Dear Military-Connected Caregiver:

At Blue Star Families, we strengthen military families by connecting communities and fostering leadership. We aim to increase awareness and promote healthier families, ultimately creating a more sustainable military and a stronger America. BSF serves military families, including service members and veterans, military spouses, military children, military parents, military siblings, and other extended military family members.

Our new Blue Star Cares Initiative aims to help military-connected caregivers address some of the complex challenges associated with being a caregiver of a wounded warrior. Blue Star Cares was created by caregivers for caregivers — like you.

The program uses innovative approaches to educate military-connected caregivers and enhance their skills. By going through the program, you will improve your ability to navigate difficult situations and conversations, reduce your stress, and enhance your relationships with the important people in your life. By using this program, you’re not only helping improve your own skills and enhance your life, but also helping improve your wounded warrior’s quality of life.

TARGET. The toolkit materials are designed for military-connected caregivers who have had minimal training in the past related to caregiving. However, the toolkit is applicable to all caregivers. These materials are designed to be readily used by caregivers and trainers in a variety of settings, such as at-home personal study, training programs, academic study, and integrated with other educational materials.

FOCUS. Although caregiving occurs in both civilian and military populations, this toolkit focuses on the unique features associated with the military. Service members are exposed to many physical and psychological challenges that can affect their ability to care for themselves and influence their relationship with the caregiver, particularly if the caregiver is a spouse or partner. Although this toolkit does not provide comprehensive training related to physical and psychological injuries among wounded warriors, it aims to increase your awareness and knowledge of these issues and provides resources so that you can be better prepared to address the challenges that you may experience as a caregiver.

HOW THE TOOLKIT HELPS YOU (LEARNING OBJECTIVES). Using this toolkit, you should be able to:

• Recognize salient issues related to serving as a military-connected caregiver.
• Identify communication strategies for talking with your social network about caregiving.
• Recognize problem-solving strategies for addressing challenges that may arise as a military-connected caregiver.

• Connect with resources that are available to you as a military-connected caregiver.

• Recognize the need for policy change in caregiving and ways of being informed about upcoming policy changes.

COMPONENTS. This toolkit includes the following main components:

• Research Overview. A brief research-based background regarding the issues.

• Problem-Solving Strategies. An overview of problem-solving techniques and strategies for navigating challenges.

• Self-Care Resources and Activities. Suggestions of ways to reduce stress and enhance your quality of life.

• Communication Strategies. An introduction to discussing the challenges of being a caregiver with professionals, engaging with other caregivers, and interacting with loved ones.

• Navigating Difficult Behaviors. An overview of difficult behaviors and how to address them appropriately.

• Secondary Trauma. A summary of secondary trauma, signs and symptoms, and why caregivers are at risk.

• Avatar Interaction. An avatar-based scenario that allows you to engage in a therapeutic activity with supporting materials for background and discussion and develop communication and problem-solving strategies.

• Resources and References. Additional resources for working as a caregiver, connecting with others, references used to compile the toolkit, and suggested resources and further reading.

The Blue Star Cares Initiative was developed through a generous grant provided by the United Health Foundation. Expert guidance and advice in developing the toolkit was provided by senior representatives from the Military Veteran Caregiver Network, Rosalynn Carter Institute, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, and University of Southern California Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families. Content in this toolkit was informed by many military-connected caregivers of wounded warriors; through their dedication and efforts, we are able to provide this valuable resource.

For additional information about this project, please visit https://bluestarfam.org/resources/family-life/blue-star-caregivers/blue-star-cares/.

Sincerely,

Sherrie L. Wilcox, PhD, CHES
Senior Research Advisor
Principal Investigator, Blue Star Cares
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Blue Star Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mission &amp; Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Blue Star Cares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Let's Get to Know Each Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Research Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Risks &amp; Protective Factors for Military-Connected Caregivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Training Implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Navigating Problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Navigating Problems: How Do You Solve Problems?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Types of Problem Solvers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know How You Navigate Problems to Enhance Your Problem-Solving Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Navigating Problems: Regulating Your Emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Overview of Stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Stressed Are You?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
But, Why Does Your Stress Level Matter?

Emotional Regulation

What is a Difficult Situation You Have Experienced While a Caregiver?

Cycles of Emotion

Breaking the Cycle

Where Do We Begin?

27 Cool Your Mind and Body While Navigating Problems:

Stop. Slow Down. Think. Act. Technique Overview

29 Navigating Problems: “Painful Problem Solving”

Step 1: Define the Situation

Step 2: Set Realistic Goals

Step 3: Generate Possible Solutions

Step 4: General More Alternative Solutions

Step 5: Decide Which Options are Best

Step 6: Create an Action Plan

Step 7: Carry Out the Action Plan

Step 8: Monitor your Progress

Step 9: Evaluate the Situation

Step 10: Use This Information for the Future

Seek Professional Help When Needed

Planning Ahead

40 Self-Care Resources & Activities

40 Practicing Self-Care

41 Why is YOUR Health So Important?

Healthy Eating Fast Facts

Physical Activity Fact Facts

Healthy Sleep Fast Facts

Prevent Back Injuries

Seek Preventive Health Services for Yourself

Get Some Respite

Relaxation Techniques

53 Communicating with Others

53 Using “Motivational Interviewing” Skills To Communication Better

The Five Principles of MI
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- But, Why is This Important for You?
- A Deeper Look at the Five Principles of MI
- **57** An Introduction to Communicating with Professionals
- **59** Difficult Behaviors
- **60** Behavioral Factors to Consider
- **61** Addressing Difficult Behaviors
- **65** Secondary Trauma
- **67** Signs and Symptoms of Secondary Trauma
- **68** Why Caregivers are at Risk of Secondary Trauma
- **71** Why Use An Avatar?
- **71** The Benefits of Avatars – Virtual Humans
- **73** Avatar Interaction
- **75** Becoming a Champion for Change
- **75** How to Engage in Policy Change
  - On the Local Level
  - On the National Level
81 Resources & References

81 Resources

Locating a Professional

Informational and Instructional Videos

Organizations for Information and Continuing Education

Caregiver Resources & Materials

Local Resources in San Diego

Local Resources in San Antonio

Local Resources in Washington, DC Metro Area

Other Caregiver Training Programs

91 Toolkit References and Suggested Reading

93 Acknowledgements

94 Project Team

94 Subject Matter Experts

94 Caregiver Community Team

94 Avatar Interaction Team

95 References

97 New Contacts
In April 2009, a group of military spouses came together across the country, using social media tools, with the goal of making a difference in the lives of all military families. The group determined that to be successful in addressing the most pressing challenges and concerns of those living the military life, they needed real data. Since 2009, Blue Star Families has executed an annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey, the results of which not only shape our own organizational initiatives, but are regularly cited and adopted by lawmakers, policy makers, the media, and other military and veteran service organizations.
MISSION & VISION

Our mission is to strengthen military families and connect America to the military.

We aim to engage military families and gather perspectives on all aspects of military life. Through outreach with national and local organizations, civilian communities, and government entities, we seek to educate the nation to promote healthier families, aid in our military readiness, and contribute to our country’s strength.

Blue Star Families is a bridge between military families, the shapers of policy affecting military life, and our nation at large. Through outreach to our government leaders and local civilian communities, we strive to share the unique experiences of our military lifestyle and the pride we feel in our families’ service.

By engaging our members and their families, we are able to gain insight on all aspects of military life. We use this knowledge base as a voice for military families to inform policy shapers and support families, like ours, that have the honor of serving our country. As a member of a military family, your voice is an important part of Blue Star Families.
BLUE STAR CARES

OVERVIEW

In 2014, our annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey found that approximately 30% of military family members indicated having caregiver responsibilities. These numbers have climbed to more than 37% in just 2 years. With advances in battlefield medicine and technology, more warriors survive war and are able to return home. However, this translates to wounded warriors returning home with physical and psychological injuries that may require care from a caregiver.

Our military-connected caregivers are often the spouses of the wounded warrior and have had little time to prepare to become a caregiver. Although military-connected caregivers have found their caregiving experience to be fulfilling, nearly half of them also report stressful or extremely stressful emotional stress from being a caregiver.

How much emotional stress would you say that caring for the person is for you?

- Extremely stressful: 11%
- Not at all stressful: 16%
- Not too stressful: 37%
- Stressful: 36%
This is where **BLUE STAR CARES** comes into play.

The overarching aim of Blue Star Cares is to provide a continuum of care to improve caregiver quality of life, which will enhance their wounded warrior’s recovery from injuries, improve his or her quality of life, and help to reduce costs of care. With this aim in mind, the goals of this project are to:

- Engage military-connected caregivers throughout the project with a community-based approach to increase awareness, usefulness, and connectedness;
- Improve knowledge, confidence, and skills related to caregiving:
  - Enhance post-training interaction and social support through continued connectedness within a community of caregivers; and
  - Improve caregiver and wounded warrior health and quality of life.

This Military-Connected Caregiver toolkit will provide you with basic knowledge needed to enhance your social relationships, improve your physical and mental health, and enhance your wounded warrior’s quality of life.
LET’S GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER

“Have you noticed that you feel better around some people more than others? You smile more in their presence and afterward feel a little lighter, a bit more cheerful? I think of those people as ‘pursuers of hope.’ They help me to know that beyond every mountain I face there is a path ... even if I can’t see it from the valley.”

—Steve Goodier

ACTIVITY

Review the list of questions in front of you.

For individuals: For fun, pick out three of the questions below and write down the answers. Be creative and have fun!

For groups: Pick out three questions that you would like to ask the person next to you. Discuss questions with your partner. Be creative!
FUNNY ICEBREAKER QUESTIONS

1. If you could teach any grade or subject, which would you teach?
2. What color is your toothbrush?
3. If you could be any animal, which would you pick? Why?
4. What is one thing that you would put on your "bucket" list?
5. Who is your favorite superhero? Why?
6. Who do you admire the most in life?
7. What is your favorite activity for the summer?
8. If a movie was made of your life, what would be the genre and who would play your character?
9. If you could be any flavor of ice cream, what ice cream flavor would you pick? Why?
10. Who is your favorite cartoon character? Why?
11. If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go? Why?
12. What is your dream job?
13. Which kind of person are you: morning or night?
14. What is your favorite hobby?
15. What one word describes your ability to use computers?
16. What is the strangest thing you have ever eaten?
17. What is your favorite thing about your family?
18. What is one of your weird quirks?
19. What three words describe yourself?
20. If you could trade lives with anyone for a day, whom would you pick? Why?
21. If you could talk in your sleep, what would you say out loud?
22. What is the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning?
23. What is your favorite movie quote?
24. What would you do on Mars for fun?
25. If you could get yourself anything, what would you choose?
26. What word would you add to the dictionary and what would it mean?
27. What would you do with your "15 minutes of fame"?
28. If you could become invisible, where would you go?
29. What is the one thing that you currently own, but wish that you didn’t own?
30. What is the name of your favorite pet?
INTRODUCTION

The number of people living longer with chronic conditions is growing. In military populations, many wounded warriors experience debilitating physical or psychological injuries or both that leave them needing long-term and often life-long care at an early age.¹

There are two broad categories of caregivers: informal caregivers and formal caregivers.²

Informal, or lay, caregivers are defined as unpaid individuals (e.g., spouses, partners, family members, friends, or volunteers) involved in assisting others with activities of daily living or medical tasks or both.

Formal caregivers are paid and may deliver care in the client’s home or care settings (e.g., day care, residential care facility). The care provided by informal caregivers is as important as care from formal caregivers.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

This toolkit aims to provide you with basic knowledge needed to enhance your social relationships, help you better navigate problems, improve your physical and mental health, and help you enhance your wounded warrior’s quality of life. We hope you can use this information to be better prepared to address the challenges that you may experience as a caregiver. This section provides a research overview of the strengths and challenges that military-connected caregivers experience, risk and protective factors, barriers to seeking help, and implications for training.
However, informal caregiving, especially when the caregiver is a spouse or partner, can have implications for the dynamics of the marital relationship and with important people in the lives of both the wounded warrior and the caregiver. Most of the available research on caregivers has focused on informal, civilian caregivers, with little emphasis on those caring for wounded warriors.

This toolkit is focused on informal caregivers and is primarily focused on post-9/11 military spouses and partners who care for their wounded warrior spouse or partner, who are referred to as military-connected caregivers throughout this toolkit.

The number of military-connected caregivers has been growing over the past several years. Although the exact number of military-connected caregivers is unknown, there are an estimated 5.5 million military-connected caregivers in the United States, with between 275,000 and more than 1 million Americans who are caring or have cared for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

The 2010 Caregiver of Veterans Study funded by the United Health Foundation indicated that the overwhelming majority of military-connected caregivers are women, most of whom are caring for their veteran husband. More recent research found that military-connected caregivers tend to be younger (40% between the ages of 18 and 30), female with dependent-aged children, caring for a younger individual with a mental health or substance use condition, non-White, a military veteran, employed, and not connected to a support network. Given the young age of both caregivers and care recipients, the caregiving experience may last for decades and may also include the additional responsibility of raising children. Taking care of young children, in addition to caring for a wounded warrior, is extremely challenging and can be complicated if a caregiver does not have a support network to help with activities or provide other relief.

Military-connected caregivers perform many different roles, including health assistance, case management, mental and emotional support, and legal and financial roles. Care provided by military-connected caregivers promotes faster recovery for their wounded warrior, due partly to the psychological benefit of being at home versus in an institution. Moreover, care provided at home instead of an institution can help save millions of dollars in health care costs. Unfortunately, much of the cost savings provided through caregivers are absorbed by the caregiver’s social, legal, and economic costs, and costs associated with health problems that caregivers report from being a caregiver.

Recent research on post-9/11 caregivers has tended to focus on helping the care recipient cope with emotional and behavioral challenges. However, in addition to the emotional and behavioral challenges, caregivers can experience physical and social challenges. Research indicates that the majority of caregivers have reported that their own health has worsened because of caregiving, with the majority of problems related to sleep, stress, pain, depression, headaches, and weight gain or loss. Although the majority of early research has focused on civilian caregivers, these problems are also seen in military-connected caregivers.
Caregivers can be thought of as helping professionals, like social workers, nurses, and psychologists. However, in many cases, military-connected caregivers have not received formal clinical training and are often unexpectedly taking on the role of caring for their wounded warrior.

Military-connected caregivers often report more mental and physical health problems than the overall adult caregiver population. Recent research has found that many military-connected caregivers report high emotional stress (68%) and high physical strain (40%) compared to caregivers of adults nationally (31% and 14%, respectively). Moreover, many military-connected caregivers report increased stress or anxiety (88%), sleep deprivation (77%), and reduced healthy behaviors (60%).

Part of this challenge is a lack of adequate and accessible training for military-connected caregivers. Although a lack of training can make the caregiving experience challenging, the caregiving experience itself is hard work, and even with training, can be very difficult. Providing training to caregivers can, however, help reduce the burden and provide strategies to make the experience easier.

In most cases, military-connected caregivers are unprepared to become a caregiver – their service member may suddenly become injured during service (physically or psychologically) and require care. Although resources are available to military-connected caregivers, it can be difficult to navigate the maze of resources, policies, and opportunities. Thus, military-connected caregivers often have very little, if any, time to prepare to become a caregiver, and few widely accessible and comprehensive training programs exist that can help reduce the burden of caregiving.

Moreover, social support from other military-connected caregivers is important, but difficult to find. The 2014 Annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey found that 45% of military-connected caregivers reported feeling isolated. Isolation in caregivers is also common in civilian caregivers. Although military-connected caregivers can meet other caregivers at various trainings, the continuity of support and care is often lacking beyond the training. In addition to isolation from family and friends, caregivers may experience a disconnect from their wounded warrior partner. In some cases, caregivers who are caring for a spouse or partner wounded warrior may experience decreased intimacy or sexual satisfaction.
TRAINING IMPLICATIONS

This is the first known study of its kind to use avatar-based technology and a continuity and community of care approach to address the needs of military-connected caregivers. The Blue Stars Cares project builds on the initial findings of the 2010 Caregiver of Veterans Study and incorporates avatar-based technology and building community and connectedness among military-connected caregivers. The purpose of this innovative project is to create a sustainable and interactive training (toolkit) for military-connected caregivers of wounded warriors that (a) can be implemented across military installations and (b) creates a supportive and engaged community of military-connected caregivers.

The toolkit can be used online or in-person, includes material from evidence-based research, and includes ways to enhance support from caregivers’ peers. In addition to avatar-based technology, the toolkit includes engaging and interactive trainings and self-care techniques based on problem-solving therapy. The avatar-based technology addresses (a) knowledge, confidence, and skills related to caregiving; (b) the community and connectedness of care among caregivers so that they are immersed in an engaging and supportive environment; and (c) the health and quality of life of military-connected caregivers; and wounded warriors. This program has the potential to improve the experience of care, improve the physical and mental health of military-connected caregivers, and reduce the per capita costs of care in both wounded warriors and military-connected caregivers.
SUMMARY

Being a military-connected caregiver is not easy, especially when considering that other duties are performed on top of their existing responsibilities. Military-connected caregivers provide beneficial care to the wounded warrior’s quality of life and experience of care. However, the long-term and constant care that is often provided, coupled with the lack of a strong support network and skills to address the challenges of caregiving, can make the caregiving experience more complicated and stressful. This training toolkit and accompanying avatar-based interaction aims to address some of the challenges associated with serving as a military-connected caregiver and to help our caregivers improve their own quality of life so that they can provide the best care and have a more enjoyable caregiving experience. Many other resources are available for military-connected caregivers, as presented in the Resources and References section.
The military lifestyle can be stressful for both the service member and family members. For the service member, sometimes returning home from a deployment or extended training can be a difficult transition. For family members, the return of the service member can also involve readjusting. For the family member who will take on new caregiver responsibilities, the transition can involve even more adjusting. The Blue Star Cares training toolkit can help make these transitions easier.

THIS SECTION:

- Contains a series of strategies that will teach you skills that can help you deal more successfully with the stress and problems associated with transitioning into new caregiver roles.
- Can also help you enhance your skills as you continue to move forward in your caregiver journey.
- Is not meant for addressing major emotional problems. Instead, it is a resource that helps you learn skills to better cope with challenges of caregiving.
NAVIGATING THROUGH PROBLEMS CAN HELP:

- Reduce stress that you experience
- Solve problems related to your caregiver responsibilities
- Improve your relationships with important people in your life
- Enhance your caregiver journey

COMPONENTS OF THE NAVIGATING THROUGH PROBLEMS SECTION:

Control your Emotions (Emotional Regulation)\textsuperscript{15}

- These strategies can help you relax your mind and body so that you’re better able to make decisions, solve problems, and communicate with important people in your life, including your family, friends, and peers.

Solve Problems Using a Planning Approach (Planful Problem Solving)\textsuperscript{16,17}

- This approach can help you to better deal with problems that you may face daily.

Tools and Resources

- These items can help to enhance your experience and improve your understanding of the techniques and approaches presented in this toolkit.

TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS TOOLKIT:

- Go at your own pace
- Write things down
- Practice what you’ve learned
- Be an active reader
- Track your progress
- Reward yourself
NAVIGATING PROBLEMS: HOW DO YOU SOLVE PROBLEMS?

BASIC TYPES OF PROBLEM SOLVERS

Much research has focused on types of problem solvers and how to best solve problems. The way that you solve problems is partly based on how the problem and situation makes you feel and what you think about that problem. Overall, problem solvers can be classified as generally (but not necessarily): (a) having either a more positive or negative outlook on a problem and (b) having a logical, planful, or rational versus hasty, impulsive, or avoidant style. This section will discuss different types of problem solvers.

Your Outlook on Problems: Positive, Negative, or In Between

When we are faced with challenges, there are many different ways they affect our thoughts and actions.

In some cases, we may view the challenges positively and be willing to learn from these experiences, recognize that these problems can be opportunities for change and improvement, and understand that certain obstacles were possibly meant to happen. Those who have a more positive outlook when faced with problems tend to have more confidence in their ability to solve a problem successfully and may understand that it’s going to take time and effort to navigate a problem.

In other cases, we may view these challenges more negatively and think of problems as a threat to our well-being, a road block that we won’t be able to solve, and begin to feel overwhelmed and frustrated.

Most of us, experience a little bit of both outlooks: problems can be challenging and make us feel overwhelmed, but that also present opportunities for us to make positive changes in our life.

Style of Navigating Problem: Logical, Planful, or Rational versus Hasty, Impulsive, or Avoidant

Although our outlook on problems can tell us how problems can make us feel and influence the way we think after being faced with a problem, there are also different styles of actually navigating problems.

The logical, planful, or rational style refers to those of us who tend to use a more technical approach to solving problems. These individuals like to get information to fully identify and understand the problem, set goals, and create a few different solutions that could be used. In many cases, these individuals may weigh the positive and negative parts of the different options and approaches and use that information to determine the best approach to take. These individuals are our “thinkers” and “planners” when it comes to solving problems, and find ways to carry out their thoughtful plans while monitoring progress and the results.
The **hasty or impulsive** style refers to those of us who tend to quickly rush through problems in an attempt to deal with them and often use the first options that come to mind. Those of us who solve problems in this way do not often think through the possible consequences of our “solution” and may not always use a method that is reasonable. In some cases, we immediately react and don’t think through the problem or possible solutions or outcomes.

The **avoidant** style refers to those of us who tend to wait until the last moment or even completely avoid a problem all together – sometimes hoping that the problem will work itself out on its own. Those of us who fall in this category may try to put the responsibility for solving the problem onto someone else or shift the responsibility from ourselves for as long as possible. In these instances, we may not even be thinking about the problem and thus not thinking about possible ways to approach the problem and possible outcomes.

---

**LOGICAL, PLANFUL, OR RATIONAL**

- Take time to understand the problem
- Set goals
- List multiple solutions
- Monitor progress
- Evaluate the results

**HASTY OR IMPULSIVE**

- Rush through solving problems
- Quick to react
- Do not think through possible consequences
- Not often reasonable approach

**AVOIDANT**

- Avoid problems
- Shift blame to others
- Do not think through possible consequences
- Not often reasonable approach
KNOW HOW YOU NAVIGATE PROBLEMS TO ENHANCE YOUR PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

Once you know your problem-solving strengths and weaknesses, you will be able to focus on the areas that need improvement and practice new skills in a way that can benefit you. As you work through this toolkit, be aware of how you can develop ways to solve problems and address challenges in your life. It’ll be important to be aware of your thoughts, feelings, and actions in problematic situations. Being able to monitor your thoughts and feelings will help you to act in a more productive way. Use the space below to journal about how you typically try to solve problems and how you could improve your skills. What is your goal for this training?

Notes

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
We experience many emotions every day – both positive and negative. Emotions are a completely normal part of everyday life. Sometimes, certain challenges can make us feel overwhelmed and like we’re on a roller coaster – most people have these experiences throughout their life. Negative emotions include sadness, guilt, anger, self-blame, or low self-esteem, among others – and it’s OK to experience these feelings. The issue is that we don’t want these emotions to negatively affect our behavior and well-being.

This section is focused on helping you help yourself by managing or regulating strong emotions that may feel overwhelming. You’ll learn about how stress affects the body. You will also learn ways to help you identify how you typically respond when you’re feeling overwhelmed and how to help reduce stress in your life.

AN OVERVIEW OF STRESS

The emotions that we experience every day can affect our health, particularly from the negative emotions that lead to stress. Stress is a physiological process that our body undergoes in response to both real and perceived stressors or stressful situations. When we face stressful problems, it is common to feel overwhelmed or like our brain is overloaded.

Stress is normal and adaptive. However, our bodies were made to fight physical stressors – think of being a hunter or gatherer and having to fight off predators or survive in harsh conditions. Now, think about the stressors that we experience today, many of which are psychological – getting struck in traffic and being late for an appointment or fearing what others might think about something you’re experiencing.

When we experience stress, our body responds in a way that would ideally help us prepare to use our muscles – because, historically, if there is something that is going to threaten us, we will need to fight it or run away from it. So, in response to stress, our body creates more glucose – the energy our body needs to fuel our muscles. Our heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing rate increase in response to stress. Our bodies also begin to stop processes like digestion, growth, reproduction, and immunity. We also have a reduced sense of pain and may not realize that we’re hurt until the stressor is gone and we are calm.

These bodily responses to stress can be harmful, especially with longer-term exposure to these changes. For example, a stress hormone, cortisol, helps the body use up glucose (sugar) and fat. Although this sounds nice, high levels of cortisol in the blood from high stress are associated with weight gain, memory problems, and heart disease, among other health issues. This is mainly due to cortisol not having an outlet – it needs to be used up. Ways to use cortisol include being physically active, meditating, and being socially connected. Other ways to reduce stress are presented later.

But first, let’s determine how stressed you have felt lately.
**HOW STRESSED ARE YOU?**

**ACTIVITY**

This activity is a 10-question survey that will evaluate your stress level based upon your responses. Answer each question as accurately as possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IN THE LAST MONTH...</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
<th>ALMOST NEVER</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>FAIRLY OFTEN</th>
<th>VERY OFTEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often have you felt that things were going your way?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often have you been able to control irritations your life?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often have you felt that you were on top of things?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often have you been angered because of things that were out of your control?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COLUMN SCORE** (add numbers for each column where you have selected an answer)

**TOTAL SCORE**
Total scores below 13 are considered low stress.

Total scores of 13 are considered average.

Total scores between 14 and 19 are considered medium stress.

Total scores of 20 or higher are considered high stress.

If you are in the high stress range, consider learning new stress-reduction techniques and increasing your physical activity to at least three times per week. High psychological stress is associated with high blood pressure, higher body mass index, larger waist-to-hip ratio, higher cortisol (stress hormone) levels, suppressed immune function, decreased sleep, and increased alcohol consumption. These are all important risk factors for cardiovascular disease.
BUT, WHY DOES YOUR STRESS LEVEL MATTER?

Well, if we are facing a real, physical threat, we will be prepared to fight or run away. However, if we experience a perceived or psychological threat, then these bodily functions still happen and can lead to illness. When this response to stress is turned on over a longer period off time, our body becomes exhausted, we fatigue more easily, risk developing a form of diabetes and cardiovascular damage, and show signs of aging.

How can we help control stress? The first step that we’ll talk about in this section is emotional regulation.

EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to effectively manage and respond to an emotional experience. We often use emotional regulation strategies to cope with difficult situations on a regular basis without even thinking about it. There are, however, both positive and negative coping strategies. Healthy coping strategies can help diffuse overwhelming emotions and allow you to have a better awareness of what may have led to the emotional experience.

Although emotional regulation can help manage and respond to emotional experiences, there is also emotional dysregulation. Emotional dysregulation refers to the inability to regularly use healthy strategies to diffuse negative emotions and may involve using unhealthy emotional regulation strategies.

EXAMPLES OF COMMON EMOTIONAL REGULATION STRATEGIES

HEALTHY

- Exercising
- Writing in a journal
- Meditating
- Socializing with friends
- Going to therapy
- Sleeping enough each night
- Paying attention to your negative thoughts
- Focusing on your positive thoughts
- Noticing when you need a break – and taking it

UNHEALTHY

- Using or abusing alcohol or other substances
- Avoiding or withdrawing from difficult situations
- Being physically aggressive
- Injuring yourself or others
- Being verbally aggressive
- Thinking too much about something (ruminating)
WHAT IS A DIFFICULT SITUATION THAT YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED AS A CAREGIVER?

**ACTIVITY**

Spend a few minutes thinking about a difficult situation that you have recently experienced while you have been a caregiver.

Note that not all stress has to be associated with being a caregiver, because most people will experience stress from many different aspects of life. Stress is accumulated over time and when it piles up, it can feel overwhelming.

Write down your experience, how you felt, and what you did to overcome the stressful experience.

**For groups: Discuss the experience with your small group.**
ACTIVITY

Below is a list of different activities that may be helpful for relaxing and destressing. Although many activities are listed, not all of them may work for you.

Which relaxation exercises work for you? Which do you actively perform?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>LIKE</th>
<th>DISLIKE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep breathing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yawn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscle relaxation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count slowly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualize</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay in touch with friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read a book</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept help from friends and family when offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward yourself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set limits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See a therapist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to music that lightens your mood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay engaged in activities that are important to you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CYCLES OF EMOTION

When we experience a difficult situation, how we interpret our emotions will determine how we respond and behave. Cycles of emotion that include a negative interpretation of the situation can lead to negative emotions. This in turn may lead to unhealthy behaviors, which can create unhealthy physical reactions. This cycle can continue and become vicious or a typical go-to pattern over time unless you do something to change the cycle.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Breaking the unhealthy and negative emotional cycle, at any point in the cycle, can help to break the pattern and lead to more positive thoughts and feelings. Understanding the cycle and being able to STOP and SLOW DOWN is an initial key for working toward more positive emotional regulation. The Stop, Slow Down, Think, and Act (SSTA) Technique is a way to calm your mind and body so that you can effectively use problem-solving skills.

To do this, we need to pay attention to the way the thought-emotion-behavior relationship works for us.

This part is key – you need to do what works for you. There is not a one-size-fits-all strategy.
WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

The first step is to STOP. Stop and notice how you are feeling and what you are thinking.

Slow down and give your brain a chance to calm down. Take a break. Step away for a moment.

This gets you out of the stressful situation and will give you the time that you need to process what’s happening.

Then, think and use your planful problem-solving skills to deal with the problem. We need to pay attention to our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors and how they are working to cause us stress. We need to ask ourselves:

- What specific thoughts triggered a negative emotion for me?
- What situation is causing me stress?
- Why am I feeling this way?
- Which emotions are the hardest for me to tolerate?
- What are the emotions that I can deal with more easily?
- What behaviors do I use to calm down?
- Which works best to help me calm down?
- How do I want to be able to calm down?
- What thoughts do I have that can help me think more positively?

It’s important to have multiple ways to deal with emotions because if we have just one, it may not work across all situations. For example, although going for a walk might be a good way to help slow down, but this may not work if we are in a place where we can’t walk around, like an airplane or a car while traveling. So, having a backup method – or two or more – could be very helpful.

What happens if I am trying to change the way I think, but I can’t stop thinking about negative things?

Sometimes, it’s hard to stop thinking about something. "Rumination" refers to when we can’t stop thinking about a situation, event, emotion – we think about all of the possible outcomes, good and bad, but tend to focus on the bad parts.

Women tend to do this more than men. This behavior is also associated with depression and other negative health outcomes. It’s hard to stop, and the best way to deal with this is to try to focus on the positive aspects.

What else can we do to help regulate our emotions?

1. Take care of your physical needs – get a good night’s sleep, eat healthy, and be physically active regularly.
2. Take care of your social needs – connect with peers, talk to your family, and engage with others.
3. Do things that give you a sense of accomplishment and make you happy. We can benefit from paying more attention to the positive things in our lives. The things that make us happy and bring us joy can decrease negative emotions and increase positive emotions.
4. It’s easier to change thoughts than it is to change feelings. If you notice that you’re starting to feel upset, stop and think about the things in your mind that are making you feel this way. What is causing you to feel this way? Think about why you’re reacting so strongly and how important this will be tomorrow or next week.

Now that you have thought through the problem and identified the best solutions, the next step is to carry out your plan and see if it works.
COOL YOUR MIND AND BODY WHILE NAVIGATING PROBLEMS: S.S.T.A.

STOP. SLOW DOWN. THINK. ACT. (SSTA)
TECHNIQUE OVERVIEW

This section will present a summary of the basic approaches to navigating problems after taking time to slow your body. The technique is known as SSTA, which refers to being able to:

STOP

SLOW DOWN

THINK

ACT

The first step is to STOP when you are experiencing a situation that makes you feel stressed or are navigating a difficult conversation. During this challenge, you may first recognize that your emotions are becoming overwhelming. It's important to be able to "stop" by being mindful of the following:

- How your body is feeling – what are your physical sensations?
- How your mind is feeling – what are you thinking?
- How your emotions are feeling – what is your mood?
- How your behavior is changing – are you reacting to a situation (before thinking about it)?

When you recognize these feelings, stop, step away from the situation for a moment, and find a way to SLOW DOWN. Some ways to slow down include:

- Slowly count to three
- Take several deep breaths
- Yawn
- Visualize a stress-free place
- Meditate
- Pray
- Exercise
- Listen to music
After stopping (the negative thoughts and emotions) and slowing down (your body and mind), it is now time to THINK about what happened and how you can navigate the problem or other challenge presented to you. This can be done by:

- Define the situation – what is happening and why might it have happened?
- Set realistic goals – what do you want to accomplish, and how can things get better?
- Generate possible solutions – what are possible solutions to help solve the problem or overcome the challenge?
- Decide which options are the best and most likely to result in a positive outcome
- Create an action plan
- Carry out the action plan
- Monitor your progress as you carry out the action plan
- Be ready to evaluation the situation – did your plan work, did things change, do you feel better?

Once you have a possible solution or action plan ready, then it is time to ACT. At this point, you can return to the problem or difficult conversation and:

- Carry out your plan
- Be ready to listen with a “warm heart and cool head” – because you took the time to stop and slow down
- Take note of what works or does not work

Finally, be sure to practice! Like all other skills that you have mastered, both in and outside of your experience as a caregiver, practice is essential! Otherwise, your chances of solving your problems successfully, either by yourself or with someone close to you, will be limited!
NAVIGATING PROBLEMS: “PLANFUL PROBLEM SOLVING”

This section will describe steps of planful problem solving to help you think how to solve various problems and challenges that you may experience as a military-connected caregiver. In general, the goals of planful problem solving are to help you:

- Identify different types of stressors and how they each make you feel
- Better understand and manage negative emotions
- Become more knowledgeable about your abilities to deal with difficult life problems and other challenges you may experience
- Be more accepting of problems that are unsolvable
- Better able to plan and think about the way that you navigate and try to solve problems
- Take more time to think about how to solve a problem rather than using a “quick fix” to impulsively solve a problem
- Spend less time avoiding problems and challenges that you face

This section expands on the SSTA technique with a focus on the Think and Act pieces.

A planful problem-solving approach can help you to approach problems and other challenges in your life in a more rational, realistic, and planned way. It can help you to better achieve your goals, reduce the stress in your life, and improve your emotions.

Before you begin thinking and acting, however, you must first stop and slow down. Once you have slowed your mind and body, it’s time to start planning.

The steps in planful problem solving include:

1. Define the situation – what is happening and why might it have happened?
2. Set realistic goals – what do you want to accomplish, and how can things get better?
3. Generate possible solutions – what are possible solutions to help solve the problem or overcome the challenge?
4. Generate some alternative solutions to the problem – don’t just stop with one possible solution, think of a few different options
5. Decide which options are the best and most likely to result in a positive outcome
6. Create an action plan
7. Carry out the action plan
8. Monitor your progress as you carry out the action plan
9. Be ready to evaluation the situation – did your plan work, did things change, and do you feel better?
10. Use this information to help with future problems and challenges
These problem-solving skills can be applied to almost any of life's problems, including relationship problems, financial problems (such as limited income or unemployment), medical or physical problems (such as a service-related injured), emotional problems (such as stress or anxiety), or transitional problems (such as relocating). The challenges we experience in life, whether positive or negative, can create stress. Our caregiving responsibilities can add to this stress. However, how we react to the stress will affect the outcome. Navigating problems and using problem-solving skills can help us successfully adapt to changes and experience more positive outcomes.
STEP 1: DEFINE THE SITUATION

Once you have stopped and slowed your mind and body, the first step is to define the situation — what is happening, why might it be happening, and what is involved and contributing to the problem?

Can your problem be solved? As you’re defining the problem, consider whether your problem is something that can be solved. Some problems and challenges cannot be solved, but there might be better ways that you could deal with these problems. For example, if your wounded warrior sustained a disabling physical injury, then she or he may not be able to change the medical condition, but can find ways to handle the injury more optimistically and to make the most of current abilities. If it is a problem or challenge that can be solved, consider the things that are involved – what is contributing to the problem?

What are the facts? When facing problems, it’s easy to get distracted with what you believe is happening and not realize what is actually happening. Additionally, the problem may be viewed differently by those involved. So, it’s important to take a step back and look at the problem to separate fact from fiction. Outline all of the facts associated with the problem. By doing this, you’ll be able to better set goals later because you’ll have concrete information about what is happening. If you’re having difficulty stepping back to look at the problem, consider talking to a friend about it to see if they can help. You’ll want to have all of the key information so that you’re able to see the whole picture. Try to answer questions about: who, what, when, where, why, and how.

What should you avoid? So far, the things to do are to define your problem and list out the facts. There are, however, things that you should try to avoid.

- When you’re listing the facts, be sure to list everything – don’t ignore facts because they don’t align with how you might want to solve the problem.
- Be sure not to overgeneralize characteristics of a group or situation based on one event.
- Don’t assign too much or too little value, intensity, or significance to a problem. Problems come in different sizes and it’s important to recognize that some are smaller than others.
- Try not to blame yourself or others for the problem. It can be easy to find someone or something that may have allowed the problem to happen, but there are many different things involved. The important part is trying to find ways to prevent the problem in the future.

What makes this situation a problem for you? Part of defining the problem is to identify ways that the problem or situation even is a problem for you. Why is it challenging? Understanding this information can help you to be more mindful about the things in your life that bring you stress. Once you know what brings you stress and how you respond to these situations, you’ll be better able to overcome these challenges.

How can you overcome obstacles? Many problems have solutions. However, it’s not always easy to get to the solution – there may be roadblocks in the way. Some of the different types of obstacles that might get in the way of solving a problem include:

- **Barriers**: something blocking your path to a solution.
- **Conflicting goals**: conflicts between yourself and others or regarding two opposing goals.
- **Reduced resources**: lack of necessary skills or resources that make reaching your goal difficult.
- **The unknown or unfamiliar**: a situation you haven’t encountered before that makes it difficult to know what to do.
- **Complexity**: a situation seems very complicated and overwhelming.
- **Emotional difficulties**: your emotional reaction itself is difficult to overcome.
STEP 2: SET REALISTIC GOALS

After defining the problem, looking at the entire picture to get all of the facts, and identifying obstacles to helping you solve the problem, you can set realistic goals about solving the problem.

When setting realistic goals:

- **Make sure that they are something that you can actually achieve.**
- **Break down big problems into smaller pieces.**
- **Try to use problem-focused goals when a problem can be solved, which involve changing the nature of a situation so that it’s no longer a problem.**
- **Try to use emotion-focused goals when a problem cannot be solved, which help change your reactions to a situation or problem and require acceptance, forgiveness, stress management, or other ways of minimizing negative emotions.**
- **Think about the type of goals that will be appropriate for your problem.**

STEP 3: GENERATE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Once you have set a realistic goal that you can achieve, it’ll be time to start brainstorming possible ways to solve the problem. A few things to keep in mind when thinking about possible solutions include:

- **List several possible solutions.** Having more options to solve a problem can increase the chance of success. Be sure to write down the different ideas.
- **Do not reject ideas yet.** There will be a time for you to go through all of the options and start judging them. However, at this point, just list all of the options that come to mind.
- **Be creative.** Remember that the only thing you need is for the solution to be related to you and the problem. There is no wrong answer at this point.
- **Think about how someone else might solve the problem.** If you’re having trouble thinking of how you could solve the problem, think about how someone you admire might try to solve the problem – what would he or she do in this situation?
- **Play out the solutions in your mind.** Try to visualize yourself using each of the different solutions – what are you doing, and what do you think will happen? Think about the different ways to achieve your goal.
- **Combine different ideas.** This can help create new solutions or modify an existing solution.
STEP 4: GENERATE MORE ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

Don’t stop there! After getting some ideas together, take a break, and then come back and list a few more ideas.

STEP 5: DECIDE WHICH OPTIONS ARE BEST

Now that you have a list of possible solutions, it’s time to start judging! Compare the possible solutions against one another and think about the positive and negative consequences of each option. Decide which is best for you. As you are judging the possible solutions, ask yourself:

- Will this solution help me reach my goals?
- Will I be able to carry it out?
- What could happen to me if I choose this option? (Personal consequences can include effects on emotional, psychological, and physical well-being; time and effort required; financial well-being; and your values).
- What could happen to others in my life if I choose this option?
- What are the immediate consequences of this potential solution?
- What are the long-range effects of this solution?

After answering these questions about the different possible solutions, make a list of the pros and cons of each option. To evaluate the possible solutions, give each a rating for the following four questions (+ for positive, - for negative, 0 for neutral):

- Will this alternative reach my goal?
- Can I carry it out?
- What are the overall effects on myself, both short-term and long-term?
- What are the overall effects on others, both short-term and long-term?

Then, select the best possible solution. Many problems in life are complex and involve multiple obstacles to overcome, and identifying several solutions may be helpful.

If you’re unable to select any solution because they all have negative ratings, then it may be helpful to consider whether you correctly defined the problem or generated enough alternatives. It may also be helpful to get feedback from people you trust.

STEP 6: CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

Now that you have selected the best possible solution, it’s time to think through how you’re going to put it into action. You may also find it helpful to think about a back-up plan – what to do in case a given possible solution or sets of options does not work. This could involve selecting your second – and third-best options – or using a combination of the best options.

It’s time to write out your action plan – how are you going to carry out the plan, when will you carry out the plan? and where will you carry out the plan. Write down or map out how everything will happen.

Motivate yourself. It can be hard to get started on an action plan, even when you really want to do it. However, you can do things to increase your motivation and give you more energy and enthusiasm to get started. Sometimes it’s helpful to start doing something, even when you don’t feel energetic or enthusiastic about doing it. Sometimes getting started is the hardest part, but once you get going, it’s easier to get the ball rolling. If you find that you’re feeling stressed, anxious, or depressed about the problem and can’t get going, then consider getting additional help from family, friends, or experts.
STEP 7: CARRY OUT THE ACTION PLAN

After stepping away from the problem or challenge, calming your mind and body, defining the problem, setting realistic goals, generating possible solutions and then a few more possible solutions, weighing your options, and creating an action plan, it’s now time to carry out the plan!

Rehearse your plan. By now, you may have already been visualizing and rehearsing the plan in your imagination. Continue to practice so that you’re better prepared to take action when it is time. Sometimes, it may be helpful to practice with someone you trust – try to role-play the action plan. It may also be helpful to switch roles so that you can experience the plan from multiple points of view.

After rehearsing, put the plan into action. And as you’re going through with it, be ready to monitor your progress.

STEP 8: MONITOR YOUR PROGRESS

You are carrying out your action plan – great work! But now, you have to monitor the situation as you’re carrying it out and evaluate the consequences of the plan. When you listed positive and negative parts of the proposed solution, are you now finding those to be correct or were you a little off? Did your solution go as planned?

STEP 9: EVALUATE THE SITUATION

Did your proposed solution go as planned? Did you meet your goals? What went right and what went wrong?

Troubleshoot the outcome. If the outcome does not go according to plan or was not satisfying, you should go back and determine what went wrong. Ask yourself the following:

- Did I use the SSTA approach to help me calm down?
- Did I define the situation or problem correctly?
- Did I identify all the important obstacles to achieving my goals?
- Are my goals realistic?
- Can the problem really be changed?
- Did I generate enough alternatives?
- Did I correctly predict the pros and cons of each alternative?
- Did I accurately evaluate the alternatives?
- Did I carry out the action plan to the best of my ability?

Depending on your answers, it may be helpful to go back and re-apply some of the planful problem-solving steps. But, don’t give up! It may take repeated attempts to successfully resolve a problem. Make sure your goals are realistic and focused on something that you can change.

STEP 10: USE THIS INFORMATION FOR THE FUTURE

You survived navigating a problem! It’s time to reward yourself, whether or not you were able to successfully resolve the problem. You put in the time and effort to create a plan to help navigate a problem, and that’s worth rewarding.

You should also have notes about what happened – what worked, what didn’t work, how things made you feel and act, and what you could do for the future if faced with this problem or a similar problem.

Although this toolkit was created to help you navigate problems and challenges in your role as a caregiver, it was not meant to solve all of your problems. Sometimes, additional help may be needed.
SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP WHEN NEEDED

Although this toolkit and training program can help you to overcome many different challenges that you may experience in life, it does not solve ALL of your challenges, and sometimes you will need more help. Consider seeking additional help from a professional if you have:

- Thoughts of harming yourself or others
- Feelings of rage or anger that do not seem to go away
- Difficulty getting out of bed most mornings
- Drinking alcohol or using other substances more than usual
- Relationship problems that are getting worse
- Overwhelming anxiety or nervousness

PLANNING AHEAD

As a military-connected caregiver, you’ll probably experience many different problems and challenges. To be better at solving these problems, practice what you learned from this toolkit. Life is full of problems, but with practice, you’ll be better able to deal with them. Even in the best of times, when good things happen, stress is not far behind. Because even the most positive experiences can be stressful, you need to forecast into the future and predict what events or situations might occur. The more you’re able to practice these skills, the better you’ll be at making decisions to resolve problems, and ultimately reduce your stress and improve your health and well-being.
Notes
**ACTIVITY**

This problem-solving worksheet is like a road map that can guide you through your problem. This worksheet will walk you through the 10 steps of planful problem solving. This activity is for practice, and you can tackle an easier problem as you work through this worksheet.

**Step 1: Define the problem**

Problem:

______________________________________________________________

Describe the major obstacles to achieving your goal at this time.

______________________________________________________________

**Step 2: Set realistic goals**

Goals:

______________________________________________________________

**Steps 3 & 4: Generate possible solutions**

Think of alternative ways to achieve your goal. Be creative. List at least three solution ideas.

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

**Step 5: Decide which options are the best**

What are the major “pros” or positive consequences of these differing alternatives?

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________
What are some of the "cons" or negative consequences and alternative solutions?


Step 6: Create an action plan

Decide which alternatives are the best by choosing those with the best positive consequences and the least negative consequences. Write down your action plan.


Steps 7-10: Carry out the action plan, monitor your progress, evaluate the situation, and use the information for the future.

Carry out the plan and observe the consequences. Are you satisfied that your plan worked?
ACTIVITY - SAMPLE

Step 1: Define the problem

Problem:

Military caregiver leave is running out and I don’t have anyone to help at home.

Describe the major obstacles to achieving your goal at this time.

I won’t have anyone to help when I’m back at work, but don’t have enough leave or money to leave my job.

Step 2: Set realistic goals

Goals:

Find a way to keep my wounded warrior comfortably at home while I return to work.

Steps 3 & 4: Generate possible solutions

Think of alternative ways to achieve your goal. Be creative. List at least three solution ideas.

1. Find someone who can help care for my wounded warrior while I am working.

2. Send my wounded warrior to an adult day care center.

3. Find a job that allows me to work from home.

Step 5: Decide which options are best

What are the major “pros” or positive consequences of these differing alternatives?

Finding someone to help would allow my wounded warrior to stay at home. Sending my wounded warrior to an adult day care center would ensure appropriate care is received during the day. Working from home would allow me to continue to work and provide care.
What are some of the “cons” or negative consequences and alternative solutions?

I don’t really know anyone in the area and our families are far away. Day care facilities can be costly and I don’t feel comfortable sending my wounded warrior away. I don’t know how soon I would be able to start a new job or if I could find a work from home job that matches my experience. I could ask family to fly in and stay for a few weeks to help while I look for a more flexible job.

Step 6: Create an action plan

Decide which alternatives are the best by choosing those with the best positive consequences and the least negative consequences. Write down your action plan.

I am going to ask my wounded warrior’s parents to fly out and stay with us for a few weeks while I return to work. They can take family leave and stay for a longer period of time. I can also start to look for work-from-home opportunities and try to save as much money while they’re here.

Steps 7-10: Carry out the action plan, monitor your progress, evaluate the situation, and use the information for the future.

Carry out the plan and observe the consequences. Are you satisfied that your plan worked?

My in-laws were able to take family leave and are going to be here for the next few months to help! I’m happy that I reached out to them about my problem.
Self-care looks different for every individual. Some individuals prefer to do something on their own, whereas others desire spending time with close friends. It's important that you know what works for you and to have a few stress-reduction skills that you can use when needed.

PRACTICING SELF CARE

Self-care not only involves the activities you engage in but also your: INTEREST and PERCEPTION of self-care, connection to PEERS, and COMMUNITY, and work-life BALANCE.

As a caregiver, you need to be able to recognize the need for self-care. You are providing around-the-clock care for a loved one, and you need to ensure that you take some time for yourself. Taking time for yourself can vary from caregiver to caregiver. Some may benefit from enjoying a cup of coffee on the porch, whereas others may benefit from writing in a journal for 30 minutes. You know your own needs better than anyone else. It is up to YOU to determine the most effective method of self-care.

“Rest and self-care are so important. When you take time to replenish your spirit, it allows you to serve others from the overflow. You cannot serve from an empty vessel.”

-Eleanor Brown
WHY IS YOUR HEALTH SO IMPORTANT?

As a caregiver, it's very important to ensure that you are in good health so that you’re able to care for your wounded warrior to the best of your ability. Although the caregiving experience is fulfilling, it can be demanding – both physically and emotionally! Ensuring that you’re in good health will help you better deal with the challenges that you will experience. Ignoring your own health can put you at risk of becoming ill, which will limit your ability to care for others.

In addition to eating well, being physically active, and getting plenty of sleep, it’s also important to prevent back injuries and get preventive health services.

HEALTHY EATING FAST FACTS

- Reduce salt intake. Salt can increase blood pressure and lead to cardiovascular problems. In general, adults should aim for less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day (a teaspoon of salt). Check food labels for sodium content.
- Drink lots of water! When we are stressed, our bodies require more water. It can cleanse our body and also helps to reduce the urge to overeat.
- Eat smaller meals throughout the day, rather than three large meals.
- Don’t skip meals.
- Keep an eating journal and review with your health care provider to see if you’re eating healthfully.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FACT FACTS

- Take short walks around the block, in the yard, down the street, or wherever you can throughout the day.
- Doing housework can help keep you active!
- Listening to music while doing chores can be helpful.
- Take your wounded warrior with you, if possible.
- Five minutes of nearly any physical activity can have lasting benefits throughout the day!
- Try to walk for 20 minutes a day for three days a week before you build up to 30 minutes for five days a week.
**ACTIVITY**

What activities can you do every day to keep you moving for at least 5 minutes?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What are some of the things that prevent you from being physically active?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

**FAST FACTS ABOUT HEALTHY SLEEP**

Most healthy adults need 8 to 9 hours of sleep each night.

- In the hour before bedtime, set a relaxation routine. Listen to soothing music, don’t do any major physical activities, don’t eat large meals, spend some time by yourself, take some deep breaths.

- Taking a hot bath or shower before bed can prepare the mind and body for deep sleep. Submersing in warm water or allowing warm water to flow over your body can help you relax.

- Use a relaxing essential oil on your bed at bedtime and take time to breathe it in deeply in the moments before you fall asleep.

- Ensure that your bed is comfortable.

- Try a white noise machine or recording of nature sounds to help block out noise.

- Turn the clock away from you at night. Set alarms and try not to check the clock throughout the night.
ACTIVITY

What time do you usually go to bed?

What time do you usually wake up?

What can you do to improve your sleep?
PREVENT BACK INJURIES

During your caregiver experience, you may be involved in lifting your wounded warrior or heavy objects, or bending over frequently. Be sure to plan each lift so that you reduce your chance of an injury.

To lift correctly:

• Plot out the whole move that you’ll have to do.
• Think about whether moving the object or person is something that you can actually do on your own. If you can’t comfortably do it, then don’t do it.
• Identify any obstacles that might be in the way and then remove them.
• Bend your knees and lift with your LEGS, not with your back.
• Keep the object balanced as you lift.

It may also be helpful to wear a back brace at all times to help you to lift properly.

SEEK PREVENTIVE HEALTH SERVICES FOR YOURSELF

Although you’re probably diligent about your wounded warrior’s health care appointments, be sure to also get your own vaccinations and health screenings regularly, and receive treatment when you need it. Catching problems early can help you take care of them before they affect your health and take away from your ability to provide care to your wounded warrior.

Some screenings to consider include:

• Immunizations and vaccines (such as the annual flu shot)
• Blood pressure
• Cardiovascular screenings
• Cholesterol screenings
• Diabetes screenings
• Mammograms
• Pap test
• Pelvic exam
• Cancer screening (breast, colorectal, skin, prostate, testicular, thyroid)
GET SOME RESPITE

Respite care refers to having someone take over your caregiving duties for a short time while you take a break. Stepping away – even for a couple hours – can help relieve stress and restore your well-being. Whether you’re working with respite services from the VA, an in-home respite care program, an adult day program, an out-of-home respite, or just having help from a close family member or friend will be beneficial for your health.

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

- Breathing exercises
- Muscle relaxation
- Imagery meditation
- Mindfulness meditation
- Journaling
**BREATHING EXERCISES**

1. Sit or lie in a comfortable position.
2. Put one hand on your stomach.
3. Feel your breathing for a few breaths. Notice the rising and falling of your stomach.
4. Breathe in deeply through your nose. As you breathe in, the hand on your stomach should rise.
5. Breathe out through your mouth. Push as much air out as you can. Feel your hand on your stomach move inward.
6. Empty out as much air as you can. Then, hold your breath for 4 seconds.
8. Breathe out for a count of 8.
9. Hold your breath for 4 seconds.
10. Repeat this breathing pattern for several minutes.

**MUSCLE RELAXATION**

1. Lie down in a comfortable position with your arms to your side and your legs straight.
2. Start breathing in and out deeply for about a minute.
3. Concentrate on each body part, one at a time. Start with your toes.
4. Tense each set of muscles as tightly as you can and hold for 10 seconds. Then release them and completely relax. Curl your toes, hold, and then release.
   - Bend your ankles, pointing your toes upward toward your knees, hold, and release.
   - Force your legs straight, tightening your thighs and leg muscles. Hold and release.
   - Notice how relaxed your lower body feels.
   - Tighten your buttocks. Hold and release.
   - Tighten your stomach muscles, hold, and release.
   - Tighten your lower back. Hold and release.
   - Make fists. Clench them tightly. Hold and release.
   - Force your arms straight by making them unbendable, tightening all of your arm muscles. Hold and release.
   - Raise your shoulders up toward your ears. Hold and release.
   - Touch your chin to your chest as tightly as you can. Hold and release.
   - Raise your eyebrows as high as you can. Hold and release.
   - Scrunch your face tightly. Hold and release.
   - Notice how your entire body is feeling very relaxed.
5. Notice how heavy your body feels.
6. Continue breathing in and out deeply.
**IMAGERY MEDITATION**

1. Comfortably sit or lie down so that you can fully relax.


3. As you calm down and relax, begin to imagine yourself in your special place.

4. Use your imagination to block out other thoughts. Allow your mind to quiet. Concentrate on the details of the place you’re imagining – your place.
   - If you imagine a sky, what does it look like? Are there clouds? Are birds flying through the sky? What color is the sky? Is it sunrise, sunset, mid-day? Where is the sun?
   - What’s near you? If there are flowers, what colors and types? Are they in bunches or vines? Are birds singing? Is there water that you can hear? Are you on sand, grass, leaves?

5. Each time a thought about something else intrudes, just let it go and concentrate on your special place.


7. Try to stay with the thought of the imagined place for 10 to 20 minutes.

**MINDFULNESS MEDITATION**

1. Sit in a chair with your feet flat on the floor, hands resting in your lap, and posture upright, but relaxed.

2. Close your eyes softly, if you’re comfortable doing so. Or, try to gaze ahead of you.

3. Your head, heart, and stomach should be stacked above one other. Perhaps you are noticing the pull of gravity in your jaw or shoulders or the feeling of your feet on the floor.

4. Bring your attention to your breath. Notice it as you breathe in and breathe out. Don’t force the breath – just notice it as it enters or leaves your body. Perhaps focus on the sensation in your nostrils as you breathe. Or focus on the rise and fall in your stomach.

5. Place your hands on your stomach for a few breaths to feel the movements as you breathe in and out. Continue to focus on your breathing.

6. You might start to notice that your mind is having difficulty staying with your breath. Maybe you’re thinking about something or noticing a feeling of boredom or restlessness. This is normal. The mind naturally jumps around like monkeys from one limb or a tree to another. The more we try to rein them in, the more they will jump around.

7. See if you can just notice where your mind has gone without judging yourself. Perhaps when you notice that you are no longer focused on your deep breathing, you can gently bring your attention back to your breath.

8. You can do this each time you are able to notice your attention has wandered from your breath.

9. Sit here for a while longer or keep practicing focus on your breathing.

10. After 5 minutes, gently open your eyes when you’re ready.
JOURNALING

Use the following prompts to help you get started with journal.

"I feel..."

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

"Today, I want..."

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

"If I am honest with myself, I am..."

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

"My thoughts about caregiving:"

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

"How I want to care for myself:"

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________
ACTIVITY

Self-care looks different for every individual. Let's take some time to identify your self-care needs.

How often do you take time for yourself? This does not have to be hours: it can be as little as 5 minutes.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

When you take time for yourself, what do you do? List as many activities as possible.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What are some things you wish you had additional time for?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What are some resources that would be beneficial in accomplishing your self-care needs?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
ACTIVITY

VISUAL IMAGERY (Your trainer will read the following aloud)

Close your eyes.

See in your mind’s eye a beautiful beach.

The sun is shining warmly, the breeze coming from the ocean is soft and warm, palm trees are overhead, and a few seagulls circle about.

Imagine walking barefoot in the warm sand; feel your feet sink in the sand with each step.

Walk toward the water’s edge and let the water roll over your feet. Jump in the water; it is warm, gentle, and very refreshing.

Come out of the water and walk to your big beach towel, lie down, and relax. Rest for a while in all the peace and beauty surrounding you. Imagine how it looks, how it sounds, how it smells.

Breathe in deeply the warm ocean air; stay as long as you like.

When you are ready to leave, go to the edge of the water and throw in anything that has been bothering you, anything you wish to be rid of in your life, anything you are feeling sad or angry about, anything you worry about (such as problems at home, violence in your neighborhood, bullies, the death of a loved one, or issues with friends).

Picture it as a big rock, a chain, a heavy bag over your shoulders, or any image that helps you see it as undesirable. Throw it in the ocean as far as you can. Watch it sink and get taken by the waves.

When your visit is done, be thankful for the release of the burden, the problem, the worry; then walk peacefully back through the warm sand and take a rest on your beach towel.

Regroup and discuss the following:

• Where did your visualization take you?
• Do you feel more calm or relaxed after going through this exercise?
• What did you see, hear, feel, and smell during your visualization? Did anything in particular stand out? What was it like throwing your burdens into the water?
• Is this technique or exercise something you might do in the future to calm down, relax and reduce your stress?
This section focuses on improving communication strategies and helping you to navigate difficult conversations, whether it is with your wounded warrior, caregiver peers, professionals, or other important people in your life.

USING MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING SKILLS TO COMMUNICATION BETTER

Various communication techniques can help you to communicate better with others. This section presents a brief summary of a method of helping others overcoming mixed feelings that keep people from making positive changes in their lives – motivational interviewing (MI). This technique is often used by many health care professionals, but can also be used in your everyday life to better understand others, communicate better, and help others change.

THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF MI

1. Express understanding and share the feelings of the other person through paraphrasing their ideas (expressing empathy)

2. Adjust to their resistance instead of opposing them (go with the flow)

3. Define the disconnect in what they want to do and their current behavior (develop discrepancy)

4. Avoid argument and confrontation

5. Support their ability to achieve a goal and their optimism (support self-efficacy)
BUT, WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT FOR YOU?

Stress can come from many different sources. Being able to effectively communicate with others, including professionals, those for whom you’re providing care, your military-connected caregiver peers, and other important people in your life, can help relieve some of these stressors. In many cases, caregivers tend to overburden themselves and take on too much at a time. Being able to ask for help from others is an important skill to help reduce the burden on yourself. This is also a technique that you can use when speaking with your peers about the challenges that they are experiencing. Not only do we want them to be able to help us, but we want to be able to help them. Part of this involves being able to listen to them and help them on their problem-solving journey.

The five principles of MI are discussed in more detail to help you to better navigate difficult conversations with others and be able to ask for help.
A DEEPER LOOK AT THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF MI

Expressing empathy. Empathy refers to being able to understand how someone else is feeling. It is different than sympathy, which refers to experiencing similar feelings as the other person. A key part of communication is being able to understand the other person’s meaning through expressing empathy by reflective listening. In reflective listening, you pay close attention to what the other person is saying and generate hypotheses about the meaning of those statements. It allows you, as the listener, to be supportive and knowledgeable about the issue and create a safe and open environment for discussion. It also allows you to view the world through their eyes and understand how they may be thinking and feeling.

EXAMPLES:
- “It sounds like...”
- “What I hear your saying is that...”
- “So, on one hand it sounds like... And, on the other...”
- “It seems as if...”
- “It feels as though...”

Going with the flow. When you’re trying to help someone to solve their own problems or encourage them to help you with your problems, it’s not always going to be easy. It’s often easy to play “devil’s advocate” or provide a “yes, but...” answer to their suggestions. However, this principle, instead, encourages you to go with the flow – let them develop their own solution, but with your empathetic guidance.

EXAMPLES:
- “What would your life be like if you...?”
- “On one hand... and, on the other... What do you think is causing...?”
- “So, it sounds like... How will that help...?”

Developing discrepancy. Discrepancy refers to thinking through and identifying differences among thoughts, ideas, and facts. Although it’s important to express empathy and go with the flow, it’s also important to help others realize the mismatch between where they are and where they want to be. When the other person recognizes that their current actions place them in conflict with their values or interfere with the accomplishment of the goals they have identified, they are more likely to increase their motivation to make life changes. Part of what you can do is to help them become aware of what they are doing now and how it can potentially lead them away from their goals.

EXAMPLES:
- “If you changed, how would it be different than it is today?”
- “How would you like things to turn out in a year from today?”
- “What are some of the good things about...?”
- “What are some of the things that you’d like to change about...?”
Avoiding argument and confrontation. Argument and confrontation refer to an angry exchange of views that don't match one another – this is something that you want to avoid. Throughout this process, it's important to avoid conflict, which may lead to defensiveness – the feeling of having to protect thoughts and feelings to avoid challenges. Although it may be tempting to argue for change, it can lead to an entirely new challenge for the both of you. Sometimes it's helpful to take the negative side and agree with them using reverse psychology to help them come to the, "Yes, but..." conclusion to think the other way. Overall, be empathetic and supportive, but direct in your conversation.

Supporting self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to how well someone believes that they are able to succeed at something. MI is a strengths-based approach, meaning that it helps to bring out the other person's beliefs that they have the ability to do something – whether it is helping you with your caregiving duties, agreeing to speak with a professional about the problems that they are experiencing, or something else. Part of what you can do to help is to focus on their skills and strengths – highlight those factors when you're talking with them.

**EXAMPLES:**

"It seems like you've been working hard to... How have you been able to do that?"

"How do you feel about these changes that you've made?"

"How were you able to do that?"

"You've showed a lot of [strength, courage, determination, commitment, etc.] doing that!"

"It's clear that you're really trying to change."

"With all of the challenges that you have right now, it's [amazing, impressive, etc.] that you've been able to..."
Communicating with professionals, whether it is your wounded warrior’s health care provider, a social worker, or other clinician, can be difficult, especially as a caregiver. Becoming a caregiver happens so rapidly that we do not have time to prepare or fully understand what is going on at all times. In an effort to start understanding the who, what, where, when, and why of problems, we must be able to start communicating effectively and interpret the discussion.

Clear, thoughtful communication between health care providers and military-connected caregivers and wounded warriors may result in improved family outcomes, and better care provided to the wounded warrior. When families actively participate in the decision-making and treatment plan, they feel a stronger connection to the overall healthcare of their wounded, ill, or injured service member or veteran, and are more likely to also have their caregiver needs met.

Caregivers should fully understand the diagnosis, including symptoms and side effects, and should have a clear understanding of the prescribed treatment plan. Caregivers will also find it essential to have a working knowledge of prescribed medications and be able to maintain an effective relationship with health care professionals. In addition to caring for the needs of the wounded warrior, the caregiver should also have his or her own needs addressed. It’s always important to be honest with the provider to express all your concerns, challenges, or other things that could make your experience as a caregiver stressful.

Being at a doctor’s appointment can be one of the most overwhelming times for a caregiver. You are presented with information you may not know how to interpret, receive results you are not emotionally prepared for, or receive an overwhelming amount of information at once.

**Prepare for Your Appointment**

- Make a list: Write out all your questions and concerns before the scheduled appointment to make best use of the time.
- Ask questions: Remember, no question is a wrong question. It is inevitable that you are charting into a new territory, and you will have several questions.
- Don’t forget about yourself: Be sure to discuss how you are feeling, what has or hasn’t been working for you, and what could be done to help make your experience even better.

**Advocate for Your Wounded Warrior**

- Advocacy: Advocacy refers to providing public support for a specific cause, such as improving the resources that are available for wounded warriors and their caregivers.
- Practice SSTIA techniques: The doctors providing care are a critical element in the treatment plan of your loved one. Although it is evident that caregivers remain heavily emotionally invested in their wounded, ill, or injured service member, we must acknowledge that communication fails to remain as effective when an individual is emotionally stressed. To be able to clearly and effectively communicate with professionals, you should practice your SSTIA (stop, slowdown, think, act) techniques to help reduce the impact of your emotions on your ability to communicate.
Record Information

• To ensure that you have captured all the information, bring a notebook with you to the appointment.
• Invite your case manager to attend. If you do not have the option to have a case manager attend, invite a close friend or family member. Having another set of eyes and ears may be just what you need to remember and understand exactly what was discussed at an appointment. However, if you have someone else attend, be sure that they are also prepared.

Be Prepared

• Ask the providers what specific documents are needed to openly discuss the treatment plan of the individual for whom you are caring.
• Ensure that you’re actively listening to the professional so that you know what to do or how to respond appropriately.
• Summarize what the professional said in your own words to make sure you’re on the right track.
Conflict in relationships is inevitable. Although it is easy to label individuals as difficult, we should focus our efforts on the behavior. Dealing with difficult behavior is a skill that must be developed and practiced. More often than not, difficult behaviors are accidental, sporadic, and stressful. Other times, the behavior is ongoing and forms patterns and predictable trends.

This section focuses on reviewing behavioral factors and discusses strategies to address difficult behaviors.

“You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the things which you think you cannot do.”

–Eleanor Roosevelt
BEHAVIORAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER

As a caregiver, you’ll deal with many challenges. If your loved one becomes anxious, angry, difficult, resistant, or demanding, it can make your caregiving experience more challenging. But, it’s important to remember that this person relies on you for their daily care, potentially creating feelings of loss of control or stress over their circumstances. If you are able to recognize the reason that the difficult behaviors are occurring, then it’ll be easier for you to find ways to address the problem and cope with what’s happening.

Some of the behavioral factors that you may experience include:

• Agitation: restlessness, vulgarity, disruption
• Aggression: toward the self or others, random or focused
• Resistance or noncompliance: with medications, treatment plan, activities
• Sleep difficulties: up all night, broken sleep, sleeping all day, night terrors

Many other challenging behavioral problems may occur during the course of your caregiving experience. In some cases, it may even be smaller things that happen on a daily basis – daily stressors. In other cases, it may be a big event that happens once in a while – an acute stressor. Either way, each of these stressors can have a negative impact on your health and it’s important to be able to address these difficult behaviors.
ADDRESSING DIFFICULT BEHAVIORS

One of the first things to remember when addressing difficult behaviors is to make sure that you are approaching the situation with a cool head! To do this, go back to your SSTA techniques and stop, slow down, think, then act (to address the behavior).

The way that you respond to the situation can be crucial. Responding to the situation will require you to evaluate the circumstances, identify the problem — where is the root of the behavioral issue — reflect on what is happening, and create a plan to address the problem. Using your problem-solving techniques will also be helpful!

That time that you’re spending to evaluate the situation before responding can vary from a few minutes to hours. The important part is that you STOP and SLOW DOWN before approaching the problem. This “gap” between the event and your response to the problem helps contribute to gaining a sense of control in your life and being able to respond to the problem more effectively.

However, a longer pause is not always an option. Sometimes situations require an immediate action. In this case, still take a moment to STOP and SLOW DOWN — take a few deep breaths. This alone can help you to gain some control and start to take action that can make a big difference in an outcome of a situation.

When considering the situation, some questions to consider asking yourself include:

• What is the behavior?
• How is this bad?
• When does the behavior occur?
• Where does it occur?
• What happens before and after the behavior?
• What happens as a result of the behavior?
• Is the behavior old or new?
Once you have some information about the behavior, you can then get information about factors that might influence the behavior:

- Are there factors that might be making the behavior worse or better?
- Are there any unmet needs?
- What is going on in the environment? Was there any change to the environment?
- What emotional factors must you consider?
- Is this part of a mental health diagnosis?

As a caregiver, you have the ability to empower yourself and your wounded warrior by knowing what factors influence the behavior. With this, you have the ability to sort through possible environmental, social, or emotional factors. Identifying and analyzing all possible triggers or circumstances that may be triggering the behavior is important to identifying a root cause.

Be sure to also take notes on each situation so that you can share the information with the health provider. The provider can also provide information on how best to address the situation. Being able to communicate this information to the health provider can be a key factor in ensuring that the problem is appropriately addressed.

Other things to consider when addressing behavioral difficulties:

- Minimize abrupt environmental changes
- Create structure and stability
- Establish and engage in routines
- Respond – do not react (which happens instantly and without thought) – to difficult behaviors; take time to process what is happening and make a plan
- Enhance communication with your loved one
- Break things into smaller conversations or tasks for easier comprehension

Remember: Not every intervention or strategy will work for every individual. Not every intervention or strategy will work every time.
**ACTIVITY**

We have all had situations in which we have reacted instead of calmly responding. It can be difficult to respond to situations with a cool head. It takes PRACTICE and hard work.

Think of a time when you reacted to a situation, rather than responded. What happened to you – your body, emotions, thoughts? Is there something that you tend to do in these situations that can help you identify that you’re going to react? For example, maybe you clench your fists or jaw, or start crying.

In doing this, you will have a reference point to hopefully keep you from reacting to a situation.

For individuals: Write down your “trigger” that you do before you react and how, in the future, you can work on using SSTA techniques to help you approach the situation with a cool head before reacting.

For groups: Discuss your “trigger” that you do before you react and how, in the future, you can work on using S.S.T.A. Techniques to help you approach the situation with a cool head before reacting.
As a military-connected caregiver, you may become much more aware of the toll that physical or psychological wounds of war are having on your wounded warrior. Secondary trauma can happen to caregivers who are:

(a) are exposed to sights, sounds, smells, or stories from the wounded warrior

(b) feel responsible for reducing the wounded warrior’s suffering.

A common feature is that you, the caregiver, very often experience a high level of stress. This response can have negative physical and psychological consequences for your own health and may interfere with your caregiving responsibilities. It can also make you more at risk of burnout.

Burnout refers to emotional exhaustion and reduced feelings of personal accomplishment. It can develop from general stress experienced by caregivers related to their duties, expectations, and working conditions.

“There is a cost to caring.” [But there are tremendous rewards, as well.]

-Charles Figley
Compassion fatigue refers to secondary traumatic stress, but is a less stigmatizing term.

Secondary traumatic stress refers to the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another. It could happen as a result of repeated and prolonged exposure to your wounded warrior’s experiences and suffering. It is associated with helping or wanting to help your wounded warrior’s suffering or trauma.18

When people say, “I couldn’t do what you do,” take that as a compliment; they are telling you how very strong and very special you are.
SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SECONDARY TRAUMA

The symptoms of secondary trauma are similar to those of post-traumatic stress disorder:

- Re-experiencing personal trauma from the past
- Noticing an increase in arousal or avoidance reactions related to the indirect trauma exposure
- Experiencing changes in reactions related to the indirect trauma exposure
- Alterations in sense of self-efficacy
- A reduction in self-care and increase in social withdrawal
- Disruption in perceptions of safety, trust, and independence

Other symptoms can include:

**Emotional:**
- Hopelessness
- Enhanced sensory sensitivity – hypervigilance
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Sleeplessness
- Fear
- Chronic exhaustion
- Physical ailments
- Guilt

**Physical:**
- Headaches
- Heart palpitations
- Stomach ache
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Flu-like symptoms
- Memory loss
- Eating or sleeping more than usual
WHY CAREGIVERS ARE AT RISK OF SECONDARY TRAUMA

We first started noticing secondary trauma in professionals working with traumatized populations. In those cases, researchers found more than 50% of clinicians working with traumatized populations were at risk of secondary trauma. As a caregiver, you also spend much time with your wounded warrior, who has experienced some sort of trauma – physical or emotional. Your close interaction and discussions with your wounded warriors may put you at risk of secondary traumatic stress. However, certain factors that can either increase or decrease your risk.

Potential risk factors for secondary trauma:

- Lack of self-care
- Lack of social support
- Lack of satisfaction with your caregiving experience

Potential protective factors for secondary trauma:

- Strong and active social support network
- Actively engaging in self-care and stress-reduction techniques
- Enjoying your caregiver experience
- Actively communicating with others in your life about the challenges that you experience
- Engaging in physical activity
- Eating healthy
- Awareness of secondary trauma signs and symptoms
ACTIVITY

Secondary trauma affects a caregiver’s social, emotional, and behavioral aspects of life. Caregivers may also experience additional risk factors related to empathy, self-care, social and organizational support, and compassion satisfaction.

What does empathy mean to you? How may your empathetic ability be hindered by secondary trauma?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

What does self-care look like for you? How may your self-care ability be hindered by secondary trauma?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

What does your social support system look like? How may you work with your social support system to help you get through burnout, compassion fatigue, or secondary traumatic stress?

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________
THE BENEFITS OF AVATARS – VIRTUAL HUMANS

Part of this training program involves the use of an avatar interaction to allow you to apply the knowledge learned from this toolkit and to develop skills. Virtual humans, or avatars, in the context of this training, refer to an animated human with a pre-programmed brain that is able to engage in simulated conversations with a user and present in an emotionally responsive manner.

Avatars have various benefits, including:

- Accessible to more people, including those in rural or hard-to-reach areas
- Creating a standardized experience that everyone in the training can experience
- Controlled alterations of the scenario so that changes can be made across the board for all users
- Access that is not bound by time or location so that you can use it virtually anytime, anywhere
- Repetitive practice of skills with an emotionally responsive virtual human
- Practice of skills in a safe environment
- Constant and immediate feedback to increase your engagement in the learning process

WHY USE AN AVATAR?
Avatar-based interactions, particularly those that help a user to navigate a difficult conversation, can help you to effectively lead more positive and successful real-life conversations. In many cases, we are unprepared to take on a challenging conversation – even after learning about problem solving. However, once we have this knowledge base and access to an avatar, we can apply that information and develop skills so that we are ready to take on difficult conversations in real life.

Using avatars that are emotionally responsive will allow the experience to be more realistic and feel more genuine than engaging with a more robotic avatar. The life-like interaction is essential to helping with learning so that you will be prepared to face these challenges in real life.

Avatars also lack the fatigue that could be experienced when practicing with your peers. With this technology, you’ll be able to repetitively practice and develop your skills at your own pace and in a safe environment, without worrying about the reactions of others. You’re also able to receive immediate feedback. So, as you’re going through the interaction, you’ll receive pop-up feedback from a virtual coach to provide insight on what happened in a situation. This feedback can allow you to better understand how certain responses could lead to various outcomes and how you could structure your responses and solutions to achieve better results.
**why use an avatar?**

**AVATAR INTERACTION**

For this training, the user will practice communication and self-care skills by stepping into the shoes of an Army wife and military-connected caregiver, Lisa. She has been caring for her husband, Logan, for the past few months, but now must return to work. She is not able to give up her job or take Logan away from his doctors. She has no nearby family to help her care for Logan. Instead, she has decided to reach out to Logan’s estranged mother, Joanne. Joanne hadn’t spoken to Logan or Lisa since they eloped 2 years ago, until Lisa called to tell her when Logan was injured. Now, she is coming to visit for the first time. Lisa has little hope that Joanne will be able to share in caring for Logan, but with nowhere else to turn, she must now find the courage to ask for help and navigate a difficult conversation.

When you begin in the conversation, the first scene will play and then provide you with three different options. Throughout the conversation, you’ll have several options from which you can choose. These options will take you down different conversations that you can explore. You will also have the option to undo a selection and can start down a different pathway. Throughout the interaction, you’ll receive feedback from your virtual coach, Dr. Howard. A progress bar at the bottom of the screen will indicate how Joanne is feeling. During the training, you’ll have 25 minutes to go through the conversation. You may explore as many conversation paths as you would like. Remember to apply the knowledge that you have learned from this toolkit to help you get through this difficult conversation.
BECOMING A CHAMPION FOR CHANGE

“We cannot solve a problem using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”
- Albert Einstein

HOW TO ENGAGE IN POLICY CHANGE

Make your voice heard and make a difference for your military family!

As a caregiver, you have so much to give, a voice to advocate, a heart to heal and change the current norms, and the ability to help others going through similar circumstances. You have been doing it all alone with your loved one. By leveraging your skills, knowledge, and determination, you can be a guiding voice for future generations of caregivers.
The annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey indicates the percentage of caregivers providing more than 40 hours a week of care to a wounded, ill, or injured service member or veteran, which includes weekends, evenings, and early morning hours, has increased 7% during the past 2 years.

To change policy, you need to be able to show there is a problem with the current situation, such as lack of coverage, lack of services, or lack of information.
Steps to getting involved in policy change:

1. Get the facts. Concisely define the problem.

2. Build a support system. A single individual can take action, but the likelihood of success is far greater if a group or coalition of individuals join in on the work. Network with other caregivers to create a unified voice.

3. Provide personal experiences. Speaking to decision makers about personal stories adds a face and a story to an issue.

4. Use media to gain support. Write a brief, concise letter to a newspaper editor. In your letter, share personal experiences and describe how others can assist your cause. Typically, elected officials and decision makers scan the letters to the editor section to stay up to date on current issues and public opinion.

5. Advocate to elected officials. Communication efforts should first concentrate on establishing that there is a problem — what it is and who is being affected — before trying to encourage a particular solution.

Remember public policy changes take time; the first step is to create awareness and involve like-minded individuals to support the claims. Policy makers must hear your voice and know the concerns before they can even consider making a change to the existing system.
ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

- Individuals can provide support through friendship and communications with military families already in their neighborhoods.
- Community organizations can offer support through outreach to military populations in their areas and local military installations.
- Local and state governments can work to minimize barriers experienced by military families that arise out of their highly mobile lifestyle.
- Business owners can seek out military spouses, veterans, and transitioning service members as a desirable and talented labor demographic and recognize the value of their experiences when they are applying for employment.

ON THE NATIONAL LEVEL

- Leaders from all sectors who possess an opportunity to shape the national narrative can continue to remind Americans that military families are central to national security and civic assets in their communities.
- Elected leaders can support initiatives and legislation as identified in this report and by regularly consulting with military family and veteran service organizations.
- Military leaders can continue to prioritize military family programming as an essential component of readiness while operational tempos remain high and the global security environment remains uncertain.
- Military leaders can take seriously the experiences and concerns of service members and their families as a factor in the decision-making process by seeking out regular, candid, and meaningful feedback from all ranks of service members such as those found in this training.
- Corporate leaders and foundations can develop best practices for supporting military families that engage the civilian community and promote collaboration across the public and private spheres.
Notes
RESOURCES & REFERENCES

This section of the toolkit provides information on additional resources, references used in developing the toolkit, and suggestions for further reading.

RESOURCES

This section provides resources for working as a caregiver, including information about locating a professional if you need additional help or resources, informational and instructional videos, organizations for information and continued education, caregiver resources and materials, local resources, and other caregiver training programs, and recommended readings.

IF YOU ARE IN CRISIS:

• CALL 911

• GO TO YOUR NEAREST EMERGENCY ROOM

• CALL THE VETERANS CRISIS LINE (1-800-273-8255)
LOCATING A PROFESSIONAL

AfterDeployment.org

AfterDeployment.org is a comprehensive online resource supporting service members, veterans, and their families, with common post-deployment concerns. The website provides self-care solutions and links to coaching.

For more information: www.afterdeployment.dcoe.mil/

Military OneSource

Military OneSource is a confidential Department of Defense-funded program providing comprehensive information on every aspect of military life at no cost to active-duty, Guard, and Reserve Component members and their families. Military OneSource provides unlimited access for caregivers regardless of their military status. Military OneSource has policy and programmatic information, helpful resources, products, articles, and tips on numerous topics related to military caregiving. Some resources available through Military OneSource are specialty consultations, non-medical counseling, educational booklets and DVDs, digital organization notebooks, in-person or online Peer Support Forums, and webinars.

For more information: www.militaryonesource.mil

National Resource Directory

The National Resource Directory is an easy to use, comprehensive database of services for service members, veterans, and their families. It lists thousands of helpful resources, tools, and organizations, all conveniently organized by subject.

For more information: www.nrd.gov

VA's Mental Health Home Page

Provides veterans with information on a range of mental health conditions, and convenient links to VA programs and services. It also has a locator to help you find a VA facility near you.

For more information: www.mentalhealth.va.gov

Vet Centers

Vet centers offer a wide range of free services to help with the transition from military to civilian life. Services include counseling for veterans and their families and referrals for medical care of benefits.

For more information: www.vetcenter.va.gov/
INFORMATIONAL AND INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS

PsychArmor

PsychArmor’s mission is to bridge the civilian-military divide by ensuring that every American has the tools and resources needed to engage effectively with service members and veterans. PsychArmor is the only national institute of its kind, dedicated to bridging the civilian-military divide through free online education and a support center staffed with mental health experts. PsychArmor recruits nationally recognized subject matter experts to create and deliver online courses about issues relevant to the military and veteran communities. Its self-paced courses are delivered in six schools geared toward military culture, health care providers, employers, educators, volunteers, caregivers, and families. It provides critical resources to all Americans who work with, live with, and care about veterans and their families.

For more information: www.psycharmor.org or www.caregiver.psycharmor.org

Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury

The Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury hosts monthly webinars to provide information and facilitate discussion on topics related to psychological health and traumatic brain injury. The webinars are open to the public, and many provide continuing education.

For more information: www.dcoe.mil

Elizabeth Dole Foundation

This foundation’s mission is to strengthen and empower American military-connected caregivers and their families by raising public awareness, driving research, championing policy, and leading collaborations that have a significant impact on their lives. Through the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, caregivers can participate in a fellowship, which is granted every year. Sen. Dole was inspired to launch the Elizabeth Dole Fellows Program as the heart of the foundation’s work after hearing from hundreds of caregivers across the country that they did not have an opportunity to voice their challenges and needs. The mission of the Elizabeth Dole Fellow program is to engage active military and veteran caregivers directly in the foundation’s initiatives, allowing them to offer advice about programs and play a leading role in raising awareness of the needs of caregivers throughout the nation.

For more information: www.elizabethdolefoundation.org

ORGANIZATIONS FOR INFORMATION AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

Colorado Technical University Scholarship

In 2008, Colorado Technical University created the Wounded Warrior Scholarship in partnership with the Yellow Ribbon Fund, Inc., to give back to those whose lives have been altered due to injury while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. For many, the impact of an injury reaches farther than the service member alone. That’s why CTU annually awards the scholarship to 50 eligible wounded service members, their spouses, non-medical attendants or caregivers and new in 2018, dependents. Scholarship recipients have the option to pursue their degree either as an online student or at one of the Colorado campuses in Colorado Springs or Aurora. A dedicated student success coach and specially trained advisors are there to support scholarship recipients throughout their academic journey.

For more information: www.coloradotech.edu/military/wounded-warrior-scholarship
Pillars of Strength Scholarship Program

The Pillars of Strength Scholarship Program honors the exceptional sacrifices of the family and non-family volunteer caregivers of our nation’s injured service members. Because this extraordinary commitment often causes caregivers to delay their personal pursuits, the fund was established to assist them in achieving their educational goals. The Pillars of Strength program is supported and managed by the Yellow Ribbon Fund and the Blewitt Foundation, each serving the severely wounded individuals and their families, in association with UMUC, a global provider of higher education to our nation’s military since 1947.

For more information: www.umuc.edu/impact/where-to-give/pillars-of-strength-scholarship.cfm

CAREGIVER RESOURCES & MATERIALS

211

211 is a national organization that brings people and services together by providing strategically organized resources in the local community. 211 is available in every state, and each state operates its own resources and referrals process.

For more information on resources in your area: www.211us.org

Center for BrainHealth

The Center for BrainHealth, part of the University of Texas at Dallas, is a research institute committed to enhancing, protecting, and restoring brain health across the lifespan. The human brain has far more capacity to be changed than we ever imagined. Improvements can be made throughout our lives – not just when we are young. The Center for BrainHealth’s high performance brain training program, known as Strategic Memory Advanced Reasoning Training (SMART), is based on more than 25 years of scientific study by cognitive neuroscientists and research clinicians. SMART has been shown to improve strategic thinking, elevate mental energy, and enhance attention and focus.

For more information: www.brainhealth.utdallas.edu

Family Caregiver Alliance

Founded in the late 1970s, Family Caregiver Alliance is the first community-based nonprofit organization in the country to address the needs of families and friends providing long-term care for loved ones at home. Family Caregiver Alliance, as a public voice for caregivers, shines light on the challenges caregivers face daily and champions their cause through education, services, and advocacy. Family Caregiver Alliance provides resources designed with caregivers’ needs in mind and offers support, tailored information, and tools to manage the complex demands of caregiving. These include:

- Family Caregiver Alliance CareJourney is a secure online solution for quality information, support, and resources for family caregivers.
- Family Care Navigator, sponsored by the National Center on Caregiving, helps caregivers locate support services state by state.
- National Center on Caregiving unites research, policy, and practice to advance the development of high quality, cost-effective programs and policies for caregivers in every state.

For more information: www.caregiver.org
Hearts of Valor

Hearts of Valor is a network of people caring for wounded, ill or injured service members, created and maintained by Operation Homefront. Operation Homefront seeks to support these caregivers in their own journey of healing by facilitating an online community that provides social connections to other caregivers in similar situations, fostering support groups by geographic area to encourage resource sharing and friendships, and sponsoring annual retreats to provide education on relevant issues.

For more information: www.heartsofvalor.org

Hidden Heroes

Finding resources and programs can be difficult, especially when your time is limited. Browse the vetted directory of valuable resources to find organizations that help military-connected caregivers and their families. Use the filters to explore resources that address challenges specific to your situation.

For more information: www.hiddenheroes.org

Hope for the Warriors

Hope For The Warriors provides a full cycle of care through four pillars of programs: career transition & education clinical health & wellness, sports & recreation, and community & military relations. The organization seeks to enhance the quality of life for post-9/11 service members, their families, and families of the fallen who have sustained physical and psychological wounds in the line of duty.

For more information: www.hopeforthewarriors.org

Military and Veteran Caregiver Network

The Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network (MVCN) offers peer-based support and services to connect caregivers with others who are giving care to members of the military or veterans who are living with wounds, illness, or injury. The MVCN’s mission is to provide the nation’s pre- and post-9/11 military and veteran caregivers with peer support and partners to reduce their isolation and increase their sense of connectedness, engagement, hopefulness, and wellness and their knowledge and skills.

For more information: www.milvetcaregivernetwork.org

Operation Family Caregiver Program through the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving

Operation Family Caregiver provides free and confidential support to the families of those who have served our nation. It helps the families of returning service members and veterans adjust to the “new normal” by coping more effectively with problems they never imagined. Its specially trained coaches help military families learn how to overcome the obstacles they face and to manage any challenges that might come along.

For more information: www.operationfamilycaregiver.org
Quality of Life Foundation

The mission of the Quality of Life Foundation is to improve the quality of life of individuals and families who provide daily, substantial care for catastrophically wounded, ill, or injured veterans. Its goal is to ensure that every caregiving family is recognized, accepted, and supported in their civilian community.

For more information:
www.qolfoundation.org

Semper Fi Fund

The Semper Fi Fund provides immediate financial assistance and lifetime support to post-9/11 wounded, critically ill, and injured members of all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, and their families, ensuring that they have the resources they need during their recovery and transition back to their communities.

For more information:
www.semperfifund.org

Wounded Warrior Project

Wounded Warrior Project is dedicated to supporting warriors and their families. Its team reaches out to family members and caregivers of warriors living with physical or mental health conditions or both to ensure they receive the full range of support and benefits of WWP programs and services. If you are a family member or caregiver of a veteran or service member who incurred a physical or mental injury, illness, or wound, co-incident to their military service on or after September 11, 2001, you may register for benefits and support services.

For more information: www.woundedwarriorproject.org

Yellow Ribbon Fund

Since its start, the Yellow Ribbon Fund has acknowledged and honored the crucial role of caregivers in the recovery of their wounded, ill, or injured service member. Caregivers often sacrifice their own physical and emotional needs. This program provides respite and comfort to those facing the unrelenting task of seeing their service member through the recovery process. It also provides educational opportunities and scholarships, financial planning, and career advice to caregivers who often need to take on new roles in their families during the service member’s convalescence. The Yellow Ribbon Fund’s Family Caregiver Program pioneered support for the family members and close friends who sacrifice so much while caring for their injured, ill, and wounded loved ones.

For more information: www.yellowribbonfund.org
LOCAL RESOURCES IN SAN DIEGO

**Jewish Family Services**

Jewish Family Service (JFS) is a client-centered, impact-driven organization working to build a stronger, healthier, more resilient San Diego. Since 1918, JFS of San Diego has been a trusted community resource for individuals and families in times of need. Its wide range of integrated services empower individuals and families to move toward self-sufficiency, support aging with dignity, and foster community connection and engagement throughout San Diego County and the Coachella Valley. JFS provides essential services to people regardless of religion, race, color, ethnicity, national origin, ability, gender identity/expression, or sexual orientation. JFS is a home for people in search of better lives and for those seeking to make better lives possible. That first contact often leads to a wide range of integrated services that addresses financial, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

*For more information: www.jffsd.org*

**Southern Caregiver Resource Center**

Southern Caregiver Resource Center (SCRC) is a nonprofit organization that provides free support services for family caregivers caring for adults with chronic or disabling conditions. SCRC has been providing services to caregivers in San Diego County since 1987. SCRC continues to be the leading provider of caregiver support services in San Diego and Imperial counties, serving 30,000 clients annually.

*For more information: www.caregivercenter.org*

**Support the Enlisted Project (STEP)**

STEP assists junior active-duty enlisted members and recently discharged enlisted veterans and their families in Southern California facing financial crisis achieve long-term financial self-sufficiency through counseling, education, and grants to alleviate critical near-term obligations.

*For more information: www.stepsocal.org*

LOCAL RESOURCES IN SAN ANTONIO

**Center for the Intrepid (CFI)**

The threefold mission of the CFI is to provide rehabilitation for post 9/11 casualties who have sustained amputation, burns, or functional limb loss; to provide education to Department of Defense and Department of Veteran’s Affairs professionals on cutting-edge rehabilitation modalities; and to promote research in the fields of orthopaedics, prosthetics, and physical and occupational rehabilitation. The staff and equipment provide the full spectrum of amputee rehabilitation and advanced outpatient rehabilitation for burn victims and limb-salvage patients with residual functional loss.

*For more information: www.bamc.amedd.army.mil*

**Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic**

The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Family Endeavors, Inc., provides quality, accessible, and integrated mental health care to veterans and their families at no cost. Services are available to any person who has served in the U.S. Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserves, regardless of role or discharge status. The Military Family Clinic uses evidenced-based practices with a holistic approach to improving the quality of life of veterans and their families. Services are provided by a trained and credentialed staff. Veterans and their family members can receive services individually and as a family unit at the same place with the same treatment team. The
Military Family Clinic will also help connect Veteran families to additional future supports, e.g., housing programs, as necessary.

For more information: www.familyendeavors.org

Veterans Team Recovery Integrative Immersion Process

The Veterans Team Recovery Integrative Immersion Process is a short-term, multimodal, complementary, integrative immersion program for veterans with post-traumatic stress symptoms and related symptoms. Its goal is to assist veterans and service members; their families and caregivers; and service providers with post-traumatic stress and related symptoms, chronic pain, and traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries to return to a happy, peaceful, productive, and successful civilian life.

For more information: www.vettriip.org

DC METRO AREA

National Intrepid Center of Excellence

The National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE), a directorate of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, helps service members and their families manage their traumatic brain injury (TBI) and psychological health (PH) conditions through:

- Cutting-edge diagnostic evaluation
- Comprehensive treatment planning
- Outpatient clinical care
- TBI and PH research

Patients at the NICoE experience a broad range of care in a team setting that promotes healing of the mind, body, and spirit. To help patients return to or stay involved in their communities and careers after treatment, the NICoE also provides family education and support services.

For more information: www.wrnmmc.capmed.mil

ServingTogether

ServingTogether is EveryMind’s commitment to veterans, active-duty military, and their families. It is an integrated program, connecting veterans who have served our country with the resources they have earned. EveryMind has supported veterans in the national capital region for nearly 60 years. It is a trusted partner in connecting individuals with empowering programs and reputable resources. The ServingTogether experience begins with a veteran peer navigator, a welcoming voice and guide. ServingTogether fosters understanding, awareness, and the personal connection often essential in successfully identifying individual needs and veterans organizations.

For more information: www.servingtogetherproject.org

LOCAL RESOURCES IN WASHINGTON,

resources & references
Virginia Veteran Family Services

Veteran and Family Support (VVFS; formerly the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program) monitors and coordinates behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services through an integrated, and responsive system of care. VVFS provides peer and family support and care coordination services to Virginia veterans, members of the Virginia National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves (not in federal service), and their families, with a special emphasis on those affected by stress-related conditions or traumatic brain injuries resulting from military service.

For more information: www.dvs.virginia.gov/virginia-veteran-and-family-support/

OTHER CAREGIVER TRAINING PROGRAMS

Department of Veterans Affairs Caregivers Support Program

Veterans Affairs values your commitment as a partner in its pledge to care for those who have “borne the battle.” It offers several support and service options designed with you in mind. The programs are available both in and out of your home to help you care for yourself and the veteran you love. The Veterans Affairs offers a variety of support and services, ranging from workshops to peer support groups.

For more information: www.caregiver.va.gov

Easterseals

Caregiving is in Easterseals’ DNA - it’s at the heart of everything it does. This is especially true in its services and supports for military veterans and their families. Its team strives to ensure military-connected caregivers can access what they need to take on the enormous responsibility of caregiving, often, while still needing to work, navigate family life, and take care of themselves. Easterseals embraces and supports military-connected caregivers, particularly as they transition into this new experience, life-long trajectory and unfamiliar yet vital role in their families and communities. Its national network supports military-connected caregivers across the lifespan. From training to respite services, Easterseals makes a profound, positive, and life-changing difference in people’s lives every day. Services include: military caregiving webinars, military-connected caregiver training, respite care, and a community onesource call center.

For more information: www.easterseals.com

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension offers a variety of free online courses tailored to life as a military-connected caregiver.

For more information: https://extensiononline.tamu.edu/courses/military_caregiving.php
**TOOLKIT REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING**

**5 LOVE LANGUAGES MILITARY**, BY GARY CHAPMAN
http://a.co/bVezJOF

**IN AN INSTANT: A FAMILY’S JOURNEY OF LOVE AND HEALING**, BY LEE WOODRUFF
http://a.co/dO4GR0i

**LEGAL GUIDE FOR MILITARY FAMILIES**, BY THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION
http://a.co/eo8LdR9

**NAVIGATING DEEP WATERS: MEDITATION FOR CAREGIVERS**, BY JEANNIE EWING AND EILEEN BENTHAL
http://a.co/2aFD5ug

**NO SAINTS AROUND HERE: A CAREGIVER’S DAYS**, BY SUSAN ALLEN TOTH
http://a.co/42pVEcE

**SEX AFTER SERVICE: A GUIDE FOR MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS, VETERANS, AND THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEM**, BY DREW A. HELMER
http://a.co/4Ofsnvr

**SEX AND INTIMACY FOR WOUNDED VETERANS: A GUIDE TO EMBRACING CHANGE**, BY KATHRYN ELLIS AND CAITLIN DENNISON
http://a.co/4VWLBSQ

**SLEEPING WITH THE WAR**, BY MELISSA COMEAU
http://a.co/fKNyCJJ

**STRANGER IN MY BED**, BY DEBBIE SPRAGUE
http://a.co/c8LFCQE

**THE CAREGIVERS COMPANION: SELF-CARE FOR HEALTH IN MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT**, BY SAMUELI INSTITUTE
http://a.co/9MYXfPC

**WAR AND THE SOUL**, BY EDWARD TICK
http://a.co/bqjz0tu

**WHEN WAR COMES HOME**, BY MICHAEL KING
http://a.co/fKQihML

**WHY IS DAD SO MAD**, BY SETH KASTLE
http://a.co/6bjPpUQ

**WOUNDED WARRIOR, WOUNDED HOME**, BY MARSHALE CARTER WADDELL
http://a.co/hji1zUA
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was made possible by:

UNITED HEALTH FOUNDATION®
PROJECT TEAM

Sherrie L. Wilcox, PhD, CHES
Principal Investigator
Blue Star Families

Ashley Molina, MS
Project Manager
Blue Star Families

Sandralee Jensen, BS
Caregivers Program Manager
Blue Star Families

Mikelle Raffel
Operation Family Caregiver
Coach Supervisor
Blue Star Families

Leisa Easom, PhD, RN
Rosalynn Carter Institute

Kathleen Ell, DSW
University of Southern California

Brandi Hall, MA
Joint Base San Antonio

Melissa Johnson, BA
Military Veteran Caregiver Network

Veliska Thomas, PhD, LCSW
University of Southern California

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

Callie Barr, BA
Blue Star Families

Laura Bauer, MPA
Rosalynn Carter Institute

Carl Castro, PhD
University of Southern California

Melissa Comeau, BS
Military Veteran Caregiver Network

Lynda Davis, PhD
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors

CAREGIVER COMMUNITY TEAM

Terry Jo Arnell, caregiver to her veteran Army spouse, Iola, KS

Krista Cline, caregiver to her active-duty Marine Corps spouse, San Antonio, TX

Leah Hernandez, caregiver to her veteran Army spouse, DC Metro Area

Katie Taylor, caregiver to her active-duty Marine Corps spouse, DC Metro Area

AVATAR INTERACTION TEAM

Kognito
REFERENCES


# NEW CONTACTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>EMAIL</th>
<th>PHONE</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>