Title: Skill-Building Course: Family, Friends & Coworkers

Description: This course will assist a Whole Health Coach or other educator working with Veterans who would like to incorporate "Family, Friends & Coworkers" (a.k.a, "Relationships") into their Personal Health Plans. It reviews six different "subtopics" related to this aspect of self-care, designed to give Veterans additional ideas, insight, and resources to support them on their Whole Health journey.

Objectives and Key Points

- Discuss the different ways relationships can affect health
- Pause to consider *who* really matters in your life
- Discuss research related to significant others, friends, volunteering, and social capital and their effects on health
- Experience a demonstration of animal-assisted therapy
- Explore different possibilities for connecting with groups, including various Veteran organizations
- Experience a mindful awareness exercise related to loving-kindness
- Identify local resources that can support Veterans with building relationships at a local level. These might include classes, shared medical visits, clubs, organizations, or other offerings
- Work with a partner to create a Personal Health Plan focused on one aspect of Family, Friends & Coworkers

Sample Agenda (total time 60-80 minutes)

- Introductions, types of connection (5 minutes)
- Discussion of key relationships in your life, significant others (10 minutes)
- Demonstration: Animal-assisted therapy (10-15 minutes)
- Friends and social capital, Connecting with fellow Veterans, Volunteering, Healthy Groups (5-10 minutes)
- Experience of the mindful awareness exercise (10-15 minutes)
- Communication and professional care (5-10 minutes)*
- Partner activity: Setting a Family, Friends & Coworkers goal, large group sharing (15 minutes)
- Wrap up, questions, and evaluations

**The Professional Care part can go longer if you invite a social worker to share about what their role is. If you can arrange a visit from a helper animal, they can circulate during the course, as well as before and after – the time allotted for the demo would really be for the person to talk about animal-assisted therapy for a few minutes.*

Preparation

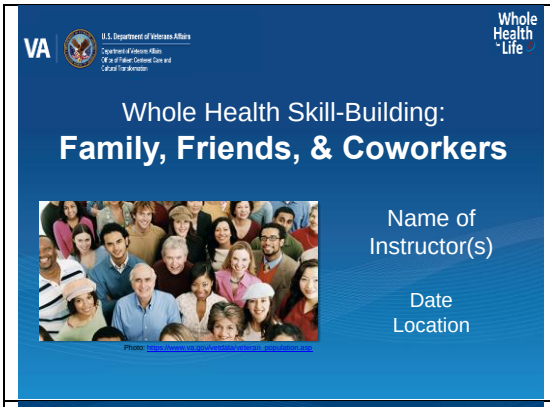
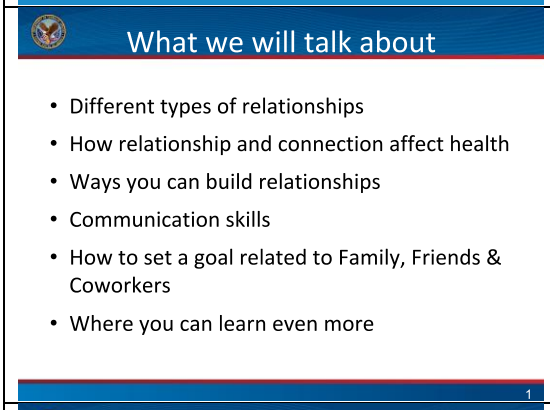
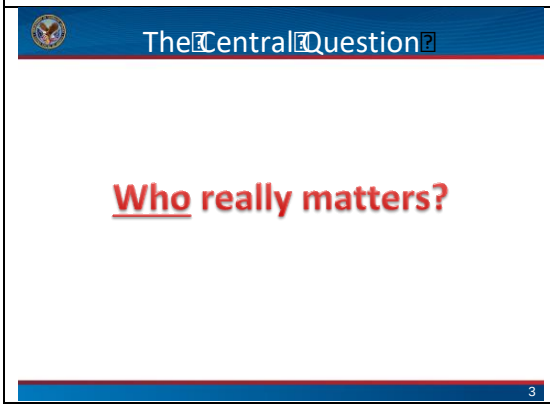
1. Pre-Reading for Instructors
   - *Passport to Whole Health*, Chapter 10. Family, Friends & Coworkers. Available at https://wholehealth.wiscweb.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/414/2018/09/Passport-to-Whole-Health-3rd-Edition-2018.pdf. Pay particular attention to the research findings, so that you can talk more about them if needed
   - Might help to keep a listing of all your different ideas for "making one small change."
   - The Whole Health Education Website has a number of additional materials that are worth a look. https://wholehealth.wisc.edu/overviews/family-friends-coworkers/.

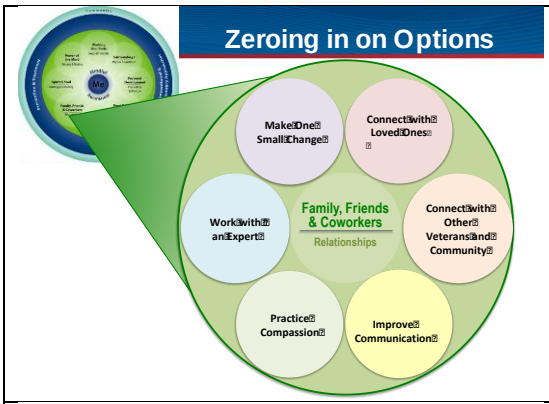
2. Prepare course materials and handouts
   - This course is best taught in collaboration with a social worker. They can help with the "Work with a Professional" section. They could also lead the compassion meditation if you so choose. In addition, you can invite someone who does animal-assisted therapy to circulate in the room with a dog or other animal and speak briefly about what they do
   - Be sure that you have practiced the loving-kindness exercise yourself first. It can help to record it and play it back. The more you can share from your own experience with this type of meditation, the better
   - Each participant will receive a copy of the Veteran Handout designed to accompany this course
   - You may also wish to provide some additional Veteran handouts related to Family, Friends & Coworkers, available at https://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/veteran-handouts/index.asp#family-friends-and-co-workers
   - It may be easiest to have handouts ready for them at their seats, or you can pass them around later. Review the handout in advance, so you can be ready for questions
   - Be sure to have an evaluation form ready to give them at the end as well. These are provided with the other course materials
   - Make sure everyone has a pen or pencil and blank paper for the writing exercise

3. Set up AV and other equipment
   - Be prepared to share the PowerPoint slides related to this course. A guide to each of the individual slides is featured later in this document
   - Connect with the AV support person at your site
   - A flip chart and markers, or a dry erase board, may be helpful
   - If you choose to show the video, will need to attach speakers to the computer running your PowerPoint presentation
   - If you do not have a slide projector, you can simply take them through the Veteran handout after you give each person a copy. Alternatively, you can print out the slides and give them copies. Then, just take them through the slides, following the faculty guide

4. Identify local and other resources
    - This is a great opportunity to invite one in a social worker, as noted above. Be mindful of time constraints
    - Add to the slide set (and/or Veteran Handout) to include local resources, including
        - Classes, group visits, and group therapy sessions available locally
        - Any other resources you want to share (be careful about time)

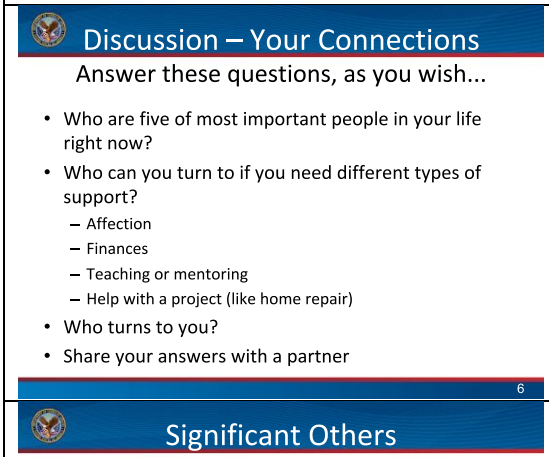
Slide-By-Slide Guide

	• Change this slide to incorporate your name, as well as the date and location of the presentation • This is a good time to introduce yourself. Be sure to share your own title/role related to the VA and teaching • It is worth it to have the participants do quick introductions as well, but be mindful of time • Many of the self-care topics focus us inward. For this one, we will focus outward, on relationships and the power of connection and relationship
	• This is the list of learning objectives for the course. You can review these in detail, or go quickly over them to save time • As you move through, remember the subtitle for this circle is "Relationships." There are many ways to think about our relationships in our lives • The main message here is that Whole Health can include any of the ways we connect with others, because they are all closely tied to our health
	• Start by discussing as a large group. What does it mean to connect with someone? • What are some examples of connections? They should come up with significant others (be careful about gender for couples, and don't assume they are married), family (your birth family, or your chosen family), friends, pets, colleagues, fellow Veterans, groups, and organizations (churches, classes, interest groups). When people served, their duty stations forced them to build relationships – some healthy, some not • We'll talk to some degree about each of these
	• Really emphasize that we are expanding from asking the usual mission/aspiration/purpose (MAP) question – *What* really matters - to also ask "*Who* really matters?" • Often, when people are asked about what really matters to them, other people come up. They want to see their grandkids grow up, spend time with friends, etc. • Encourage them to think about their answers to this question – it will come up again later

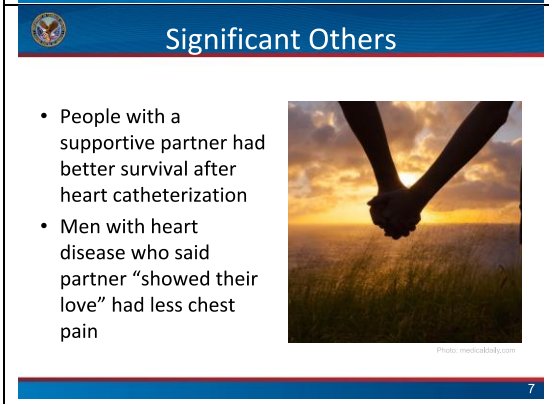


- Here is a list of areas we will discuss in more detail, going clockwise. Think of this as looking at circles within the circle, when it comes to relationships
- Read each of the circles, to introduce them
- These are simply suggestions related to what can be included in a Personal Health Plan

- Connecting with loved ones is something where no one really questions its importance. That doesn't make it easy. In fact, it can be really tough sometimes
- As you talk about this topic, remind them that there is lots of space for who a 'loved one' can be in your life – pets, friends, partners, kids, etc.

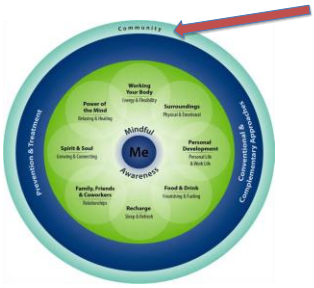


- Have them reflect on these questions, THEN pair up after they have had time to think for a minute or two
- It might be helpful to have pens/pencils available so they can write things down
- Let them know it is normal for this exercise to bring up some feelings



- These are findings from two studies featured in the *Passport*
- The first one involved 1400 men and women. Survival 5 years after the heart procedure was 3 times higher if they had support
- The second study was older and included 10,000 married men talking about their wives. The group who said their wives showed their love had 50% less chest pain and 50% fewer ulcers too
- One other study, not featured, that you can mention if you want: Women who were given shocks during MRI had fewer signs of stress in their brains if they held hands with a supportive partner (IF they rated their marriages as good)

Animals • Animal-assisted therapy has multiple benefits • Companion animals and pets can be very healing • Anyone here have pets or other animals in your life? 8	• Take a survey (last bullet point) of who has animals in their lives
Try it out! Demonstration 9	• This is an opportunity to have a visit from a therapy dog or other therapy/companion animal • You may have already done this in the Surroundings course – if so, you can simply omit it (or do it again)
Friends • Being able to confide in people is linked to your health • Number of confidantes per person has dropped in recent years • Technology helps us connect 10	• "Confide" in many studies means being able to talk with others about something very personal, like your health problems and your emotional concerns about those problems • There are other types of confiding as well • It seems to matter how *deep* your connections go, not just how many you have. That is, it helps to have one good friend versus many acquaintances – though it is great to have both • Studies show that social media may help some
Another Question Are there any relationships you would like to heal? 11	• Preface this question by saying you don't expect them to answer it out loud – just reflect • New relationships can be built, as part of a Personal Health Plan. And, past relationships can also be repaired. One goal you can set is to at least reach out to someone to see where things stand • For many Veterans – for people in general – reaching out can be tough to do. Ask yourself why that is? Where is the fear coming from? Is reaching out worth the risk of being turned away?

Social Capital • The value of being connected • You invest in others, they give back to you • The balance of favors owed, favors given • More = longer life • Twin studies show that twins with more social capital have better mental and physical health 12	• Social capital is an idea that was introduced by Putnam in his book, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community • It can help to explore what you have in common with people – more in common means more connection and more social capital • What are ways to enhance this capital? Answer: Usually you get more back if you give more
	• And we can take connection to the next level – connecting not only with individuals but with groups
Community is Part of the Circle 	• Take just a moment to remind them that the outer circle is all about how we fit into the broader community, which is also important to health. We don't have a healthy "Me" without a healthy "We."

Your Fellow Veterans
• Do you connect with other Veterans?
• How?
  • Volunteering
  • VFW, DAV and other Veteran groups
  • Other groups
  • Classes
 	
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	• Who are some of the most helpful and supportive people for Veterans? Answer: Other Veterans!
	• How can they support their fellow Veterans?
	• Encourage a brief large group discussion about best ways to connect with other Veterans

Giving: Volunteering and More People who volunteer... • Get to help others • Live longer • Feel a "helper's high" • Feel more of a sense of accomplishment • Seem to do better with chronic illnesses • Find it helps with depression • Have lower heart disease risk Veterans love working with other Veterans! Even if you can't volunteer, you can do random acts of kindness	• This is featured in the Personal Development materials, but it also relates here • Acknowledge that many Veterans "volunteered" to be in the military and serve their country. This may be a loaded term for some. Be ready to emphasize that we are focusing on the more positive aspects of the word here, especially around volunteering for fellow Veterans. Volunteering now can help a person be more of an asset to others who need guidance or help with getting on a better course
Healthy Groups: A Discussion • What groups do you belong to? • What groups have you considered joining? – Groups at work – Support groups – Group medial visits – Social media – Community gardens – Classes – Church/spiritual community – Gyms – Others? 17	• In addition to Veteran groups, what other groups do you belong to? (Can continue the discussion form the previous slide.) • One example of a group is a group of colleagues at work • Point out that about 10% of the population is very introverted – they may not feel as comfortable seeking out groups • That is okay, but perhaps some of the ways listed here can be helpful
	• Communication can be a challenge for many people • People who have experienced life in the Armed Forces learn different ways to communicate – following orders and rapid communication can save your life • It can be hard to come back and re-assimilate ○ E.g., having a non-Veteran boss ○ Having people not get what it is like to be a Veteran and asking the wrong questions • The next slides cover a few skills that can help anyone communicate better. To learn more, a person can take a class or work with someone one-on-one
Communication Tips for Communication 1. Listen well 2. Ask and clarify, restate 3. Get out of fixing mode 4. Don't focus just on what you will say next 5. I statements – Use "I" instead of "You" – "I don't want to do that" instead of "You shouldn't do that" 19	• These might seem basic, but many people don't do them • There is an old saying that we have 2 ears and 1 mouth, and that tells us how much we should listen versus talk • This is a place where you can summarize some of the techniques taught in Whole Health Coaching – generous listening, reflection, paraphrasing • "I" statements definitely take us all some practice to learn

Communication- More tips

6. Listen as much as you speak
7. If you don't know them, pause to introduce yourself
8. Ask what you and they want out of the conversation
9. Stay focused – don't ramble
10. Consider their point of view
11. Body language – yours and theirs

Others?

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More points about communication:

- For your health plan, you could practice any one of these
- Some are more relevant for certain types of conversation. For example, with health care visits, it can really help to be clear about your goals
- A huge proportion of communication isn't the words so much as body language

- Can ask, "What does compassion mean to you?" and discuss as a large group

Compassion

- Favorably affects brain function
- Alters gene expression too
- Helps us connect

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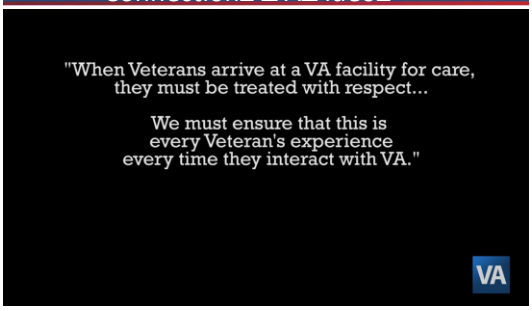
- When they first started doing brain scans to study meditation, the long-time meditators they studied (Buddhist monks) laughed, because they said the scan should really focus on the heart, not the head
- How does one open one's heart?
- Compassion involves empathy – understanding what it is like to be in someone else's shoes, combined with taking action to do something to support them (which is different from talking about 'fixing' the problem)

Connection - VA Video



- Optional to show this video. The key here is to pause and think, when we communicate, that everyone has a back story going on
- A big piece of relating to others is tied in with empathy and compassion. They are not the same as pity, and they don't require you to plunge into the other person's negative emotional state. It is about acknowledging their pain and being present for them

Reflections on the Video Get into groups of 3 or 4 and discuss: • What struck you in this video? • What feelings came up for you? • Did an of the people in the video really stand out for you? • What might the words above your head say right now if you were in the video? • Does thinking in this way change how you might feel the next time you walk past someone? 22	• Can do this as a large discussion too, if needed, based on time. Again, the video is optional • This discussion will take some time to do effectively • Can ask about how they do with self-compassion as well. Can you be driven, or push yourself, and still be compassionate toward yourself?
Mindful Awareness: Loving-Kindness • There are many ways mindful awareness can tie in to relationships • This exercise asks you to focus outward as well as inward • What do you notice? 25	• There are many practices intended to build compassion toward others. There is also one in chapter 10 of the *Passport to Whole Health* This is a particularly important one to have a debrief about • Read the script that is provided with the course materials
	• The VA does a really good job thinking beyond a person's physical health needs to what they need socially too – coverage for services, getting into different programs, housing, etc. • There are many professionals who can help, and you should know who they are. Generate a list you can share
Social Workers and Others can… • Suggest community resources • Link people with support groups • Help with intimate partner violence • Assist with benefits and services • Share couples and family counseling options (or offer the counseling themselves) • Teach communication skills Photo: socialwork.va.gov	• If possible, can be good to have a social worker present in the class to share what they do • There are more links about social workers and what they can offer in the course handouts • Mental health professionals can help with many of these as well. • The primary care team can help as well. • If intense emotions come up while someone is working with relationships, they should ask for help as needed.

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<td>• And our final circle...</td>
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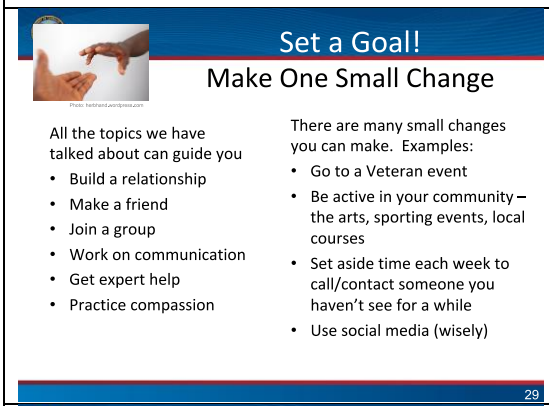
<td> 
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<td>• You can either read all of these, or just let them read them as you highlight a few of your favorites
• Ask them if they have other thoughts, beyond those list or other things we have talked about</td>
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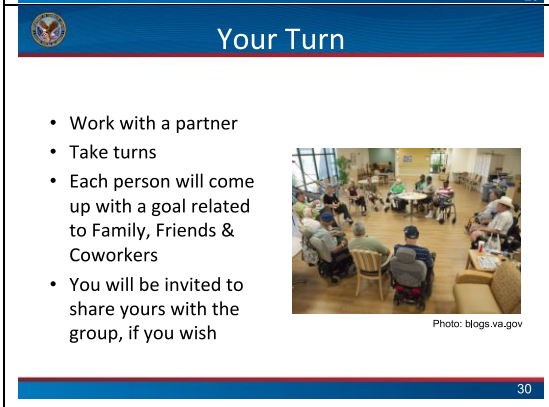
<td> 
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<td>• The temptation is always to spend more time on lecture and less on experiential activities or skill-building. Give this last exercise at least 15 minutes
• Some people may be hesitant, but encourage them to work with someone else if at all possible. If not, they can still set a goal on their own, and you can check in with them while others are working in pairs
• If there are an odd number of people, you can always jump into the mix and pair with someone yourself
• Be sure to set a timer to remind them to switch who is doing the talking/planning after half the time has passed
• Take time for a large group discussion, and invite people to share
• *Be sure to focus on accountability – how can they check in with their partner (text, coffee, email, etc.)? When? Can you as the instructor check in with them at some point? Be sure to talk about their next steps with all of this work</td>
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Setting Goals **Seven steps in goal setting** 1. Identify the goal 2. Know the benefits 3. Know obstacles 4. List skills and knowledge needed 5. Identify who can help 6. Develop a plan (SMART) 7. Set a timeline and next steps **SMART Goals** • Specific • Measurable • Action-based • Realistic • Time-bound 32	• You can leave this slide up while they are talking to their partner. It can help them create stronger goals • It doesn't have to be a complicated process, though. They can choose which of these steps they wish to think about, and when • It is up to you if you want to read through the items on this slide or simply have them read to themselves
Family, Friends & Coworkers- Summing Up 1. There are many options. Where do you want to start? 2. Start by focusing on what – and *who* - matters most to you 3. This might involve building new relationships, or repairing old ones 4. Reach out to someone. It takes courage – but so does serving in the military. You've got this! 5. Join a group of people with similar interests 6. Ask for help from social workers and others if you need it 7. Take it one step at a time 32	• Feel free to modify this based on which points you chose to emphasize
Thanks! 32	• As you finish, be sure to leave time for questions and comments •