



# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

## Department of Veterans' Services



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**Subject:** Resources for veterans and their supports

**Regarding:** 9/11 and the end of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)

Veterans from all eras may be having difficulty with the events in Afghanistan, such as the U.S withdrawal and the takeover by the Taliban. **You are not alone. Your service, sacrifice, and bravery matters.**

Veterans may question the meaning of their service or whether it was worth the sacrifices they made. They may feel more moral distress about experiences they had during their service. It's normal to feel this way. Talk with your friends and families, reach out to battle buddies, connect with a peer-to-peer network, or sign up for mental health services.

Please read below for a list of common reactions, coping advice, and resources for support.

### Common Reactions

In reaction to current events in Afghanistan, Veterans may:

- Feel frustrated, sad, helpless, grief or distressed
- Feel angry or betrayed
- Experience an increase in mental health symptoms like symptoms of PTSD or depression
- Sleep poorly, drink more or use more drugs
- Try to avoid all reminders or media or shy away from social situations
- Have more military and homecoming memories

Veterans may feel like they need to expect and/or prepare for the worst. For example, they may:

- Become overly protective, vigilant, and guarded
- Become preoccupied by danger
- Feel a need to avoid being shocked by, or unprepared for, what may happen in the future

Feeling distress is a normal reaction to negative events, especially ones that feel personal. It can be helpful to let yourself feel those feelings rather than try to avoid them. Often, these feelings will naturally run their course. If they continue without easing up or if you feel overwhelmed by them, the suggestions below can be helpful.



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### Strategies for Managing Ongoing Distress

At this moment, it may seem like all is lost, like your service or your sacrifices were for nothing. Consider the ways that your service made a difference, the impact it had on others' lives or on your own life. Remember that now is just one moment in time and that things will continue to change.

It can also help to consider your thinking. Ask yourself if your thoughts are helpful to you right now. Are there ways you can change your thinking to be more accurate and less distressing? For example, are you using extreme thinking where you see the situation as all bad or all good? If so, try and think in less extreme terms. For example, rather than thinking "my service in Afghanistan was useless" consider instead "I helped keep Afghanistan safe."

It can be helpful to focus on the present and to engage in the activities that are most meaningful and valuable to you. Is there something you can do today that is important to you? This can be as an individual, a family member, a parent, or a community member. Something that is meaningful to you regarding your work or your spirituality? Such activities won't change the past or the things you can't control, but they can help life feel meaningful and reduce distress, despite the things you cannot change.

Finally, consider more general coping strategies that you may want to try including:

- **Engage in Positive Activities.** Try to engage in positive, healthy, or meaningful activities, even if they are small, simple actions. Doing things that are rewarding, meaningful, or enjoyable, even if you don't feel like it, can make you feel better.
- **Stay Connected.** Spend time with people who give you a sense of security, calm, or happiness, or those who best understand what you are going through.
- **Practice Good Self Care.** Look for positive coping strategies that help you manage your emotions. Listening to music, exercising, practicing breathing routines, spending time in nature or with animals, journaling, or reading inspirational text are some simple ways to help manage overwhelming or distressing emotions.
- **Stick to Your Routines.** It can be helpful to stick to a schedule for when you sleep, eat, work, and do other day-to-day activities.
- **Limit Media Exposure.** Limit how much news you take in if media coverage is increasing your distress.
- **Use a mobile app.** Consider one of VA's [self-help apps](#) which have tools that can help you deal with common reactions like, stress, sadness, and anxiety. You can also track your symptoms over time.
- **[PTSD Coach Online](#).** A series of online video coaches will guide you through 17 tools to help you manage stress. PTSD Coach Online is used on a computer, rather than a mobile device, and therefore can offer tools that involve writing.



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If you develop your own ways of adapting to ongoing events and situations, you may gain a stronger sense of being able to deal with challenges, a greater sense of meaning or purpose, and an ability to mentor and support others in similar situations.

### Resources available right now

- **Veterans Crisis Line** - If you are having thoughts of suicide, call [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255), then PRESS 1 or visit [veteranscrisisline.net](http://veteranscrisisline.net)
  - For emergency mental health care, you can also go directly to [your local VA medical center](#) 24/7 regardless of your discharge status or enrollment in other VA health care.
- **Vet Centers** - Discuss how you feel with other Veterans in these community-based counseling centers. 70% of Vet Center staff are Veterans. Call [1-877-927-8387](tel:1-877-927-8387) or find one [near you](#).
- **VA Mental Health Services Guide** - This guide will help you sign up and access mental health services.
- **MakeTheConnection.net** - information, resources, and Veteran to Veteran videos for challenging life events and experiences with mental health issues.
- **RallyPoint** - Talk to other Veterans online. Discuss: [What are your feelings as the Taliban reclaim Afghanistan after 20 years of US involvement?](#)
- **Download VA's self-help apps** - Tools to help deal with common reactions like, stress, sadness, and anxiety. You can also track your symptoms over time.
- **Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)** - [Request a Peer Mentor](#)
- **VA Women Veterans Call Center** - Call or text [1-855-829-6636](tel:1-855-829-6636) (M-F 8AM - 10PM & SAT 8AM - 6:30PM ET)
- **VA Caregiver Support Line** - Call [1-855-260-3274](tel:1-855-260-3274) (M-F 8AM - 10PM & SAT 8AM - 5PM ET)
- **Together We Served** - [Find your battle buddies](#) through unit pages
- **George W. Bush Institute** - Need help or want to talk? [Check In](#) or call: [1-630-522-4904](tel:1-630-522-4904) or email: [checkin@veteranwellnessalliance.org](mailto:checkin@veteranwellnessalliance.org)
- **Elizabeth Dole Foundation Hidden Heroes** - [Join the Community](#)
- **American Red Cross Military Veteran Caregiver Network** - [Peer Support and Mentoring](#)
- **Team Red, White & Blue** - Hundreds of events weekly. [Find a chapter](#) in your area.
- **Student Veterans of America** - Find a [campus chapter](#) to connect with.
- **Team Rubicon** - Find a [local support](#) squad.
- **American Red Cross: [Military and Veteran Caregiver Network](#) | [American Red Cross](#)**
- **Massachusetts Statewide Advocacy for Veterans' Empowerment (SAVE) Team:**  
Call 1-888-844-2838 or email: [save@massmail.state.ma.us](mailto:save@massmail.state.ma.us) or on the web, [SAVE](#)
- **Cambridge Veterans' Services:** [Cambridge Veterans' Services](#) is available for local veterans.

Neil MacInnes-Barker, Director