



SELF-HELP EXERCISE: MANAGING TRIGGERS

INTRODUCTION

Distressing and painful memories of combat and military experiences can be triggered by different things. Here's how you can manage them:

WHAT YOU CAN DO



STEP 1: Be more aware of your triggers

- ★ Become more aware of the specific things that trigger a stress reaction.
- ★ Pay close attention to your triggers and start cataloging them.
- ★ Develop a list of situations that trigger memories – this can take some time.



STEP 2: Make a plan

To manage triggers effectively, you need to have a tool kit of strategies. Create a list of strategies that work for you so you are prepared ahead of time for when a trigger occurs. These are a few examples:

- ★ **Relaxation Exercises:** Simple ways of reducing tension and stress through deep, slow breathing or simple muscle relaxation strategies (e.g., tensing and releasing muscle groups or stretching).
- ★ **Distraction:** Focusing on something else (e.g., a friend or a pet) or doing something pleasant (e.g., humming a tune or listening to music).
- ★ **Thought Challenging:** Getting your reactions under control by examining and challenging unhelpful thoughts (e.g., reminding yourself that your reaction is about the past, not the present).
- ★ **Getting Support:** Talking to someone you trust about your feelings or experiences.
- ★ **Emotion Surfing:** Learning to ride out feelings of anxiety, sadness, or even anger by reminding yourself that the intensity of the feelings always decreases over time and can be tolerated.
- ★ **Sticking with a Routine:** Creating a consistent daily routine will provide you with some structure. Having structure will provide purpose and predictability.
- ★ **Writing Things Down:** Writing about your experiences, even if you throw the paper away afterward, can help you clarify what is bothering you and help identify solutions.



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COMBAT STRESS TRIGGERS



These are examples of specific things and situations that can trigger a stress reaction.



OBJECTS:

items associated with what happened



PLACES:

similar places where bad things happened



PEOPLE:

individuals from the Middle East, other service members, veterans



EVENTS:

driving a vehicle, attending a funeral or memorial service



SOUNDS:

fireworks, thunder, loud people



ODORS:

diesel fuel, barbecue, smoke



EMOTIONS:

sadness, anger, fear



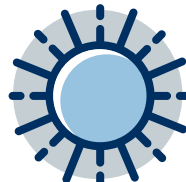
TASTES:

the flavor of the gum you were chewing when the trauma happened



BODILY SENSATIONS:

feeling tense or exhausted



WEATHER:

hot and dry days



TIME:

season of the year, anniversary of an event



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