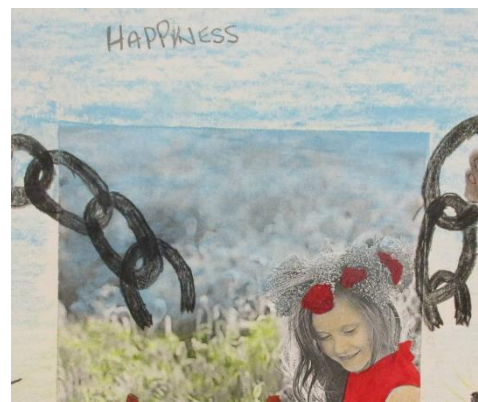
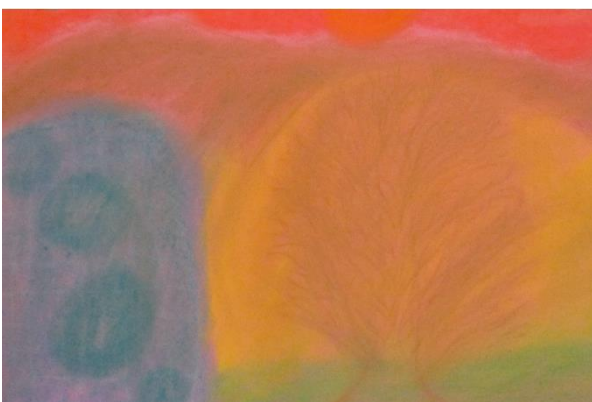


## Support for families Self-Help Guide

It will take ~10 minutes to work through Section One

# SUPPORTING A PARTNER OR FAMILY MEMBER WITH PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop after someone experiences a stressful, frightening or distressing event.



When someone has PTSD they experience unwanted memories of their distressing experience and it feels like past events are happening again.



Some of the common symptoms of PTSD include:

- Unwanted memories of past events popping into their head
- Upsetting dreams about difficult situations that have happened

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- Staying away from things that remind them of past events
- Feeling on edge and as if they can't relax
- Difficulties with emotions such as anger

## Veterans and PTSD

Military culture means that veterans are often less likely to talk about the difficulties they're having and the difficult memories they're experiencing.

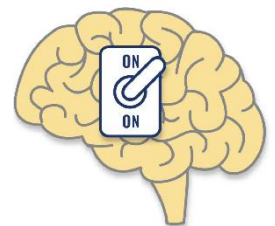
Uncovering the problem and talking to them about what is going on, can be tricky. Symptoms of PTSD can remain for months, or even years after leaving the forces.

These are just a few examples of some of the ways veterans might try to control the symptoms of PTSD:

- Withdrawing from military friends
- Hiding medals away out of sight
- Leaving the room at certain points in a film or TV programme
- Only going out when it's quiet
- 'Self-medicating' with alcohol or drugs to block out difficult feelings
- Spending less time with others
- Avoiding sleep

## What to do if you know someone who's struggling with PTSD

If you think a veteran might be struggling with PTSD, the best thing to do is support them to think about whether they need/want support. Direct them to our veteran pages for more information. For the majority, the thought of having PTSD has probably never crossed their mind.



For more information on PTSD and how it develops please see our PTSD resource for veterans [www.combatstress.org.uk/self-help/PTSD](http://www.combatstress.org.uk/self-help/PTSD)

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## Talking to children about PTSD

Talking to children about PTSD and what it is can be difficult. Below we have developed some helpful hints and tips to get you started:



- Open and honest communication
- Help the child express their feelings and needs
- Reassure the child that they are not to blame
- Tell the child what is going to happen next
- Let them know that what they think, and feel is important
- Where possible restore family traditions
- Help educate about mental health and reduce stigma

## Helplines for children and young people

Some children may find it helpful to talk to others – here are details for some specific helplines for children and young people:

ChildLine: **0800 1111**

The Mix (Under 25s): **0808 808 4994**

Young Minds: **0808 802 5544** (for parents who are concerned about their child). Or text **YM 85258** for crisis messenger service

Samaritans: **116 123** (freephone)

**24-hour Helpline: 0800 138 1619**

## Section 2

It will take ~5 minutes to work through Section Two

### HOW CAN I SUPPORT A VETERAN?

You might have noticed that PTSD can change how a veteran behaves and responds to situations. They may seem different to how you first knew them.

Those supporting a veteran often say they don't know how best to help. Below we have offered some strategies that you might find helpful.



### Create a safe space

#### What is grounding?

The veteran you are supporting may need some time out occasionally to practice strategies, gather their thoughts or to figure out what is going on for them.

Consider creating a 'safe space' in your home where they can go, uninterrupted when they need to. Somewhere they can feel completely safe.

It can be handy to have some 'house rules' around this space. For example, not to be disturbed when they are using it or to check in on them after a certain length of time. This can help to keep everyone in the family safe.

### Connect with the present – Grounding

A key symptom of PTSD includes re-experiencing the trauma event. When this happens it can be overwhelming and scary.

Sometimes it can feel as if the event is happening again. It is common for veterans with PTSD to get images and even a replay of the event. This can lead to them feeling temporarily disconnected from the world around them.

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Grounding is one way that we teach veterans to remain connected to reality. You can support them with this, if they would like you to.

We can use all our senses to reconnect and be grounded in the present moment. Some examples include:



### Touch

Holding their hand or passing them a familiar object



### Smell

Strong smells such as Olbas Oil



### Sight

Point out objects in their surroundings and direct their focus



### Sound

Reassure them that they are safe and remind them of where they are



### Taste

Strong tastes, such as extra strong mints, can help bring someone back to the present



### Movement

Direct them to squeeze a stress ball or something that requires a push or pull movement

As with all of the above, it's important to discuss with the veteran what works for them and what they would like you to do if they're struggling and need support. Whichever one they choose to try, it needs to be something that was NOT present at the time of the trauma. Some strategies are very personal, so don't be offended if there are ones you cannot help them with.

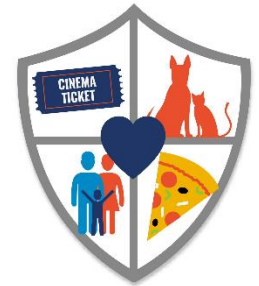
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## Help to reconnect with the family

As a family it is important that you spend some time together to reconnect and support each other.

Doing creative activities together can help to recognise each other's qualities and strengthen relationships.

- Design a team badge or emblem for your family: represent each member of the family by a colour, shape, or animal.



Then discuss what qualities each of the colours, shapes, or animals represent and contributes to the family.

## Section 3

It will take ~15 minutes to work through Section Three

# LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF: SELF-CARE SUPPORT

What stops you from putting your needs first?

Supporting a veteran with PTSD can be tough, and many family members describe feeling stuck, overwhelmed or even like they have lost their own sense of identity. This can result in you neglecting your own needs.

You might have noticed some of the following:

- Difficulty saying "no". If we are someone who is inclined to say yes when really, we want to say no, this can lead to feeling stuck and frustrated.
- You might think you're being selfish if you put your needs first.
- You might find yourself saying "My needs are not a priority"

You might be shocked to hear this, but your needs ARE a priority and we are here to support you.

Remember that in supporting a veteran, you are doing a great job, but you need to care for yourself. While it's important you're in good health (mental and physical) so you can support

**24-hour Helpline: 0800 138 1619**

and care for your loved one, it's also important you remember to take care of yourself for you too.

Supporting a veteran who may be going through a very difficult time is a selfless and difficult thing to do. So do remember to be kind to yourself and that you are worth taking care of too.

## Support for abuse and violence

Any threats of physical violence or actual violence are not acceptable. Abuse should never be tolerated. If you, or your family are in danger of violence, go immediately to a place of safety. You may find the following contact details helpful:

- National domestic violence helpline: 0808 200 0247
- [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk): 0808 2000 247
- Ripple Pond: Peer support group for partners [www.theripplepond.co.uk](http://www.theripplepond.co.uk)
- HeroinesbehindHeroes: [www.heroinesbehindheroes.co.uk](http://www.heroinesbehindheroes.co.uk)
- Band of sisters- Help for Hero's Tel No: 01980 844280
- Blue Apple Heroes available online: [www.facebook.com/BlueAppleHeroes](https://www.facebook.com/BlueAppleHeroes)

## What can I do about it?

Learning to take care of your own needs is not something which is easy or immediately achieved.

It is something which takes small steps and gets easier over time. Most importantly you need to keep yourself safe!

Below are some useful strategies to get you started on your journey to supporting you.



---

## Do what matters

Prioritise doing things which make you feel good, every day

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What you do has great power and can have a significant impact on how you feel. Ensuring you have a balance in your life is important. Each day having a balance, as demonstrated in the diagram below, can help take care of you.



Before moving on, take a moment to note down activities that are important to you and make you feel good. Use the model above to ensure that you're getting balance in all three areas.

## Section 4

It will take ~15 minutes to work through Section Four

### GET YOUR THINKING STRAIGHT

*Remember that in supporting a veteran, you are doing a great job, but you need to care for yourself. While it's important you're in good health (mental and physical) so you can support and care for your loved one, it's also important you remember to take care of yourself for you too.*

*Supporting a veteran who may be going through a very difficult time is a selfless and difficult thing to do. So do remember to be kind to yourself and that you are worth taking care of too.*

### Control your inner critic

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Sometimes when you want to provide the best support and care to the veteran you love; it can be easy to become critical of yourself and your efforts. It can be helpful to remember the following:

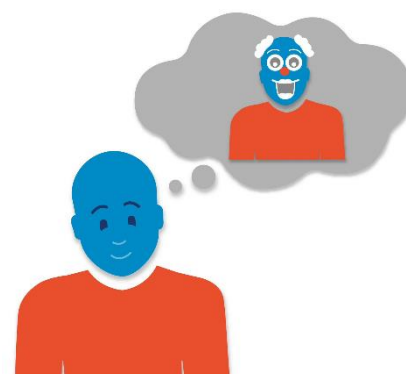
- *You are doing the best you can with the resources that you have in your life at this time. There are all sorts of other demands on your time such as work, caring for the family as well as your own needs. No one is perfect and you can only do your best according to how you are feeling at that time.*
- *When you find that you have slipped into being self-critical try to stop and notice what you were thinking that made you be so hard on yourself.*
- *Think... "would I speak to someone I love and care about in this way?"*
- *"Would I allow someone else to speak to someone I really care about in this way?"*
- *"What is the evidence for this thought, am I being fair to myself?"*
- *"Am I being fair and is there another fairer and kinder way I can look at this situation?"*

## Tap into your creativity

**Try drawing out your inner critic – consider what your inner critic would look like as a character or animation - for instance, could it be a monster or a clown?**

**By putting an image to your critic, you can change how you feel about it.**

**Try choosing something funny for example, that will make you laugh the next time you notice your inner critic having a go.**



**Remember, not every idea will work for everyone, they are designed to give you a place to start and help you find what works for you. So do try each method individually and give yourself time to adjust and practice before moving on to the next one.**

## Section 5

**It will take ~15 minutes to work through Section Five**

### WHAT YOUR BODY NEEDS

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Remember that in supporting a veteran, you are doing a great job, but you need to care for yourself. While it's important you're in good health (mental and physical) so you can support and care for your loved one, it's also important you remember to take care of yourself for you too.

Supporting a veteran who may be going through a very difficult time is a selfless and difficult thing to do. So do remember to be kind to yourself and that you are worth taking care of too.

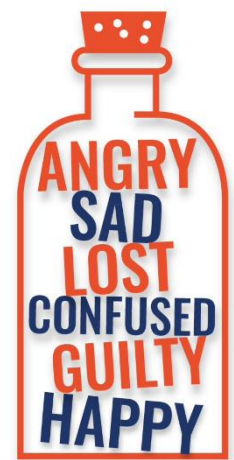
## Communicate your feelings and wants

Bottled up feelings can create emotional and physical pain. It is important to talk to your partner or loved one about your feelings and wants.

Choosing the right time for you both to talk is crucial. Ensure that you are both in a calm and uninterrupted space where you can give each other the time and energy that this deserves.

If you have something important to say, try following the three steps below:

1. **FACT:** Outline the situation as objectively as you can and try not to make any judgements or assumptions.
2. **FEEL:** Describe your feelings using "I feel..." statements and not "you make me feel...".
3. **WANT:** Say what you want someone to do and not what you don't want them to do.



**Example:**

"You spend a lot of time at work and bring work home with you on weekends (fact). I feel lonely and miss our quiet times together (feeling). I would like to make a date with you for a quiet romantic dinner this weekend (want)."

If talking about your feelings and wants is too difficult, try writing them down first or write a letter. If you don't share your needs and wants, you may end up feeling frustrated and resentful.

## Colour breathing

Relaxation has many benefits for body and mind. It can help to reduce stress hormones and improve your immune system. Relaxation can also help to manage feelings of stress, anger and frustration.

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There are many types of relaxation. Colour breathing is something that you can do either alone or with everyone in your family.

Our video will guide you through the relaxation practice: <https://youtu.be/Bwk6YYTNWAU>

## Create a wellness plan

Take a moment to reflect on what you have been learning from this resource and create your own Wellness Plan.

This is your own individual plan on how to manage and maintain your progress in the present.

This can help you gather your thoughts and pick and choose which bit of this resource works best for you.

Go through each individual point and write down helpful tips for yourself.

### 1. Triggers

- Triggers that are more likely to cause me to slip backwards

### 2. Exercise and diet

- List of healthy activities or exercise

### 3. Activities with a veteran family member

- Brainstorm ideas and places, you can explore together, or practice some tools you have learnt together

### 4. Social Support

- What I need from others when I am struggling?
- Who do I need to talk to?

### 5. Looking after yourself

- When I am looking after myself I:
- When I am not looking after myself I:

### 6. Balanced thinking

- Unhelpful thinking styles I am likely to use:
- Helpful coping strategies:

### 7. Goals

- Write down a personal goal you have
- Write down a goal you have for you and your family member

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This is an example of how to fill out your wellness plan:

## Wellness Plan

### Difficult situation:

Argument with loved ones  
Children's bed time  
When alone at home more

### What stops me putting my needs first?

My loved one is struggling  
I don't think I'm important  
I put others first

### Things I can do to keep a balance in my life:

Time with friends  
Going to the gym  
Painting

### Social support:

Friends  
Family  
Support groups

### Self-care:

Relaxation strategies  
Healthy lifestyle  
Communicate your needs to your family

### Balanced thinking:

Control the inner critic  
Remind yourself that you are important too

### Goals:

Spend more quality time with family  
Start the gym again

Remember, not every idea will work for everyone, they are designed to give you a place to start and help you find what works for you. So do try each method individually and give yourself time to adjust and practice before moving on to the next one.

## Section 6

It will take ~10 minutes to work through Section Six

### BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Remember, caring for a veteran with mental health difficulties can be challenging. Continue to make time for yourself and to be kind to yourself - we all have good days and bad days, so it's okay to feel overwhelmed sometimes.

### Practical support

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## Financial, house or employment support services

If you are struggling with financial, housing or employment issues these services may be able to offer you support.

The Royal British Legion: [www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk) – 0808 802 8080 (08;00-20:00 7 days a week)

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA): [www.ssafa.org.uk](http://www.ssafa.org.uk) or call 0800 731 4880 (Mon-Fri 09;00-17:30)

Veterans Gateway: [www.veteransgateway.org.uk/community-family-advice-for-veterans](http://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/community-family-advice-for-veterans)

## Some questions you might have

### What to do if my family need further support?

It might take some time to start reaping the rewards of your efforts. As with any new skill, keep at it and you will find it easier to use these skills when you need them. While these resources aim to give you some tools to manage your difficulties in-the-moment, for many this will only be the beginning.

With this in mind, Combat Stress also provides specialist treatment programmes to help veterans tackle the past and take on the future. If you would like to know more, you will find the details of our 24-hour helpline below.

### Is there someone I can contact if I need more help or information?

If you're a family member/carer worried about the mental health of a loved one who has served, please call our Helpline.

The Combat Stress 24-hour Helpline provides free confidential advice and support to veterans and their families. Don't struggle in silence.

Call 0800 138 1619

### Are there any other resources that may help?

- Ripple Pond - <https://theripplepond.org/>
- Veterans' Gateway website - <https://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/>

## How do I know what resource to do next?

You may remember when you first began these self-help guides, you filled out a questionnaire. This questionnaire enables us to guide you to the resources that will be most helpful to you. You'll find links to other guides in this series at <https://selfhelp.combatstress.org.uk/>

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## **Is there someone I can contact if I need more help or information?**

If you're a veteran and need to talk to someone, or you're a family member/carer worried about the mental health of a loved one who has served, please call our Helpline.

The Combat Stress 24-hour Helpline provides free confidential advice and support to veterans and their families. Don't struggle in silence.

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## **Are there any other resources that may help me?**

Veterans' Gateway website - <https://www.veteransgateway.org.uk/>

VA Mobile Apps - <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/mobile-apps>

## **You've completed the Families Self-Help guide.**

### **Well done!**

We hope you've found this resource to be helpful and can begin to notice some changes. Make sure you take a break before beginning your next resource. We recommend waiting two weeks before moving on.

This information was publishing on 30 October 2020.

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