

# 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**

