

Conversations that Matter: Talking with Veterans



Reality Check

- Some veterans are proud of their service and are open to talking
- Some veterans are proud of their service but do not want to engage in conversation
- Some veterans continue to experience post-traumatic stress disorder and will disengage in any conversation about service
- Some veterans continue to have negative service experiences



Start the Conversation

- "I heard you used to serve in the military. Is it ok if we talk about your current life?"
- "I've noticed you avoid talking about service. Do you want information about peer support?"
- "I thank you for your service. Do you mind if we talk about support available to you?"
- "I thank you for your service. Do you still participate in veteran activities like drill teams?"
- "I thank you for your service. Do you own a firearm?"



Changes in Behavior

- Withdrawal from friends or family
- Sudden mood swings or irritability
- Withdrawal from veteran services
- Non-participation in veteran services
- Increased conversation about negative service experiences or post-service experiences
- Decreased conversation about negative service experiences or post-service experiences – withdrawal from recent expressions of grief, depression, suicide
- Increased conversations about firearms
- Expedient firearm seeking – expressing emergency to obtain FOID card or obtain firearm



Reassurance

- You matter
- You are important
- You make a difference
- You have the power to get through this
- You always overcome
- Praise and appreciate service if they engage in positive conversations



If You Suspect Self-Harm

- Let the veteran know you appreciate them
- Encourage open dialogue, without shame
- Avoid conversation about current and historical politics, war, conflict, etc.
- Reach out to a mental health professional for guidance and support for both you and the veteran
- Know not all veterans qualify for Veterans' Administration services. Reach out to your local office for more information.

For VA Health Care:
Veterans Affairs

Benefits For
Service Members:
Veterans Affairs

