

Veterans' Families United Foundation

Resources for
Friends & Families
of Veterans



Helpful Tips for Families/Friends in Crisis

“Intervention” for FAMILY/FRIENDS is necessary when you find yourself beginning to act or behave in unusual or unhealthy ways to COPE with the veteran’s problem. This can include your own withdrawal, fear, depression, and isolation or anything that is getting progressively worse and is affecting you and/or your family.

One of the most important things to remember is that these problems will not go away on their own. Readjustment problems require that the veteran and family member learn NEW skills to cope. Doing nothing and hoping things will just “get better” might feel like the most appealing idea, but the reality is that it will take time and work and a lot of love to deal with these problems.

Listed are some helpful tips for family and friends and may be considered learning and using “new skills”.

1. Seek help.

- If you have insurance, seek private counseling and other healing interventions. This problem does not go away by itself and you will need all the support and techniques that you can find to gain healthy coping skills. Do not feel ashamed to ask for help. It is the opposite. It takes courage to ask for help.
- Attend groups like Codependents Anonymous or AlAnon as they are offered at no cost and teach healthy coping mechanisms.
- Contact your local NAMI office. You can find the contact under www.nami.org
- If you do not have insurance, call your local VA Hospital and inquire about counseling intervention for families (Look under “health benefits” at www.va.gov for the closest VA hospital and inquire about family counseling and intervention).
- Call local churches to see if they have a Family of Veteran Support Group
- Call the VFW or American Legion to see if they are aware of Family of Soldier Support Groups or Military One Source at 1-800-342-9647 or at www.militaryonesource.com. They have up to 6 FREE and confidential counseling sessions available OVER THE PHONE (if needed) for the Veteran or the Family.
- Call your veterans military unit to see if there are family support groups.
- Visit our “Connect with Others” link on this web site.

2. Set boundaries.

- Understand that it will be your responsibility to make good judgments for yourself and your family while your veteran is impaired. If you “feel” that something is wrong with your veteran, wrong with his/her health care, wrong in the family, it is important to address it. That includes facing it and talking about it, but it also means taking action.
- If you or your veteran is not making progress with a health care professional or agency, then you have a right to ask why and a right to choose something that serves you better if you do not receive an honoring response.
- Any person, professional or agency that minimizes or invalidates what you are going through is a “red flag” that tells you that the type of care you will be getting will be the same way. You do not, nor should you, settle for any person, professional or agency that does not respond in a caring and timely manner. YOU and YOUR FAMILY and YOUR VETERAN are important and should be treated as such.

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- Recognize when others (could be co-workers, friends, other family) minimize or invalidate the seriousness of the problem or have an attitude of “real veterans should be able to suck it up and handle it”. These problems are very real and very destructive and you need people around you who understand and support you instead of question and invalidate you or your veteran.
- If your veteran is unwilling to cooperate in the healing process, you will need to set boundaries. Do NOT expect that he/she will like it or agree with it, but you will need to make a declaration of things that you need to do to take care of yourself. It is sometimes even helpful to write it down and give it to the veteran. This is not meant to “blame” the veteran, it is meant to take care of you and your family. An example may be, “roaming the house at night past 11 pm is unacceptable as it awakens everyone. One room will be designated for you to go to and the TV must be kept quiet. If you want something to eat, a small refrigerator will be put in that room or you may go out to eat, but to disturb the family by being up all night throughout the night, is unhealthy”.
- Set time spans to check boundaries, like one month. If the boundaries are not followed, make a record of it to present to the veteran when setting new boundaries. You may ask for the help of your counselor or family group when setting boundaries and for recognizing healthy ones for yourself.
- If your veteran continues to be unwilling to get help or follow boundaries, you will need to consult with your counselor or family group. Veterans don't just wake up one day and are suddenly better. It requires a lot of work and energy but is essential for you and your family's well being, and ultimately for the veteran.

3. Protect yourself.

- **Financially.** If your veteran continues to show financial instability, seek every way possible to protect yourself. The impact of a veteran's readjustment and psychological problems can be devastating financially. Many times, veterans have very poor judgment about finances. Recognize it and do what you need to do to stabilize the situation. You will need your resources. This may mean taking over finances if you are the married partner of the sick veteran OR that you obtain legal guardianship of finances if you are a parent of a single veteran.
- **Emotionally.** Seek support of others that have experienced this and do not try to do it alone. Visit our “Connect with Others” on this web site.
- **Physically.** If you ever consider yourself in physical danger, seek help immediately. Call the domestic abuse hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or 1-800-787-3224 or access the website at www.ndvh.org. This is the only option.
- **Legally.** Seek out a good attorney (call the American Bar Association for referrals) that you can call for legal advice. The Military also has a Deployment Cycle Support (DCS) that can help with family readjustment and counseling and mental health support. ([http://www4.army.mil/ocpa/read.php?story is key=182](http://www4.army.mil/ocpa/read.php?story%20is%20key%3D182))

4. Take care of yourself

- **Make sure you get rest even if your veteran cannot.** Make sure that you are able to get consistent restful sleep. This is essential to have the energy to make decisions for your veteran and your family. If the veteran is displaying behavior in which you believe you or your family are in danger WHILE sleeping, this indicates that you need very direct intervention. You need to call a counselor at military one source (these are private contracted and confidential

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counselors), the domestic abuse hotline listed above, or seek intervention from

crisis hotlines listed in your local directories. **YOU CANNOT HELP YOUR VETERAN**

IF YOU LIVE IN FEAR FROM HIM/HER. Your veteran may be seriously ill. It is always frightening to ask for help, but it is more dangerous to ignore the problem and believe it will go away on its own. **IT WILL NOT.**

If you feel safe, but cannot get to sleep because of worry and anxiety, try guided imagery CD's for sleep

www.healthjourneys.com. There are also natural herbs that can help with sleep and consult a pharmacist for direction.

If worse comes to worse, you may visit with your physician about a prescription medication.

- **Find ways to take a break.** You may feel inclined to “be there for your veteran”, but finding a balance is essential. You must make time to enjoy friends, go to the park, play with your children, etc. Everyday take time to take a healthy breather. If you do not, you will begin to isolate and withdraw just like your veteran. To stay able to help your veteran, you must help yourself first.
- **Exercise.** No one feels like exercising when they are emotionally drained and overwhelmed. Even if it just to walk around the block, getting out of the house and breathing fresh air can help. Every time you do something healthy for yourself, you are teaching that behavior to your veteran and your children. It will feel like life has stopped when dealing with a sick veteran, but it hasn't and as family members, we must go on. Find another veterans family member to walk with you, or your children, just do something physical to release the anxiety you are experiencing.
- **Eat well.** Mental and physical exhaustion are common when dealing with a sick veteran. It will be a first response to grab a bag of potato chips or cookies or any other comfort foods. Again, **YOU** will be a key in wellness and it must start with you. One way to avoid unhealthy foods is to try to find fast, healthy finger foods for home and the car. Pretzels, trail mix, granola bars, dried fruit can give you and/or your children the boost they need while keeping your mind and body healthy.
- **Simplify.** Caring for a Veteran that is having readjustment, psychological or medical challenges can be a full time job. It is a good idea to do what you can to simplify your life. Get rid of extra obligations and commitments and things and errands so that you can conserve your energy for your own well-being and to support your Veteran to recovery.
- **Get help.** Whether you go to Support Groups, Church, counseling, etc., it is essential that you have time to process the changes and to consider options for healing for you and your family.

Finding a balance during trying times is difficult. Even if it is attempting only one or two things that encourage self-care and connection with others that you love, that is helpful. Be gentle with yourself and remember there is hope.

NOTE: VFU does not guarantee results or outcome of the information provided in any of its materials.

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