your shoes and can't read your mind. So take the initiative and work to break down any barriers between yourself and others, because maintaining your social resources is one of the most important things you can do for yourself.

Try things on:



TRY THINGS ON. Don't give up when you experience frustration with others you care about and who care about you. Try saying things that speak to your heart and sharing exactly what you are struggling with. If you do get rejected or if you hear hurtful things from people, then by all means you should reconsider the usefulness of that relationship. But, you don't know until you try it.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Staying connected to people requires effort. Connecting with fellow warriors may help you feel more comfortable reaching out to family members and friends. Making use of your social resources can help you come to terms with various war experiences and get a more clear meaning about the impact of these experiences. The goal is not to be defined by what you did, saw, or experienced, but rather by who you are and what you stand for.



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