



VETERANS IN TRANSITION SERIES:

SUPPORTING YOUR VETERAN



Table of Contents

Preface.....	4
What is a Veteran.....	6
Post-Traumatic Stress.....	8
Military Sexual Trauma.....	9
Suicide and Suicide Prevention.....	10
Why You Don't Understand Me.....	11
What I Wish You Understood.....	12
What You Need to Know to Help You Understand.....	13
Notes.....	19
Sources/Acknowledgements.....	23
Resource Numbers.....	Back Cover

AllenForce.org
oneteam@allenforce.org
779-205-3314

OUR MISSION

To Promote a healthy and successful lifestyle for all veterans of all branches of the United States Armed Forces by providing positive networking, health and wellness opportunities and social outlets. AllenForce strives to understand and meet the needs of all veterans and their families as they face an ever-changing adjustment process after serving our nation.

OUR VISION

Our Vision is to bring together veterans, families, and communities to empower our members to lead healthy and successful lifestyles through a variety of national programs and opportunities. We strive to be nationally regarded as one of the leading community based veteran's service providers.

OUR VALUES

Our Values are a constant in an ever-changing world. These are the practices and principles we use to interact with each other and how we accomplish our mission.

ACCOUNTABILITY

FORTITUDE

OPTIMISM

FITNESS

FAMILY

RESPECT

COMMITMENT

EMPATHY

COMMUNITY

HEALTH

NETWORKING

ADVOCATE

EDUCATION

ADVENTURE RECREATION

ADAPTIVE SPORTS

Preface:

My learning about the challenges veterans and their families face started five years ago, when I was asked to start a program we named “Healthy Minds Healthy Bodies”. There were not many guidelines given to me and I was not personally familiar with the military world so my quest for information, guidance and military education began. I met with Veterans Assistance Commissions, friends of friends who had served, VFW members, professionals, family members of veterans and more. What I learned is that it is a world of strong character, loyal and devoted individuals, full of pride and humility, complete with selflessness for their well-being and sacrifice for their brethren. As I immersed myself into this world of honor, I became friends with and was adopted by many military families. They saw the passion within me to learn about this world and took me into their confidence to teach me about what they experienced and what is necessary not just for survival but to thrive in this world.

Many of them have been gracious and trusting enough to sit me down and say, “Donna, if this is what you really want to do, then this is what you really need to know. We’re going to take you into the dark shit that we struggle with daily.” This was truly a gift, though a tough gift to receive. The hard part with which I struggled with was knowing there were so many loved ones of veterans out there who craved this information, who wished for this insight, who begged for this inclusion into a world of which they would never be a part. And here I was being blessed with many veterans’ trust and their stories. During my learning time with all of this, being taught by the veterans about the deep struggles and the challenges within themselves that they don’t want to or couldn’t share with family, I came to realize fast that civilians MUST understand the world from which they come. Could we ever comprehend their experiences in the military? In war? No. But we could learn as much as possible to ease the process of communicating with them for their benefit. We could learn the language, we can understand the difficulty and challenges of asking for help, we can accept the fear of sleeping at night, the hyper vigilance when in a crowd. We could seek to empathize with the fact the medications get overwhelming, the side effects of weight gain, brain fog, and more are so discouraging, and someone who used to be in such control in the service now often seems to be spiraling downward on the home front. We need to understand that this is all part of many veterans’ culture. It is more easily

and comfortably discussed between veterans themselves than civilian-to-veteran. What I've been taught is that there is a way to make yourself, as a civilian (whether or not you are related to the veteran), feel more approachable from the veteran's stand-point. Understanding: it is not plain and simple. It doesn't happen overnight. It may not fully happen at all. But trying to understand to the best of your ability what the veteran has experienced from time of enlistment through post – discharge. This is not an easy task. Nor will it ever be fully accomplished. But some of it is possible and that understanding or desire to will most likely open a door of communication.


I did not feel comfortable being gifted this knowledge and not sharing it. I saw too much desire and need for this information within the families of the veterans whom I serve through AllenForce. Thus the concept of this workshop came to be. To share with those who need it most, the ones living with it daily, the hard to hear stuff with which their loved ones may struggle after service. The veterans here today, sharing their journeys with you, may not have had the exact experiences of your loved one but they may have had very similar paths along which they've walked. And they are willing to share that with you.

Thank you to the professionals who have dedicated their careers to the veteran's and family's paths making it less of a struggle for them to walk and heal.

Thank you to all the loved ones who submitted questions to be used in this booklet and continued encouragement to not give up on their vet.

To the veterans both here today and behind the scenes who contributed from their personal experiences, THANK YOU. Thank you for helping provide the answers, thoughts and stories we are handing out today. My heart will forever be grateful to you. It is an honor to be considered worthy of the name, "Battle Buddy".

God Bless.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dana". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D'.

Please Note

The following remarks are generalizations. Not all veterans have the same reactions and responses to stimuli. This booklet was written with the idea that these are common responses found in order to possibly provide guidance and insight into your loved one. While professionals have assisted in developing this booklet, it is not intended to be used as a diagnostic tool or to replace professional consultations or treatment. If you think you or your loved one need help, call a professional.

Why You Don't Understand Me:

I am a veteran. I am no longer your average civilian. I have experiences you can only comprehend if you've marched in military boots.

Every veteran's experience is different. While not all veterans have served in combat, they have all been through military training. Their duty was to protect and serve at all costs. Many serve in a variety of places both in and outside of the United States. Each branch and each component has its own deployment types, separations from family and friends, and reintegration times.

Assumptions are often made that after a safe return home, the veteran will blend back into the family or community to live as if nothing has changed. But often, the veteran is changed for life. Readjustment is a process, yet people assume the transition is instant. The "honeymoon period" after return is often not long lasting and reintegration is an intense time.

When things look rough and you do not understand, they need you to give them the benefit of the doubt. The issues they face are really not about you, but you may become tangled in them sometimes. The last thing they truly want is for you to become a casualty of their war.

Remember, there is a lifetime of experiences for a veteran to share about their time in service. It is essentially up to them to decide which aspects they wish to share or not share with you.

SOURCES

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3. Lighthall, Alison. “Ten Things You Should Know About Today’s Student Veteran.” Retrieved from NEA.org March 3, 2015.

OTHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many professionals from the medical and mental health fields employed by the Vet Centers and VAs have provided valuable input regarding resources and guidance to the questions addressed.

Countless interviews of veterans from all eras that have willingly shared their stories and experiences with us throughout the years.

RESOURCES

VIALE AS OF 6/29/19

Veteran Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 (option 1)

National Call Center for Homeless Veterans
1-877-424-3838

VA Caregiver Support Line
1-855-260-3274

VFW National Hotline to Report Your VA Issues
1-800-VFW-1899

Veteran's Families United Foundation
405-535-1925

VA Hotline-non-emergency,
non-clinical Call Center
855-948-2311

For Emergencies Call 911

and

Use one of the following statements:

“This person is a veteran.”

“This veteran is experiencing a mental health crisis.”