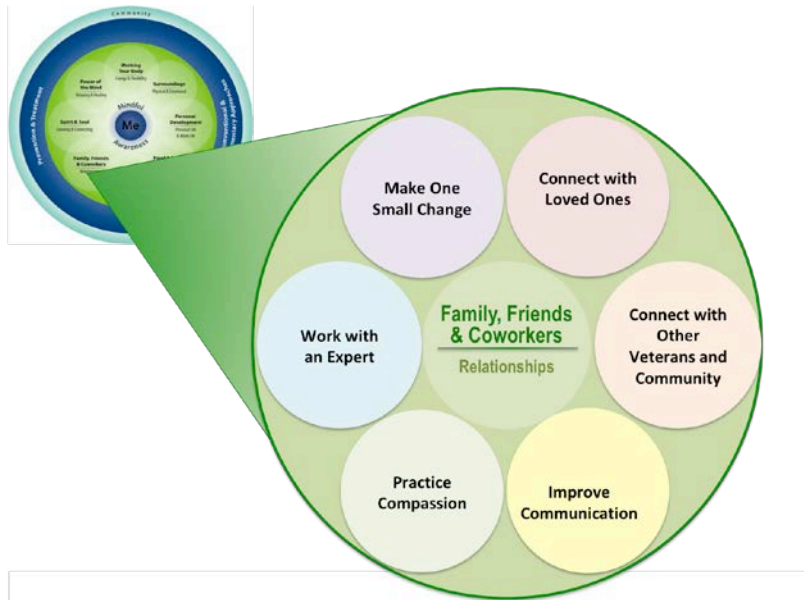


Zeroing In – Family, Friends & Coworkers: Relationships

There is an old saying, “In the shelter of each other, we live.” Relationships matter to our health. Family and friends, the groups we are part of, fellow Veterans, our health care team members – when it comes to Whole Health, many people can support us.



Key Points

- In addition to asking yourself what really matters, ask yourself *who* really matters.
- Explore how you can enhance connections with family, friends, fellow Veterans, and others in your community.
- Improving communication can help.
- Loving-kindness practices can help you feel more connected.
- Ask experts, like social workers, for help.

Loved Ones

Connect with Love Ones. Loved ones can include life partners, spouses, family members, friends, pets, and others. Having them in your life helps you live longer and deal with health issues better.

- Social capital is the amount of support you can get from others if you need it. It can help to think about who you turn to for different kinds of support. Who gives you affection or kindness? Who mentors, or advises you? Who offers you financial support? Who do you support?
- As you think about relationships, try to notice what you feel, but don't let the feelings make you shut down. If possible, think about relationships you want to renew or heal.

Veterans & Community

Connect with Other Veterans and Community. In the Circle of Health, Community surrounds (and protects) everything else.

- No one supports Veterans better than their fellow Veterans. What support do you need? How can you support others? Volunteer work might be one option.
- Join a group or organization, like Veterans of Foreign Wars or Disabled American Veterans.
- If it feels appropriate to you, consider joining a spiritual community.
- Sign up for classes, or see if your VA site offers shared medical appointments, where Veterans can learn about a health topic together.
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter) and email are other ways to connect.

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Communication

Improve Communication. Communication styles inside and outside of the military can be very different.

- There are different techniques you can learn, like how to listen better, how to read body language, and how to use “I statements.”
- Taking classes on communication skills is another option.

Compassion

Practice Compassion. Loving-kindness meditation is one way to focus on connecting. 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.

- Increasing compassion starts with self-compassion. Sometimes it is easier to feel compassion for others than ourselves.

Experts

Work with an Expert. Social workers, vocational rehabilitation people, chaplains, and psychologists are some of the professionals who can help Veterans connect.

- As you think about relationships with others, it can help to ask what sort of formal social support you need, too. Some Veterans need help with housing, or getting coverage for medical bills, or applying for a support program.
- Social workers are skilled professionals who know the resources in your local community and what is offered at the VA. They can help you speak up for yourself, and some perform family/couples counseling.
- Working on relationships can bring up a lot of emotions. If you find you are struggling with your feelings or thoughts, ask for help.

One Small Change

Make One Small Change. There are many options for connecting. Pick one and set a goal. It helps to start with something you know you can do – set yourself up for success!

Working. Here are some more examples, in addition to what has already been covered:

- Go to a community event, like a ball game, a play or musical, a festival, or a fair.
- Take a class at a local college.
- Join an online interest group.
- Call someone you have not spoken to in a while, who you miss talking to.
- Set up an account on Facebook or another site like it.
- If you are in an abusive relationship, seek help.
- Talk to a neighbor you have never met.
- Get a pet, work with a therapy animal, or volunteer at a local shelter.
- Strike up a conversation with someone in the VA cantina.
- Connect with former battle buddies.
- Look online at tips for how to communicate better. There are guides for doing that in relationships with loved ones and also at work.

Family, Friends & Coworkers Links

Whole Health Library Veteran Handouts. These are indexed at <https://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/veteran-handouts/index.asp#family-friends-and-co-workers>

- An Introduction to Family, Friends, and Coworkers: Connecting for Whole Health
- Relationships and Health [Link Pending]
- Compassion [Link Pending]

Other VA Whole Health Resources

- A Patient Centered Approach to Family, Friends, and Coworkers - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmqMRGezb0&feature=youtu.be>
- Information on Social Workers in the VA. <https://www.socialwork.va.gov/socialworkers.asp>.
- Support groups for PTSD and other great resources https://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/treatment/cope/peer_support_groups.asp.
- Support and resources for caregivers of Veterans. <https://www.caregiver.va.gov/>.

Community Groups for Veterans

- Veterans of Foreign Wars. <https://www.vfw.org/>.
- Disabled American Veterans - <https://www.dav.org/>.
- The American Legion - <https://www.legion.org/>.
- American Veterans - <http://amvets.org/>.

Counseling and Therapy Resources

- National Alliance on Mental Illness. <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support>
- American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. <https://www.aamft.org/>. Depending on what's happening with your family or marriage, working with a professional can be very helpful.

Communication

- Center for Nonviolent Communication. <https://www.cnvc.org/>. In the community section on the left bar, there different resources you can review.
- Communication TED Talks
 - Celeste Headlee: 10 ways to have a better conversation. https://www.ted.com/talks/celeste_headlee_10_ways_to_have_a_better_conversation/transcript?language=en
 - Julian Treasure: How to speak so that people want to listen. https://www.ted.com/talks/julian_treasure_how_to_speak_so_that_people_want_to_listen

Addiction Resources for Loved Ones

The Power of the Mind course covers resources for Veterans with addiction, but addiction affects loved ones too. Keep the following resources in mind:

- Al-Anon. <https://al-anon.org/>. For loved ones of someone with a drinking problem.
- Nar-Anon. <https://www.nar-anon.org/>. For family and friends of someone with an addiction problem.
- Gam-Anon. <https://gam-anon.org/>. For loved ones of someone with a gambling problem.

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Healthy Coworker Relationships

- Workplace Strategies for Mental Health.
<https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/>.
- Communicating at work.
https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em_eap_assertive.asp
- Communicating with people you supervise
<https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/communicationtips.asp>

Animal Therapy

- Pet Partners - <https://petpartners.org/>.
- Psychology Today search - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapy-types/animal-assisted-therapy>. Find animal-assisted therapists in your area.

Compassion

- Compassion articles at the Greater Good Website, by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley. <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/compassion>. Articles for the general public on latest compassion research findings. Free registration.
- Self-Compassion by Dr. Kristin Neff. <http://self-compassion.org/>. Self-compassion is key if you want to become more compassionate toward others. This website has thoughts about helping with compassion in general too. The Resources page has books, websites, and more.
- Compassion TED Talks. Videos that are worth a look.
 - Joan Halifax: Compassion and the true meaning of empathy.
https://www.ted.com/talks/joan_halifax
 - Daniel Goleman: Why aren't we more compassionate?
https://www.ted.com/talks/daniel_goleman_on_compassion/transcript?language=en

Volunteering Resources:

- Veterans Affairs. <https://www.volunteer.va.gov/>. Check this out to learn more about volunteering at the VA.
- United Way. <https://www.unitedway.org/>. Click on the "Get Involved" tab at the top of the screen.
- All for Good. <https://www.allforgood.org/>. Can search for volunteer opportunities based on where you live. Covers many different groups. Can also ask for volunteers for your projects.
- Volunteer.gov. <https://www.volunteer.gov/>. Volunteer opportunities related to natural and cultural resources, including volunteer work with the National Park Service.
- Idealist. <https://www.idealists.org>. Click on "Volunteering" at the top. Can search by location. Also has a list of jobs.
- AARP's Create the Good. <http://www.createthegood.org/>. Can search for volunteer opportunities based on location on this site as well.
- Volunteer Match. <https://www.volunteermatch.org/>. Can match based on location as well as the type of opportunity you want.