

Practical tips for recognising and helping Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

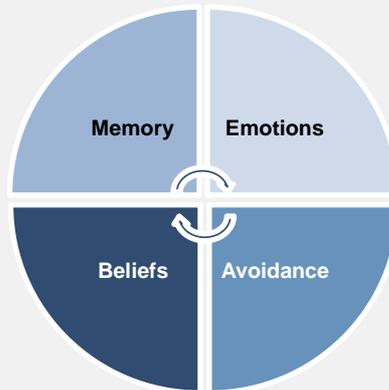
Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a serious psychological condition that can develop after a person is exposed to a traumatic event. Early intervention can have a strong impact on the outcomes of this condition. Here are some simple ways to identify veterans with symptoms of PTSD and assist them to get mental health support.

Recognising PTSD – What to look for

Most people who experience a traumatic event may have temporary difficulty coping and adjusting but with time and good self-care, they naturally feel better. For a minority of people, their symptoms persist and lead to significant distress or impairment in functioning. PTSD includes a range of intense emotional, physical and behavioural reactions that interfere with a person's day-to-day life. These symptoms can develop in the weeks following exposure to the traumatic event, or they may be delayed for months or even years later.

Examples of common PTSD symptoms

- Emotional, physical reactions to event reminders
- Intrusive images
- Nightmares
- "I am worthless"
- "I can't cope"
- "People will hurt me"



- Tense all the time
- Can't control temper
- Constantly flat or numb
- Uncontrolled alcohol / drug use
- Lack of interest in social activities
- Avoiding reminders of the trauma

Screen for PTSD – What to ask

If you have noticed some of the signs of PTSD in your client, you can take the next step of screening them for the condition using a professional screening measure. The following questions are taken from the Primary Care PTSD Screen and can be used to identify individuals who may have PTSD.

If the individual responds "yes" to THREE questions or more, it is recommended that they see a health professional for further assessment.

*"Have you ever had any experience that was so horrible or upsetting that **in the past month**, you:*

- *Tried hard not to think about it or went out of your way to avoid situations reminding you of it?*
- *Were constantly on guard or easily startled?*
- *Have had nightmares about it or thought about when you didn't want to?*
- *Felt numb or detached from others or your surroundings?*
- *Felt guilty or unable to stop blaming yourself or others for events or problems the events may have caused?"*

Respond to PTSD – What to do

Encourage the veteran to share their thoughts and feelings about what is happening to them. You can acknowledge their difficulties without needing to have the solutions! Comment on any positive small changes you have noticed and offer reassurance that effective treatments for mental health issues are available.

Link into appropriate services

People with PTSD often benefit from having a team of health professionals involved, including their GP. You can direct them to the following types of health professionals for assessment and treatment:

- **General Practitioner** – initial contact, provision of referrals and health care planning
- **Psychologist** – assessment and evidence-based psychological therapy
- **Psychiatrist** – assessment and medication prescription and management
- **Mental Health Occupational Therapist** – activities to improve daily living skills
- **Mental Health Social Worker** – support with psychological problems and associated social and environmental problems

There are different types of free veteran-specific counselling or self-management strategies, to suit a veteran's preferred form of engagement. These include in-person meetings, over the phone support or online resources and information.

SERVICES

Open Arms provides confidential counselling, group treatment programs, peer support and community networks. 1800 011 046 openarms.gov.au

Open Arms 'At Ease' website provides veteran-specific mental health information on assessment, treatments, DVA services and resources, including available PTSD treatment programs. at-ease.dva.gov.au/

PTSD Coach Australia provides information and strategies for self-management of PTSD symptoms. Downloadable from the App Store or Google Play

Consider overall wellbeing

In addition to mental health treatment, it could be useful for your client to access other DVA funded services to support their all-round wellbeing. They may benefit from working with a Social Worker, an Occupational Therapist, an Exercise Physiologist, or a Drug and Alcohol Counsellor, depending on their individual circumstances and needs.

DVA and a range of Ex-Service Organisations offer social programs that provide veterans with opportunities to create social connections and develop their support network. Local recreational clubs can tailor activities to the interests and skills of the club members.

SERVICES

Contact **DVA** on 1800 555 254 for more information on their range of health and community services.

Social support is essential

If your client does not want to engage with professional health services, ensure that they are talking to someone about their condition, such as a family member or a friend.

SERVICES

Open Arms provides 24 Hour crisis veteran mental health support on 1800 011 046.

If you need help in your work with veterans, or with a particular veteran, ESO staff can contact the Centenary of Anzac Centre for free expert guidance and support.



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