

# CAREGIVER WORKBOOK



## Caregivers FIRST

*Caregivers  
Finding Important Resources,  
Support, and Training*

**Function QUERI**

Optimizing Function and Independence  
Quality Enhancement Research Initiative

*July 2022*

The Caregivers FIRST (Finding Important Resources, Support, and Training) Facilitator's Guide is designed to be used with the Caregivers FIRST Caregiver Training Program. This program is part of the Optimizing Function and Independence VA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative Program (Function QUERI), which evaluates efforts to implement team-based clinical programs for Veterans at risk for functional decline and disability. This project is supported by VA HSR&D QUERI (IP1 HX002258-01).

If you would like more information about the Caregivers FIRST program or the Optimizing Function and Independence QUERI project, please contact us at (919) 286-6936 or [visit the Durham Center of Innovation to ADAPT online.](#)

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**VA**



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Health Administration  
VA Illiana Health Care System



**Function QUERI**  
Optimizing Function and Independence  
Quality Enhancement Research Initiative

## Important Contact Information

*Note: This workbook is for you to keep, feel free to write in this workbook.*

### Caregiver Support Coordinator

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### My Primary Care Provider:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### My Veteran's PACT Team Social Worker:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### My Veteran's Mental Health Provider:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### Local Patient Advocate:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### Other VA Provider/Contact:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_



# Caregivers FIRST

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# Caregivers FIRST Training

Welcome to Caregivers FIRST, which stands for Caregivers Finding Important Resources, Support, and Training. As a caregiver of a Veteran loved one, there can be many challenges.



## Training Goals:

- Apply strategies to help you in your caregiving role
- Learn about VA resources and support to help you
- Share tools and strategies from your experience as a caregiver
- Learn and apply self-care strategies

Over the course of these four classes, we hope you will be able to interact with other caregivers to share tools and strategies, learn how to apply those strategies, and ultimately help connect you with what you need to feel confident, capable, and supported in your caregiving role.

### Class 1: Introduction and caregiving discussion

- Frustrations and rewards of caregiving
- Helping Veteran remain independent
- Relaxation exercise

### Class 2: Hands-on and shared decision-making strategies

- Basics of daily care
- Safety
- Veteran preferences
- Communication with providers

### Class 3: Coping skills and strategies

- Stress management
- Value of self-care
- Recognizing depression, burnout

### Class 4: Support-seeking skills and navigation strategies

- Navigating the system
- VA services and Caregiver Support Program
- Non-VA resources
- Preparing for the future and legal issues

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# Class 1: Introduction and Caregiving Discussion

This class explores rewards and challenges of caregiving. Skills and strategies essential to caregiving will be identified. In addition, the group will engage in a personal goal-setting exercise.

## Class Objectives

- Discuss caregiving frustrations and rewards
- Describe the concepts of recovery versus cure
- Identify strategies and resources to help their Veteran loved one remain independent
- Practice the signal breath relaxation exercise

## Group Guidelines

- ✓ What is said here stays here
- ✓ Speak and listen to each other with respect
- ✓ Share information and give equal time to all group members
- ✓ Try not to use the name of your Veteran's VA providers
- ✓ If you have questions, please ask

## Class 1 Slides and Activities

*Note: This workbook is for you to keep, feel free to write in this workbook.*



Slide 1

# Caregivers FIRST

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## *Caregivers Finding Important Resources, Support, and Training*

### *Class One*



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

Slide 2

## Logistics

- Housekeeping
- Classes start at X:XX and end at Y:YY
- Please turn your cell phones off or place them on silent



## Goals of Caregivers FIRST Classes

- Learn about VA supports and resources to help you
- Share tools and strategies from your experience as a Caregiver
- Apply strategies to help you in your caregiving role
- Learn and apply self-care strategies

***You are the experts!***

## Agenda

- Introductions
- Taking a Moment for You: Self Care Exercise
- Caregiving Discussion
  - Rewards and challenges of caregiving
  - Caregiver skills
  - Caregiver strategies: The Heart of a Caregiver
  - Recovery vs. Cure
  - Personal goal-setting

## Introductions

1. Your name
2. How are you related to the Veteran?
3. How long have you been a Caregiver?
4. Does the Veteran live with you?
5. Tell us something you like to do

## Expectations

What do you hope  
to get out  
of this class?



## Important Information

- Group guidelines
  - ✓ What is said here stays here
  - ✓ Speak and listen to each other with respect
  - ✓ Share information and give equal time to all group members
  - ✓ Try not to use the name of your Veteran's VA providers
  - ✓ If you have questions, please ask
- Anything else you would you like to add?

## Taking a Moment for You: Self-Care Exercise

Signal Breath:

- This will take just a few minutes
- Rate your level of tension
  - Think of a scale from 1 to 5:
    - 1 is "not tense at all"
    - 5 is "terribly tense"



## The Signal Breath

1. Position yourself in your chair with your back straight.
2. Think of a word that helps you relax or think of relaxing. A word like “peace” or “calm” or “flower”.
3. Think of that word and take a deep breath in, holding it in for 3 or 4 seconds.
4. Gently and slowly exhale and as you are letting your breath out, think of your calming word and physically let the muscles in your neck, shoulders, and back relax.
5. Repeat these steps 2 or 3 times.

## Caregiving Discussion: Rewards of Caregiving

- Taking care of a family member with physical and/or mental health problems just might be the **toughest** job you have ever had. It can also be **very rewarding!**
- What are some of the rewards that you have experienced since becoming a Caregiver?

## Caregiving Discussion: Challenges of Caregiving

- It is a job that neither of you asked for
- Your lives changed when you became the Veteran's Caregiver
- What is the biggest challenge you have faced since becoming a Caregiver?

### Caregiving Discussion

Some of rewards I have experienced as a Caregiver are:

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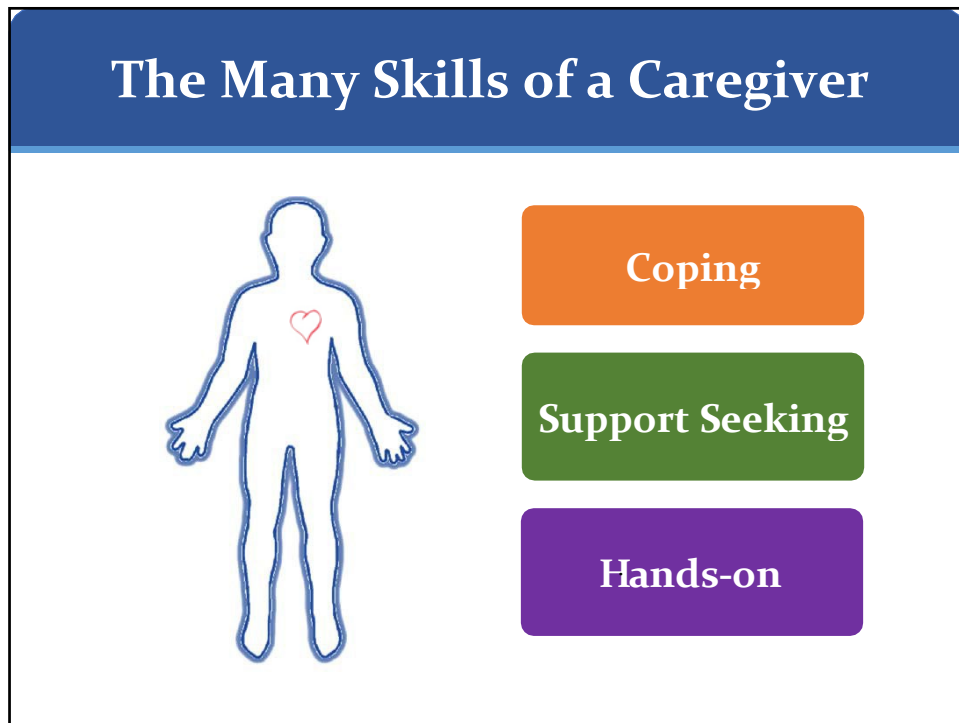
Some challenges:

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## Caregiver Skills: Building on What You Know to Address Caregiving Challenges

- *You are the expert!*
- *You know what you need*





Over the next few weeks, we will talk about the different Caregiver skills. Caregiving requires:

- **COPING SKILLS**, which involve the importance of practicing physical and emotional self-care.
  - We'll talk about developing coping skills and strategies to help you in your caregiving role.
  - We'll talk about boundary-setting with your Veteran and in other relationships.
- **SUPPORT SEEKING SKILLS**, which is an area that is hard for many Caregivers who are accustomed to *being* the source of support, rather than *asking* for support.
  - We'll explore some skills for improving communication.
  - We'll talk about seeking resources and where to find them.
  - We'll also tackle the topic of asking for help.
- **HANDS-ON CLINICAL SKILLS**, which involve determining what your Veteran loved one is capable of safely doing on his/her own.
  - What are the Veteran's goals?
  - We'll talk about realistic goal-setting, not just for you, but for your Veteran loved one as well.
  - We'll talk about distinguishing between your Veteran's "needs" and his/her "wants".

## Caregiver Skills Help with Recovery

- What is “recovery”? Recovery is:
  - Doing the best with what you have
  - Setting goals
  - Engaging in treatment
  - Different for everyone
  - Possible for everyone

We often confuse “recovery” with “cured.”  
When we talk about recovery, we are ***not***  
talking about a cure.

## Challenges to Recovery

*“The Doctor says he’s not going to get better”*

- My Veteran’s condition is **chronic**
  - “Chronic” means ongoing
  - It does **not** mean that the impact of the Veteran’s symptoms can’t improve over time
- My Veteran’s condition is **progressive**
  - “Progressive” means that the symptoms are going to advance and become more severe

## Strategies to Help Recovery

- Possible strategy: Talk with your Veteran (and his/her treatment team) to set manageable goals to improve his/her symptom experience.
- Why is this important? It feels good to be able to do some things on their own.
  - It is empowering and can lead to increased independence

## Challenges to Recovery

*“It is just easier to do it myself.”*

- My Veteran does not want to do \_\_\_\_
  - Recovery can be hard, uncomfortable, even scary.
- My Veteran says he/she can't do \_\_\_\_
  - Sometimes we say “can't” when we mean “don't want to”.
- My Veteran does not want anyone else but me to help.
  - It can make one feel really vulnerable and weak to ask others for help.



## Strategies to Help Recovery

- Possible strategy: Use gentle but clear communication with your Veteran to explain what is happening and the reasons behind it.
- Why is this important? Doing it yourself may be easier in the short-run, but harder for you and the Veteran over time.

***There are many different challenges to your loved one's recovery. Focus on what works best for you!***

Challenge	Potential Strategies
Veteran can't do anything	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Veteran helps pair the socks in the clean laundry basket.</li> <li>• Veteran folds the laundry in the laundry basket – Veteran can take the clean, dry laundry from the dryer, put it in the basket, fold it, and put it away.</li> </ul>
Veteran can't feed him/herself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Veteran works with OT/PT to develop ability to operate utensils.</li> <li>• Veteran practices at home with VA provided adaptive equipment.</li> </ul>
Veteran gets confused with multi-step instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Veteran and Caregiver do task (washing dishes) together.</li> <li>• Veteran dries the dishes while Caregiver washes.</li> <li>• Veteran dries and puts away the dishes while Caregiver washes and helps direct where things go.</li> </ul>
Veteran can't handle social situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Veteran works with his/her mental health provider in addressing symptoms with evidence-based treatments (EBTs), with direct Caregiver support.</li> <li>• Caregiver encourages small steps outside of Veteran's comfort zone.</li> <li>• Veteran goes to the store early in the morning and picks up/pays for 2 items while Caregiver waits in the car.</li> </ul>
My Veteran requires around-the-clock supervision, I can't leave him alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caregiver asks friend of Veteran to come and play cards with Veteran for an hour while Caregiver is still at home, in another room</li> <li>• Caregiver asks friend or family member to come and spend an hour with Veteran while Caregiver shops for groceries 1x per week</li> <li>• Caregiver encourages Veteran to participate in Recreational Therapy 2x per week.</li> <li>• Caregiver uses VA respite care benefits to attend her own medical appointments.</li> <li>• Caregiver uses adult day health 3x per week for longer periods of respite.</li> </ul>

Setting some clear expectations can help your Veteran feel a sense of power and control in his/her life and alleviate some of the day-to-day stress and strain you face as a Caregiver.

Some things to consider:

Challenge	Potential Strategies
"I don't want to..."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explain that there are things we have to do in life even if we don't want to (e.g., brushing our teeth to prevent problems later).</li></ul>
"I can't..."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set and reach a small goal for achievable tasks.</li><li>• For tasks your Veteran truly can't do, talk with your Veteran's providers about other achievable alternatives.</li></ul>
"I only want you to help..."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You are only one person and you cannot do it all forever. Find a way to introduce respite from others (e.g., friends, family members, VA recreational therapy).</li><li>• Remember: If something were to happen to you, you would need a plan in place for someone else to help.</li></ul>
Caregiver: "I will avoid this battle for now..."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sometimes avoiding the battle now is helpful, and sometimes it sets standards that are hard to meet later. Try relaxing your standards, or encouraging the Veteran to relax theirs.</li><li>• Be flexible with expectations of yourself and each other. Remember, it does not feel good to need someone else to do things for us.</li></ul>

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## Taking Action

- What are some challenges you have faced while caring for your Veteran loved one?
- How have you been dealing with those challenges?
  - Choose a challenge to recovery that you would like to focus on.
  - Think about how you can begin to address this challenge at home.

## Wrap Up/Next Steps

- We talked about a lot today!
- What will you think about or do differently this week?
  - Try a new skill from “Skills of a Caregiver”?
  - Try a recovery strategy?
- Practice the Signal Breath exercise

*We will start the next class with a check-in on this “action item” to see how things went this week.*

# Action Plan

*This week, consider an action item. Jot down your thoughts and next week, we will start the group by discussing what you've come up with.*

1) Choose a challenge to recovery that you would like to focus on:

*Think about how you can begin to address this challenge at home:*

2) This week, I'm going to try:

3) I will need these resources:

4) I will ask these people for help:

5) I will start on this date:

6) *How did it go?*

**REMEMBER TO PRACTICE SIGNAL BREATH!**  
(see below)

**Rating Your Tension this Week:**

*Try this on your own this week as you practice the Signal Breath exercise. Think of a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not tense at all, 5= terribly tense):*

MONDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

TUESDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

WEDNESDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

THURSDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

FRIDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

SATURDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

SUNDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes about how it went:**

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## Optional Content for Class 1

Slide 21

### Scenario: Herman



Herman is a 91 year old WWII Navy Veteran. He has poor vision due to macular degeneration. He can see, but only with glasses and only in his left eye. He is a little forgetful, but has not been diagnosed with dementia. He had a both hips replaced about a year and a half ago. He uses a cane and a walker for mobility. He has a torn rotator cuff on his left shoulder (his principal arm) and has trouble reaching or stretching that arm. He is able to feed and toilet independently, but requires assistance with dressing and bathing, daily.

He and his wife, Lily, who is 89, live independently. They have 2 adult children who live out of state. Lily and Herman both insist that they can remain independent in their family home. However, Lily is unable to lift Herman in and out of the bath safely anymore. Herman is proud and does not want any outside help.

**What are some of the challenges that Lily faces in caring for Herman? What are your thoughts about what Lily and Herman can do to help him be as independent as possible, to help with his recovery?**

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Herman's recovery is tricky. It is likely that his level of independence is going to decrease, rather than increase. However, there are tools and strategies that can be used to help him be as independent as possible, to stay in his own home, without exhausting and overwhelming Lily.

- ✓ Lily should reach out to her local VA Caregiver Support Coordinator. They can help her access resources such as a HISSA grant that can enable Lily to modify their bathroom/home to increase access/independence.
- ✓ Perhaps a Physical Therapy consult to address Herman's trouble with reaching, function?
- ✓ Maybe an Occupational Therapy consult for assessment and prescription of devices, sock donner, long handled reacher, sponge, etc.?

Lily is not expected to manage all this on her own! There are many resources that may help her to help Herman remain safely at home while providing her with valuable support and encouragement.

## Class 2: Hands-on and Shared Decision-making Strategies

This class explores the tools and skills to help with communication with your Veteran loved one's health care team. In addition, hands-on skills will be shared for addressing the basics of daily care and safety in the home. Finally, the group will engage in a personal goal-setting exercise.

### Class Objectives

- Describe strategies for improving communication with Veteran's health care providers
- Discuss the basics of daily care
- Discuss approaches for caring for a Veteran with memory problems or mental illness
- Identify strategies for improving home safety
- Practice the progressive muscle relaxation exercise

### Group Guidelines

- ✓ What is said here stays here
- ✓ Speak and listen to each other with respect
- ✓ Share information and give equal time to all group members
- ✓ Try not to use the name of your Veteran's VA providers
- ✓ If you have questions, please ask

## Class 2 Slides and Activities



Slide 1

# Caregivers FIRST

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## *Caregivers Finding Important Resources, Support, and Training*

### *Class Two*

  U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Slide 2

## Logistics

- Housekeeping
- Classes start at X:XX and end at Y:YY
- Please turn your cell phones off (or on silent)
- Group guidelines
  - What is said here stays here
  - Speak and listen to each other with respect
  - Share information and give equal time to all group members
  - Try not to use the name of your Veteran's healthcare providers
  - If you have questions, please ask



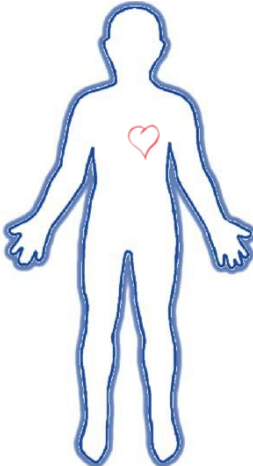
## Agenda

- Introduction
- Point of Action/Check-in
- Taking a Moment for You: Self Care Exercise
- Caregiving Discussion: Hands-On Skills
  - Communicating with Veteran's healthcare providers
  - Basics of daily care

## Checking In

- Remember your Action Item from last week?
  - Were you able to practice a strategy to address a challenge you faced as a Caregiver?
  - Do you have successes you would like to share?
- Did you practice the Signal Breath exercise?
  - How did it go?
  - Did you notice a change in your stress level?

## The Many Skills of a Caregiver




- Coping
- Support Seeking
- Hands-on

## Taking a Moment for You: Self-Care Exercise

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation

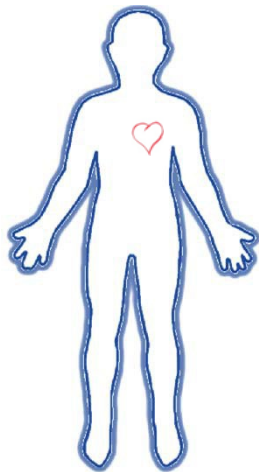
- This will take just a few minutes
- Let's start by rating our level of tension
  - Think of a scale from 1–5
    - 1 is “not tense at all”
    - 5 is “terribly tense”

[Watch: Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#) 

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

1. Start by rating your level oftension
2. Get into a comfortable position
3. Breathe at a comfortable pace, in through the nose, out through the mouth
4. If you are comfortable closing your eyes, you are welcomed to do so. Otherwise, soften your gaze or watch the video
5. If you do not have access to a computer, you can go through the muscle groups, starting at your toes and up to the top of your head, tensing and releasing, slowly and deliberately

## The Many Skills of a Caregiver



Coping

Support Seeking

**Hands-on**

## Talking with the Healthcare Team

Benefits of improving communication with the PACT (Patient Aligned Care Team):

- Better care for your Veteran
- More efficient use of time (for you and the healthcare team)
- Improved collaboration with healthcare team
- Greater sense of control for you and the Veteran
- Better able to share your experience and expertise ***as part of*** the healthcare team

***The main reason for improving communication with the Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) in partnership with your Veteran loved one is to foster greater independence when possible, helping your Veteran be an active participant in his/her treatment.***

- If you and your Veteran can effectively communicate and genuinely relate to the care team, both of you will have a greater sense of satisfaction and control in your healthcare experience overall.
- This does not mean that you will always agree, but you will be able to communicate, even during times of disagreement, for the health and well-being of your Veteran loved one.
- When you feel that your thoughts, concerns, opinions are being taken into consideration regarding your Veteran loved one's healthcare, you may feel a greater sense of control in a typically out-of-control situation.
  - Your stress level may go down.
  - You may develop a greater sense of partnership and collaboration between you and your Veteran's healthcare team.

After all, you are the expert! You want your expertise to be considered in the Veteran's care.

## A Word from our Experts

- You have likely faced challenges when trying to communicate with your Veteran's healthcare team
- What are some of the tools or strategies you have used to improve communication?



### Caregiving Discussion

**What strategies did you use to improve communication?**

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**What tools did you use for communicating with the healthcare team?**

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## Talking About Recovery

-  Recovery does not mean “cure”
-  Recovery looks different for everyone
-  Recovery involves a “whole person” approach

- Ask your Veteran about his/her recovery goals
  - Talk about sharing these goals with the treatment team or his/her Primary Care Provider
- Ask your Veteran how you, as a Caregiver, can support their recovery efforts

Recovery looks different for everyone and every situation. It is important to talk with your Veteran about what their recovery goals might be, such as:

- Do they want to be more independent in day-to-day activities?
- Do they want to feel more comfortable in family or social settings?
- Do they want to increase their mobility?

Together, you can talk with the Veteran’s Primary Care provider about his/her level of disability and their identified recovery goals. **Are there tools or resources that the provider might recommend that may help the Veteran achieve greater independence?**

- Perhaps an Occupational Therapy (OT) or Physical Therapy (PT) consult might help the Veteran gain independence.
- Consider talking with a Social Worker about a HISSA Grant to make home modifications to install a ramp or a roll-in shower to increase Veteran independence.
- Encourage a conversation with the provider about prognosis and progression of symptoms.

Remember that sometimes the effort to complete these tasks independently, combined with chronic pain, leads the Veteran to **prefer** a Caregiver to do some tasks for them, not **require** a Caregiver’s help. It does not feel good to depend on others for your basic, daily care needs. With the right tools and support, you can help your Veteran achieve his/her highest level of independence possible.

## Preparing for the Clinic Visit

- Talk with your Veteran about the upcoming appointment, and how he/she would like you to be involved
- Make a list of questions before the appointment
  - Order important questions first in case time is short
- Make note of any changes in symptoms
- Have a list of all medications and/or allergies

*Consider preparing a notebook with all your Veteran's health-related information and history*



***There are many strategies to reduce or remove some of the challenges to recovery you may face. The strategies are designed to help your Veteran make the most of his/her time with the provider:***

- **Be prepared before you go to the Medical Center.** Have a conversation with the Veteran about the upcoming appointment. Ask about his/her understanding of why they are going, how they have been feeling, and what they want the provider to know about. You can talk about issues, challenges, or changes that the Veteran may have noticed and what you may have noticed. Finally, ask them about how **THEY** prefer you to be involved in the appointment.
- **Make some notes and/or a list of questions that you and your Veteran want the provider to know.** Prioritize these by importance and note what, if anything, can wait if time runs out. Talk with the Veteran about using this list. Be sure to include any changes in symptoms (good or bad), change in sleeping or eating habits, changes in stress level, etc. *See Resources section for a copy of the Clinic Satisfaction Tool as a way to prepare a list of questions.*
- **Make a list of the medications that the Veteran is taking.** Even though the provider has access to this in the medical record, it is important to make note of any side effects, positive impacts on symptoms, and how long the Veteran has been taking the medication. It is also helpful to have information about medications and dosages that the Veteran may have used in the past and whether they were effective.
- **Encourage your Veteran to take the lead in the appointment.** He or she may be more comfortable having you speak on their behalf, but be supportive and encouraging. Providers often prefer to hear directly from the patient. As a Caregiver, help your Veteran feel empowered to speak on their own behalf.

## During the Clinic Visit

- Use your list!
- Take notes
- Ask questions!
- Talk with the provider if you have concerns about your capacity to meet the Veteran's caregiving needs
- Ask for a summary of any changes in medications, treatments, and prognosis



***Medical appointments can be stressful for you and your Veteran loved one, so be prepared to make it a positive experience.***

- **Use your list** as a guide during the appointment. Share it with the provider to present the topics you would like to discuss. *See Resources section for a copy of the Clinic Satisfaction Tool as a way to prepare a list of questions.*
- **Take notes.** Even if the Veteran prefers to speak on his/her own behalf, you can still ask questions or request additional information.
- **Providers may assume that you are managing okay in your caregiving role.**
  - If you need support or resources, it is important to tell the provider.
  - It is also a good time to ask for suggestions about how best to meet the Veteran's medical needs and communicate with the provider if you need to (you may want to pursue a *Release Of Information (ROI)* which enables you to communicate with the Veteran's provider).
- **Ask for a summary of what was discussed.** Medication changes, specialty consults or referrals, and anticipated timelines for medications to be effective, or for specialty clinics to reach out, are good items to have in your summary.



## After the Clinic Visit

- Check in with your Veteran
- Reach out to the PACT provider if you are unclear about any medications or instructions
  - MyHealtheVet is a useful tool for communication
- The pharmacist is a good resource for questions about medications, side effects, concerns about interactions
- Follow-up with providers if Veteran does not improve or gets worse



***After your appointment, check-in with your loved one. How does he/she feel it went? Do they still have any questions or concerns about their health or treatment?***

- You can reach out to the **PACT Team** in between appointments if issues come up.
- **MyHealtheVet** is a great way to check lab results, send messages to the PACT Team, etc. If you are not already signed up for MyHealtheVet, talk with your Veteran loved one's PACT Team Social Worker or your Caregiver Support Coordinator.
- **Ask your Veteran loved one whether any medication changes are helping or not.** Are they experiencing any side effects? Have you, the Caregiver, noticed any change (good or bad)?
- **Follow-up with providers** if the Veteran does not improve or gets worse. Better to reach out for advice than to worry or feel uncertain. The pharmacist is also a good resource for questions about medications, side effects, and interactions.
- Your **Caregiver Support Coordinator** can help you problem-solve or access support.
- Should you or your Veteran feel as if the Veteran was not treated appropriately during the appointment, you can always speak with the **Patient Advocate**. You can contact your Caregiver Support Coordinator for information on how to contact your local Patient Advocate, or see your workbook page 3, "IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION."

## Activities of Daily Living

- Your Veteran may need assistance with daily activities
  - Encourage independence as much as possible
  - Protect your back!
- This can include assistance ranging from prompting/coaching to hands-on assistance



Eating



Bathing



Dressing



Transferring



Toileting



Walking or moving around

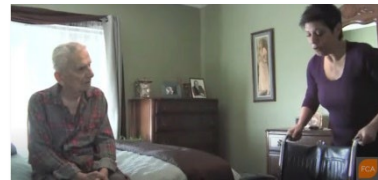
## Hands-On Care of Your Veteran

[Watch: Transfer Skills Video](#)



### Transfer Skills for Family Caregivers

- Tips and instructions on how to use gravity and leverage to assist you when lifting or transferring a loved one who has limited mobility



*Good body mechanics are key to preserving your back and your strength as a Caregiver. A great resource for training and videos is youtube.com. Also, talk with the Veteran's care team about good body mechanics for assisting your Veteran with his/her specific care needs. You may want to consult with your own physician as well.*

## A Word from our Experts

- It can be hard to help your Veteran loved one with challenging daily activities
- Have you discovered any tools, tricks, or strategies that make it easier to assist your loved one?



### Caregiving Discussion

**What has helped you with the hands-on or day-to-day care activities?**

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**Tips from others?**

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## Caring for a Loved One with Mental Health or Memory Problems

- Brings a whole new level to caregiving
  - Often loved one does not understand
  - Unpredictable levels of need
  - Around the clock
  - Can be isolating
- Grief and a sense of loss of the person they used to be
  - Changes in personality
  - Loss of ability to recognize loved ones

**Caring for my loved one has affected me in the following ways:**

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**People I can confide in and ask for help:**

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## Caring for a Loved One with Memory Problems

Some DO's	Some DON'Ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Face your loved one, make gentle eye-contact</li> <li>Praise their efforts</li> <li>Explain what's happening</li> <li>Redirect</li> <li>Answer their questions</li> <li>Help start tasks</li> <li>Encourage activity</li> <li>Keep a predictable routine</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take it personally</li> <li>Overstimulate</li> <li>Argue/say no</li> <li>Force them to do something</li> <li>Offer too many choices</li> <li>Remind them of how much they are forgetting</li> <li>Talk about them as if they are not there</li> </ul>

## Caring for a Veteran Loved One with Mental Illness

- Mental Illness is a medical condition
  - Stigma, guilt, or shame can make it difficult to ask for help
- Caregiver strategies:
  - Provide structure and stability
  - Encourage treatment
  - Discourage alcohol or drug use
  - Be on alert for signs or thoughts of self-harm or harm to others
  - Don't take the Veteran's symptoms personally



**Veterans  
Crisis Line**  
1-800-273-8255  
PRESS 1

*Mental Illness is a **medical condition**. There is still considerable stigma and misconception around the mental health concerns that our Veterans may face.*

It can be very difficult for our Veteran loved ones to seek help or even to acknowledge that their mental health is suffering. It can be equally difficult for Caregivers to seek help.

- **Help provide structure, stability, and predictability.** A predictable routine can be comforting and provide some assurance to the Veteran in a world that can otherwise feel very unsafe and uncertain.
- **Encourage treatment.** Stigma can be a big obstacle, but there are many understanding professionals available to help your Veteran cope more effectively with mental health symptoms. There are therapies that can help a Veteran develop healthy coping strategies to manage their mental health symptoms. There are also intensive, inpatient treatment options for Veterans whose symptoms may become more severe.
- **Discourage substance use and self-medication, and seek treatment if substance use is an issue.** Some Veterans may feel as if having some alcohol or marijuana or other substances will help alleviate the distress related to their mental health symptoms. This approach has a short-term benefit that leads to long-term problems.
- **Seek professional support if your Veteran is expressing hopelessness, helplessness, rage, or extreme sadness.**
- **Seek assistance right away if your Veteran has thoughts of harming his/her self or others.** The Veterans Crisis Line is available to Veterans by calling 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1 to receive free, confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you are concerned for the immediate safety of your Veteran or the ones around you, call 911.
  - Each Medical Center also has a **Suicide Prevention Coordinator**. This person can help support you in ensuring your Veteran loved one's safety. They are also a great source of educational and other resources on the subject of suicide and suicide prevention, specific to the Veteran culture.
- **Try not to take the Veteran's symptoms personally.** Remember...mental illness is an illness. Seek support for yourself. **Use your respite.**

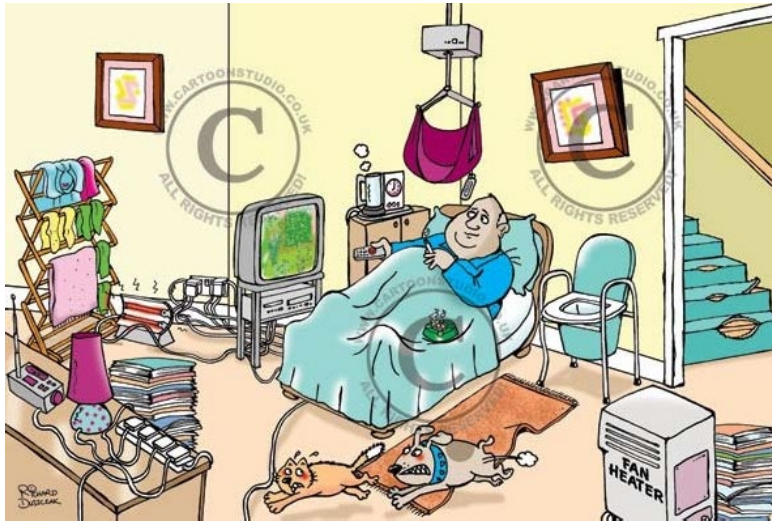
If you find yourself **or** your Veteran loved one in crisis, if you are concerned about safety of yourself or others, you can call the **National Veteran's Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255**.

- Hotline is staffed 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.
- Hotline is staffed with compassionate and skilled clinicians.

If you are struggling in your role as a Caregiver, if you need resources or guidance, or if you simply need someone who understands the challenges of being a caregiver, you can call the **National Caregiver Support Line: 1-855-260-3274**.

- This is a national number, staffed by licensed Clinical Social Workers who will assist you and connect you to your local VA Caregiver Support Coordinator.

## Staying Safe at Home



**What are some hazards you see in this picture?**

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## Home Safety



- Keep emergency numbers (and phones) handy
- Keep a key hidden outside or with a friend/neighbor
- Keep rooms and hallways clutter and trip hazard free
- Use adequate lighting throughout the house
- Keep **working** smoke detectors in the home
- Keep doors and windows locked
- Electronic monitoring devices can be useful tools
- Padlocks/child proof latches on cabinets where medications or hazards stored
- Install handrails on stairs, grab bars in bathrooms

Practicing some strategies or making some adjustments at home make it safer, not just for your Veteran, but for you as well. The “one less thing to worry about” factor can help reduce/alleviate your distress as a Caregiver.

*Also refer to “Home Safety Tips” in the Resources section of this workbook.*

- **Keep important numbers (and phones) readily available** in case of emergencies.
- **Keep a key with a neighbor or a friend close by (or well hidden).** If you get locked out or if there’s an emergency, a friend or neighbor access the house as needed.
- **Maintain wide, level paths in your home for your Veteran to safely navigate.** Walk through your house, imagining you have some balance issues. Look for items that might be used for catching one’s balance or would interfere with the use of canes or walkers. Items like area rugs, extension cords, and furniture can cause a nasty fall.
- **Make sure your home is well lit,** particularly hallways and stairwells.
- **Make sure your smoke detectors are working.** Get on a schedule to change the batteries 2x per year (perhaps, when the time changes).
- **If your Veteran loved one may wander, keep doors and windows locked** (with a key, if necessary). Monitoring devices are increasingly inexpensive and easy to install. As well, child proof latches or locks on cabinets where medicines or hazards are kept can give you, the Caregiver, peace of mind.
- **Talk to your Social Worker about a HISSA Grant to make home modifications for safety.** Handrails, grab bars, wheel chair ramps can make the home safer for you and your Veteran.

**ANYTHING NOT ON THIS LIST THAT WOULD MAKE YOUR HOME SAFER?**



## Taking Action

- What skills have helped you as a caregiver?
- What are some of your strongest skills?
- Are there areas where you still struggle?
- Choose a skill-boosting activity that you would like to focus on:
  - Caregiver Notebook?
  - My HealtheVet?
  - Planning for the Clinic Visit?
  - Talking with your Veteran loved one about recovery?
- Think about how you can begin to use this activity at home

## Wrap Up/Next Steps

- What will you think about or do differently this week?
  - Focus on one of the caregiving skills?
  - Choose an action item and take action!
    - Caregiver Notebook?
    - My HealtheVet?
    - Safety check?
- Practice the Signal Breath exercise and/or Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercises

*We will start the next class with a check-in on this "action item" to see how things went this week.*

# Action Plan

*This week, consider an action item. We will start the group by discussing what you've come up with.*

1) This week, I'm going to try:

2) I will need these resources:

3) I will ask these people for help:

4) I will start on this date:

5) *How did it go?*

**REMEMBER TO PRACTICE SIGNAL BREATH or PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION!**

*Rating Your Tension this Week:*

*Try this on your own this week as you practice the Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercise.  
Think of a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not tense at all, 5= terribly tense):*

MONDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

TUESDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

WEDNESDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

THURSDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

FRIDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

SATURDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

SUNDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes about how it went:**

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[illegible]

## Class 3: Coping Skills and Strategies

This class explores effective communication, positive self-talk, and problem-solving strategies. In addition, this class will share coping skills, de-stressing techniques, and ways to identify risk of depression and/or burnout along with resources to help combat these experiences. Finally, the group will engage in a personal goal-setting exercise.

### Class Objectives

- Identify effective communication skills and problem-solving strategies
- Discuss coping and de-stressing skills
- Identify risk of depression and/or burnout and available resources
- Practice the creative visualization exercise

### Group Guidelines

- ✓ What is said here stays here
- ✓ Speak and listen to each other with respect
- ✓ Share information and give equal time to all group members
- ✓ Try not to use the name of your Veteran's VA providers
- ✓ If you have questions, please ask

## Class 3 Slides and Activities



Slide 1

# Caregivers FIRST

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## *Caregivers Finding Important Resources, Support, and Training*

### *Class Three*



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

Slide 2

## Logistics

- Housekeeping
- Classes start at X:XX and end at Y:YY
- Please turn your cell phones off (or on silent)
- Group guidelines
  - What is said here stays here
  - Speak and listen to each other with respect
  - Share information and give equal time to all group members
  - Try not to use the name of your Veteran's healthcare providers

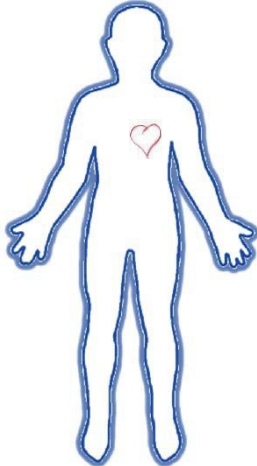
## Agenda

- Introduction
- Point of Action/Check-in
- Taking a Moment for You: Self Care Exercise
- Caregiving Discussion: Hands-On Skills
  - Effective communication skills
  - Coping and de-stressing
  - Avoiding burnout and depression

## Checking In

- Remember your Action Item from last week?
  - Thoughts or insights you would like to share?
- Did you practice the Signal Breath or Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercise?
  - How did it go?
  - Any challenges or successes?
  - Is this something you will try again?

## The Many Skills of a Caregiver



- Coping
- Support Seeking
- Hands-on

## Taking a Moment for You: Self-Care Exercise

### Creative Visualization

- Let's start by rating our level of tension (scale 1-5)
  - 1 is "not tense at all"
  - 5 is "terribly tense"
- Get into a comfortable position
- Breathe at a comfortable pace
- If you are comfortable closing your eyes, you can
- Rate your tension again after the exercise

[Watch: VA Office of Rural Health Self-Care Video](#)

*[The VA Rural Health website](#) has many useful videos and guides for Caregivers of Veterans with dementia and for Caregivers in general.*



### **Creative Visualization Steps**

Take some time, when you are not too stressed, to picture a calming and peaceful scene. It could be the beach. It might be the mountains. Taking note of all 5 senses:

1. What do you hear? Birds? Waves? Children laughing?

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2. What can you smell? Mossy hillside? Salty sea air?

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3. What do you feel? The warmth of the sun? The grass between your toes?

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4. What do you see? Sparkling water? Fields of wildflowers?

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5. What do you taste? Refreshing lemonade? Salt from the sea on your lips?

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Remember to keep breathing, deeply and at a comfortable pace. If you are pressed for time, set a timer for 3 – 5 minutes. Allow yourself to travel to this peaceful place for a few moments.

## A Word from our Experts

- Why is effective communication important as a Caregiver?
- What are some of the **communication challenges** you face in your caregiving role?
- What does effective communication have to do with self-care?



### Caregiving Discussion

Why is effective communication important as a Caregiver?

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What are some of the challenges you face regarding communication in your role as a Caregiver?

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## Effective Communication

- Why is communication important as a Caregiver?
  - Enhances the connection between you and your Veteran
  - Increases understanding of each other's needs
  - Increases positive outcomes/responses
  - Reduces anxiety and stress
- Difficulty in communicating can lead to psychological distress for both you and your Veteran
  - Communication skills can often prevent distress

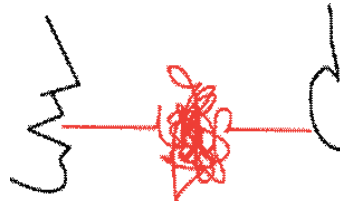
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*[Youtube](#) is a great resource for brief videos with tips and tricks for effective communication. When you type "communication skills" or "effective communication" into the search bar, you will get a long list of video examples and demonstrations.*

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## Choosing Your Words


- Use “I” statements
- Avoid “All or Nothing” language
- Keep the past in the past




***An important part of effective communication is the language that you use when communicating with others:***

- **The use of “I” statements** is important for clear and reducing the likelihood that others will become defensive. Example: “I feel like you aren’t listening when you stare at the TV when I am talking with you.”
- **Avoiding the use of all or nothing language.** Using phrases like “you never...” or “you always...” leaves no room for negotiation and can leave the other person feeling defensive or shut down. Instead of “You never do anything around the house to help me”, try being direct and sticking to the issue at hand: “I need your help with the laundry. Can you please fold these clothes while I get our sheets to start another load?”
- **Try to keep the uncorrectable, unchangeable past in the past.** “This is just like last year, when we were visiting with my family and you stayed in the room and didn’t socialize.” Again, try to be direct and ask for what it is you are wanting: “We are going to be visiting with my family next weekend. They will be having a small cookout to welcome us. I would really like for you to participate. How can I help you feel more comfortable in that setting?”

## Asking for What You Want

 [Watch: Communication Skills Video](#)



***The primary reason for developing your communication skills involves your basic need to get along with others while maintaining your personal integrity.***

In this first clip, it really is quite simple. The rabbit was on the list. He simply asked, “will you take me off that list?” The other animals did not ask for what they wanted.

Many times we are reluctant to ask because we are afraid we’ll be turned down. We may be afraid of imposing. We anticipate rejection and therefore we don’t even ask. Other times, we may think that we are being clear, but in fact we are too vague in our request and others don’t fully understand what is going on or even what is being asked of them!

- “Oh, it’s going to be a rough day” (Meaning: My back hurts. I need to take some medicine and sit. I cannot give you your bath right now).
- “This restaurant is so crowded tonight” (Meaning: I don’t feel comfortable staying here when it is so crowded. I can’t wait that long to be seated).
- “I have a doctor’s appointment on Thursday, but your dad can’t come with me.” (Meaning: I need you to stay with your father while I go to a doctor’s appointment of my own).

In the second clip, we are taught some steps to improve our communication. Although this depicts a business setting, the skills and strategies seem to translate well into caregiving.

Having a plan...or a script...makes it easier for us to ask for help. In this clip:

Step	Explanation	Examples
1. Do your research	Learn about the situation and the person you are asking for help.	What has been going on with Veteran? Is Charlie's work schedule flexible enough that he might be able to come and watch dad while I go to my Dr. appointment?
2. Be upfront/direct	Sometimes we get into trouble with our requests because we are vague, apologetic, or beat around the bush. Be respectful, but direct and clear.	"Dear, it looks like you are uncomfortable or in pain. What hurts?" "Charlie, I know you are off on Thursdays. Would you please come watch dad for me from 11:00 to 1:30 while I go to my Dr. appointment?"
3. Make it easy to say yes	Extend kindness or appreciation in advance.	"I know you don't like to complain, but I am concerned and want to try and help." "Charlie, I know it's your day off. I've rented Star Wars and would be happy to order lunch from your favorite pizza place"
4. Deliver the goods	If you agree to something, follow through.	Make sure to give Charlie pizza for lunch.
5. Gratitude	Say thank you and express appreciation, even if the answer is no.	Thank you for telling me what was going on. I am less worried, now." "Thank you, Charlie. Your dad told me he had the best day! I appreciate you helping me out on your day off. It is so important that I take care of myself."

## Active Listening

- Active Listening is an important part of effective communication
- People want to feel “heard”



[Watch: The Value of Active Listening](#)

In this clip, it is clear Amy is not very interested in what Sheldon is saying.

- Her body language, tone, and facial expressions send a message that she does not care.
- Sheldon picks up on these obvious cues and calls her out.
- She then engages in active listening. She provides her undivided attention, she makes eye contact, she reflects what he is saying and even mirrors the emotions that Sheldon is expressing.

Even though this is a rather silly depiction of active listening skills, the message comes through: **Active listening is an important part of effective communication.** All people want to be heard when they speak. By heard, we mean that we want people to join us in an experience, to appreciate how we are feeling. We want to feel that connection. It is important to use active listening skills in our relationships with not just our loved ones, but with others, to increase the likelihood of effective communication.

### Tips to remember:

- **Body language** is a big part of effective communication. If you are turned away from the person or your arms are folded, it communicates disinterest or defensiveness. Soft eye contact, arms open or at sides, can communicate interest and understanding.
- **The use of summarizing**, or briefly explaining the basics of the conversation as you heard it can let the person you are speaking hear that you “got” what he/she was saying (or not).
- Then, **ask for clarification**. It can really demonstrate to the person you are communicating with that you are really trying to understand their perspective.
- **Genuine empathy** is different than paraphrasing or summarizing, in that you are trying to reflect to the person you are talking with about the feelings and emotions that are at stake in the situation you are discussing.

## Active Listening

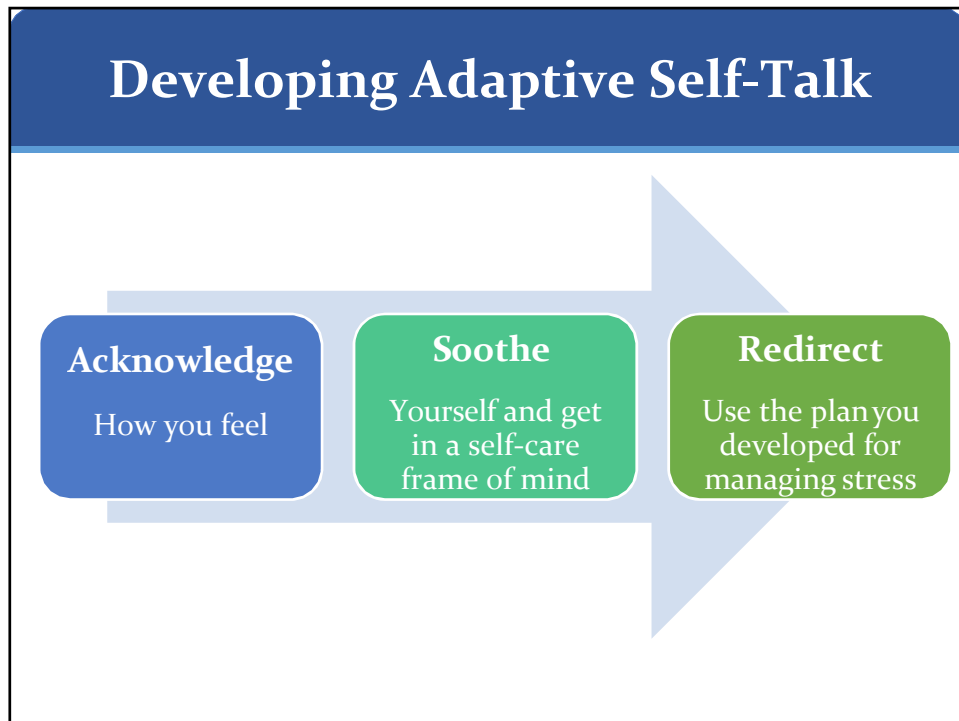
- Body Language
- Summarizing/Paraphrasing
- Clarification
- Empathizing



## Self Talk

- Coaching yourself to use coping techniques when you are late for an important appointment
- Reminding yourself, when something disappointing occurs, that you have many blessings
- Reducing or preventing feelings of depression by mentally reviewing a prepared list of personal competencies
- Managing anxiety by saying: “Calm down. You can get through this. Don’t sweat the small stuff”





Adaptive self-talk involves developing ways to use your inner voice. The first step is to gently identify when you are using problematic self-talk or irrational thinking. Next, you need to correct it and replace it. You may find it useful to have a prepared set of adaptive self-talk statements ready.

The Acknowledge-Soothe-Redirect method is a way of gently and effectively changing negative self-talk into more positive, supportive, encouraging self-talk.

- **Acknowledge.** I am getting upset. I am starting to get shaky and nervous. I am angry and I am starting to feel overwhelmed. I feel sad and empty.
- **Soothe.** I can handle these feelings. I have learned strategies to deal with them. Just take it easy. I know what to do to manage these emotions. Let's keep this in perspective. I do not have to let my emotions get the best of me. I have a plan for this.
- **Redirect.** I will use deep breathing for a while. Then I will take a walk. When I am feeling upset, my plan is to call a friend and make a date to go out for lunch or to review a list of my good points, or get out my journal and write.

## Think-Pair-Share

- What are some situations where this method might be helpful?
- What are some self-talk statements that might work for you?

```
graph LR; A[Acknowledge  
How you feel] --> B[Soothe  
Yourself and get  
in a self-care  
frame of mind]; B --> C[Redirect  
Use the plan you  
developed for  
managing stress];
```

### Think-Pair-Share

**SITUATION:**

---

**ACKNOWLEDGE:**

---

**SOOTHE:**

---

**REDIRECT:**

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**CONGRATULATIONS!**

## Problem Solving Skills

- Problems are a natural part of life
  - Having a plan makes problem solving less intimidating
- Take an active, solution-focused approach
  1. **Stop and think**
  2. **What is the problem?**
  3. **What are the different ways the problem can be solved?**
  4. **Evaluate the alternatives**
  5. **Choose and plan**
  6. **What resources will you need?**
  7. **Set a date and time to implement**
  8. **Re-evaluate**

Problems are a natural part of life. Some problems are easily solved and cause very little stress. Other problems are more challenging, and can result in significant stress. When stress builds up, it can cause chronic symptoms to worsen and lead to sleep or health problems, even burnout in your caregiving role.

- You can use **specific strategies** to solve day-to-day problems, reach better solutions, and avoid complicating already difficult or stressful situations.
  - Viewing difficulties as problems to be solved and challenges rather than personal attacks is linked with better health.
  - Knowing you have a method for solving problems can help you feel more in control and may make it easier to view obstacles this way.
- When trying to solve a problem or achieve a goal, **it's important to take an active, solution-focused approach.**
  - In the Resources section of your workbook you will find a structured, step-by-step method for solving problems you may face (see “**Problem Solving Worksheet**”). This method is helpful for achieving goals by yourself or with members of your support system (family members, friends, peers, treatment team).

## Caregiving and Burnout

Caregiver burnout occurs when all your caregiver frustrations and stresses, **both physical and emotional**, add up to such an unhealthy and intense level that you become totally drained and “burnt out.”



## A Word from our Experts

- Have **you** ever experienced burnout?
- What did you do?



## Caregiving Discussion

Have you or someone you know ever experienced burnout?

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What did you (or they) do to start feeling back on track?

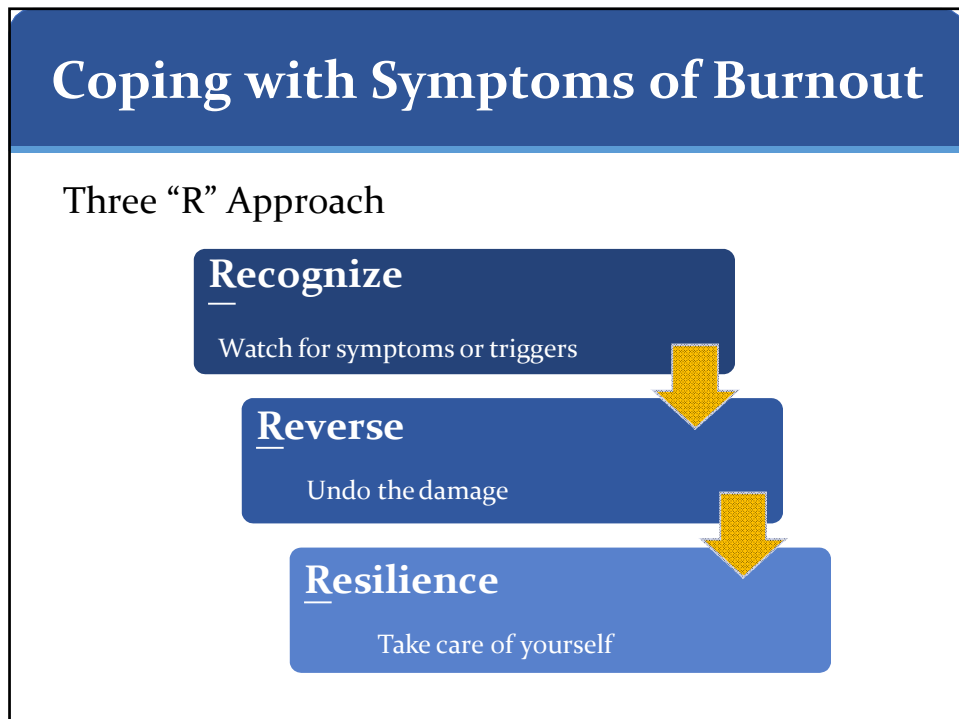
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Slide 19



## Recognize

- Have less energy, constantly exhausted, get sick often
- Neglect your own needs, feel guilty if you spend time on yourself
- Life revolves around caregiving, with little satisfaction
- Even when help is available:
  - Trouble relaxing
  - Trouble asking for/accepting help
- Impatient and irritable with the Veteran
- Feel overwhelmed, helpless, and hopeless

## Reverse

- Get some rest, try to exercise
- Make and keep your own doctor appointments
- Cultivate supportive relationships
- Make a little time for a hobby or interest
- Use self-care strategies to take small breaks
- Use your communication skills to ask for help
- Take deep breaths
- Try to access respite care
- Use your self-talk skills to be gentle with yourself

## Resilience

Preventing/Addressing burnout is an ongoing process:

- Connect with support
- Use your resources
- Maintain your healthy relationships
- Relax your standards/expectations
- Delegate
- Practice your skills

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*Addressing burnout is an ongoing process. Incorporating self-care into your daily routine can help foster resilience to the natural stress and strain that accompanies the role of Caregiver. Be gentle with yourself. Use your tools and skills. Seek support. Delegate.*

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## Preventing Burnout

- Take time out for yourself
- Seek support
  - Friends, counselors, online
- Walk or Exercise
- Read, draw, paint, create
- Journal
- Use prayer, spiritual support
- Practice self-care
  - Meditation, breathing, muscle relaxation
- Take your medication





## Preventing Burnout: List of Possible Action Strategies

Here is a list of many behaviors that may serve as action strategies to prevent burnout. Some will suit you and your health profile and some may not. Pick what feels right and try it with self-care in mind.

	Meditate		Pop some popcorn
	Take 10 deep breaths		Pick flowers or buy one
	Do stretching exercises		Play solitaire
	Practice 4 square breathing		Draw, sketch, or craft
	Go for a walk		Cook a special meal
	Envision a peaceful scene		Watch TV (consciously)
	Look at the clouds		Ask for a hug
	Drink caffeine free tea		Listen to a friend
	Take a hot bath		Go swimming
	Listen to soothing music		Listen to children playing
	Smile at yourself in the mirror		Show someone you love them
	Make a list of all your good qualities		Buy a present for yourself or a friend
	Think about how a friend would describe you		Tell someone you care about them
	Go for a hike in the woods		Watch a funny movie
	Imagine yourself acting calmly and competently		Look forward to something pleasant
	Apply ice		Read a joke book
	Hum a soothing tune		Laugh at yourself lovingly
	Pray		Express appreciation
	Remember a past success		Daydream
	Pet your dog or cat		Smile at other people
	Do a puzzle		Call a friend
	Feed the birds		Go out for coffee
	Play a musical instrument		People watch
	Do Laundry/Dishes		Go to a museum
	Bake bread or cookies		Go to a park
	Write a letter		Throw a little party

## Sources of Stress and Ways to Help Yourself

We can sometimes experience stress and not be fully aware of it.

- Stress can sneak up on you and you may not notice the tell-tale signs of stress until your stress level is high.
- The higher the stress level, the more intervention is required to bring it down. The more intervention required to bring it down, the less likely you are to engage in stress reduction.
- Start to recognize stress and intervene early. Early intervention increases the likelihood of success in keeping our stress at a manageable level. That can lead to a greater sense of confidence, control, and mastery of one's situation and can reduce depressive symptoms, anxiety, and burnout.

Sources of Stress	Signs of Stress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Too much to do</li><li>• Feeling of inadequacy</li><li>• Hard to say "no"</li><li>• Lack of sleep</li><li>• Interruptions</li><li>• Lack of help</li><li>• Unreasonable expectations</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pacing</li><li>• Forgetfulness</li><li>• Inability to concentrate</li><li>• Irritability</li><li>• Headaches</li><li>• Being prone to crying</li><li>• Alcohol use</li></ul>

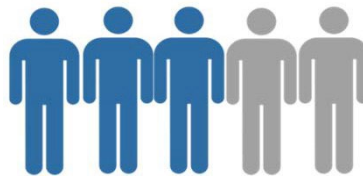
## Ways to Help Yourself

Feeling angry or sad or resentful or frustrated does not make you a bad person, nor a bad caregiver. It simply makes you human. It can be challenging to do things for you. Remember that when you do things for yourself and your own health and well-being, it makes you a better, more effective caregiver. Be gentle, patient, and persistent with your efforts.

- **Ask for help.** Don't try to do everything by yourself.
- **Accept your feelings.** Feelings of sadness or anger are normal from time to time. Be patient with yourself.
- **Try not to take things personally.** Remind yourself that you are doing a great job and commend yourself for your efforts.
- **Replace negative thoughts** with positive thinking or memories.
- **Set realistic goals** and assume a reasonable amount of responsibility.
- **Break large tasks into small ones.** Set priorities and do what you can.
- **Expect your mood to improve gradually,** not immediately.

## Depression

- It is not unusual for Caregivers to develop depression as a result of the constant demands they face
  - \*More than 3 out of 5 (63%) Caregivers of Veterans suffer from symptoms of depression\*



\*Caregivers of Veterans: Serving on the Homefront (November 2010). Report of study findings, Washington, D.C.

Depression is more than feeling sad or down, it's a medical issue. Like most health problems, early symptoms can be easy to overlook. If left untreated, the symptoms can become more difficult to manage and can affect your overall health, relationships, and even lead to thoughts of self-harm or suicide. Proper treatment helps most people with depression and talking with your doctor is the first step to receiving treatment.

## Depression: Symptoms to Watch

- Feeling depressed or down with repeated crying
- Changes in your sleeping pattern
- Major changes in eating habits/appetite
- Not finding pleasure in things you used to enjoy
- Feeling angry or tense, hopeless or resentful
- Using alcohol, prescription, or illicit drugs
- Thoughts of harming or killing yourself or others

## Understanding Depression

- Depression is not a sign of personal weakness, but that **something is out of balance**
  - Ignoring or denying these feelings will not make them go away
  - Depressive feelings are not your fault
  - Depressive feelings can cause/exacerbate physical health symptoms

## Asking for Help

### If you are in crisis:

- National Veteran's Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 (24/7)
- Go to your local Emergency Room
- Call 9-1-1

### If you need support:

- National VA Caregiver Support Line: 1-855-260-3274
- Caregiver Support Coordinators:

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There are also a whole host of resources available to you through Psych-Armor, VA's Coaching into Care, [VA Caregiver Support Program](#) and [the VHA Office of Rural Health](#).

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Slide 28

## Taking Action

- We have covered a lot today!
- Choose an action item and practice:
  - Communication strategies
  - Self Talk strategies
  - Problem Solving worksheet
  - Coping with or preventing burnout (the 3 R Approach)

*Jot down your thoughts in your workbook, and next week, we will start the group by discussing what you've come up with.*



## Wrap Up/Next Steps

- Self-Care Exercises: Commit to taking a break
  - Signal Breath
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation
  - Creative Visualization
- Attach a strategy to your already established routine
- Practice, practice, practice!

*We will start the next class with a check-in on self-care exercises to see how things went.*

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# Action Plan

*This week, consider an action item. We will start the group by discussing what you've come up with.*

- 1) This week, I'm going to try:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) I will need these resources:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) I will ask these people for help:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) I will start on this date:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) *How did it go?*

**REMEMBER TO PRACTICE SIGNAL BREATH, PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION,  
OR CREATIVE VISUALIZATION!**



**Rating Your Tension this Week:**

*Try this on your own this week as you practice the Creative Visualization exercise. Think of a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not tense at all, 5= terribly tense):*

MONDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

TUESDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

WEDNESDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

THURSDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

FRIDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

SATURDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

SUNDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes about how it went:**

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## **Class 4: Support-seeking Skills and Navigation Strategies**

This class explores VA and community-based resources to help you as the caregiver in your caregiving role. Resources include VA, Caregiver Support Program, online resources from national partners, and other self-help guides for caregivers to reference beyond Caregivers FIRST. In addition, the group will discuss respite care and future planning topics such as Guardianship, Power of Attorney, and Advance Directives for Healthcare. This final class will also close with a personal goal-setting exercise designed to foster commitment to self-care beyond Caregivers FIRST.

### **Class Objectives**

- Identify VA and community-based resources for caregivers
- Discuss respite care and future planning for your Veteran loved one
- Practice the triangle breathing exercise

### **Group Guidelines**

- ✓ What is said here stays here
- ✓ Speak and listen to each other with respect
- ✓ Share information and give equal time to all group members
- ✓ Try not to use the name of your Veteran's VA providers
- ✓ If you have questions, please ask

## Class 4 Slides and Activities



Slide 1

# Caregivers FIRST

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## *Caregivers Finding Important Resources, Support, and Training*

### *Class Four*



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

Slide 2

## Logistics

Housekeeping

Classes start at X:XX and end at Y:YY

Please turn your cell phones off (or on silent)

Group guidelines:

- What is said here stays here
- Speak and listen to each other with respect
- Share information and give equal time to all group members
- Try not to use the name of your Veteran's health care providers
- If you have questions, please ask

## Agenda

- Introduction
- Point of Action/Check-in
- Taking a Moment for You: Self Care Exercise
- Caregiving Discussion: Support-Seeking Skills
  - VA resources available to Veteran/Caregiver
  - Community resources available to the Caregiver
  - Planning for the future

## Checking In

- Remember your Action Item from last week?
  - Were you able to practice a strategy to address a challenge?
  - Do you have any successes you would like to share?
- Did you practice the Signal Breath, Progressive Muscle Relaxation, or Creative Visualization exercise?
  - How did it go?
  - Did you notice a change in your stress level?
  - Is this something you will try again?

## Checking In

What's been working?

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What are the barriers or obstacles you have encountered when trying to do your Action Items or Relaxation Exercises?

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What do you need to remove those barriers or obstacles?

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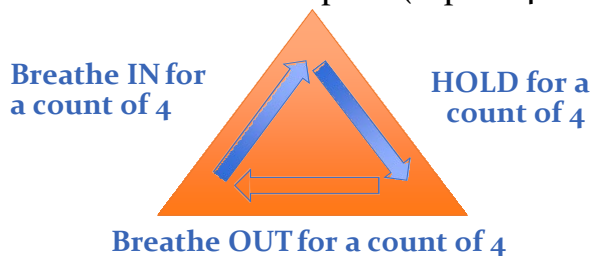
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Slide 5

## Taking a Moment for You: Self-Care Exercise

### Triangle Breathing

- Rate your level of tension (scale 1-5)
  - 1 is "not tense at all"
  - 5 is "terribly tense"
- Breathe at a comfortable pace (repeat 4 times):



## Triangle Breathing

Triangle Breathing involves focusing your attention on a structure breathing exercise. By mindfully and repeatedly breathing, a couple of things happen:

- **By giving your mind a small task, you force it to take a break** from all the thoughts and concerns you have swirling around.
- **You provide fresh, clean oxygen to your lungs.** This is where the greatest transfer of oxygen to the blood stream takes place. When we are stressed, we breathe shallower and there's a lower transfer of oxygen into the blood stream. The muscles, organs, and tissue in your body react to this lowered level of oxygen and send your brain a stress signal. This exacerbates the stress you are experiencing.

### Triangle Breathing Steps

1. Breathe slowly, in through the nose for a count of 1 – 2 – 3 – 4.
2. Hold the breath for a count of 1 – 2 – 3 – 4.
3. Exhale slowly through the mouth for a count of 1 – 2 – 3 – 4.
4. Repeat Steps 1 through 3 two more times.

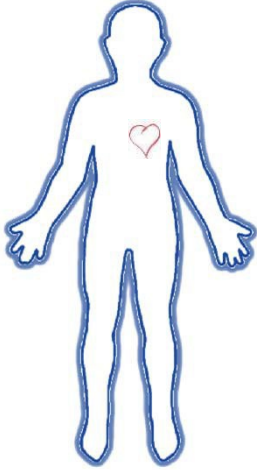
Now just breathe regularly and comfortably. Slowly bring your awareness back into the room.

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*There are many great free video resources for Caregivers available on [YouTube](#). Search whatever you might be looking for (for example, "Breathing Exercises"). Much like the stress of caregiving builds throughout the day, moments of relaxation build on themselves, too. Taking a few moments can lower your stress level and help you feel more capable of managing the natural stress and strain of caregiving.*

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## The Many Skills of a Caregiver



Coping

**Support Seeking**

Hands-on

## VA Resources Available to Veterans and Caregivers



## Respite Care

- Temporarily relieves Caregiver from daily routine and care responsibilities
  - Up to 30 days per calendar year/possible co-pay after 20 days
- Offered in a variety of settings
- Accessed through the Veteran's Primary Care Provider or PACT Team Social Worker

## Who May Need Respite Care?

- Your Veterans Primary Care provider will assess your Veteran to see if he/she meets clinical criteria to qualify as ADL dependent

If your Veteran is cognitively impaired

If you, as a Caregiver are experiencing severe strain or has need for respite:

- High Zarit Burdenscore
- Upcoming surgery
- Unexpected illness
- Out of town travel



## VA Caregiver Support Program

- Open to Caregivers of Veterans who are receiving VAcare
- Services include:
  - Counseling related to Caregiver burden
  - Crisis support
  - Assistance navigating the VA healthcare system, including respite care
  - Access and information about supports and resources available
  - Socialization and support events throughout the year

## VAMC Caregiver Support Program

Caregiver Support Coordinators:



## Caregiver Support Line

- VA Caregiver Support Line
  - Provides crisis counseling and resource information
  - Connects you with a local Caregiver Support Coordinator



- VA Caregiver Support Line Monthly Calls
  - Monthly education groups
  - Caregivers can discuss self-care tips and ask questions

## Important VA Websites

- [VA Geriatrics and Extended Care](#)
  - Explore VA home and community-based services, residential options, and nursing homes
- [VA Caregiver Toolbox](#)
  - Diagnosis Care Sheets
  - Tips and Checklists



## Local Resources

- [Enter key local resources here]

## Activity: Resource Scavenger Hunt

- Time: 15 minutes
  - 10 for activity
  - 5 for answer review, debrief
- Find a partner
- Using resource section of the workbook, answer the questions.

## SCAVENGER HUNT ACTIVITY

### Instructions:

- Find a partner and break into pairs
  - Using the resources section of this workbook, answer the following questions.
- 
- True or False: Veterans Crisis Line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - What is the name of the online VA resource that allows you to keep track of your Veteran's health record, appointments, email reminders, and prescription refills?  
  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - True or False: *Coaching Into Care* provides information about mental health, services at the VA and tips on how to begin the conversation about treatment with a loved one who is a Veteran.  
  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - The *Reach VA* Program is a coaching program with the goal to assist Caregivers with the following challenges (select all that apply):
    - ☐ Taking care of yourself
    - ☐ Problem solving
    - ☐ Mood management
    - ☐ Asking for help
    - ☐ Stress management
  - How many days in a year can a Caregiver use the *VA Respite Care*?
    - ☐ 10
    - ☐ 20
    - ☐ 30
    - ☐ 50

## A Word from Our Experts

- What are some resources that you find helpful in your Caregiving role?
  - VA resources?
  - Other local community resources?



### Caregiving Discussion

**What are some VA resources that you have found helpful to you in your caregiving role?**

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**What are some LOCAL resources that you have found helpful to you in your caregiving role?**

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**Below is a place to jot down any local resources shared by your Caregiver Support Coordinator or peers in the Caregivers FIRST Classes:**

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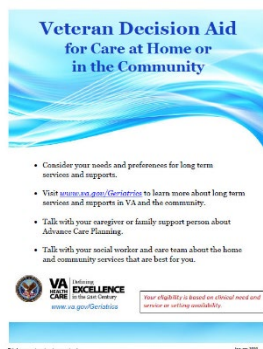
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## Planning for the Future

## Planning for the Future



- “Shared Decision-Making and Long-Term Care” Worksheet
  - Discuss plans with your Veteran
    - Wishes in case his/her health declines
    - Institutional setting preferences
    - If he/she is willing to use hospice
- Besides health plans, you may need to consider legal planning

## Advance Medical Directive

- Veteran's written instructions on providing or withholding medical treatment and healthcare when he/she is incapacitated
- Includes:
  - End of life issues
  - Durable Power of Attorney
  - Living Will

The VA can help you setup an Advanced Directive for the Veteran



## Power of Attorney



- Allows you to act for the Veteran regarding legal financial issues
- Must be obtained when Veteran is competent
  - In legal terms, when he/she is able to reason and make decisions
  - Veteran must be able to sign notarized document that authorizes another person to act on his/her behalf

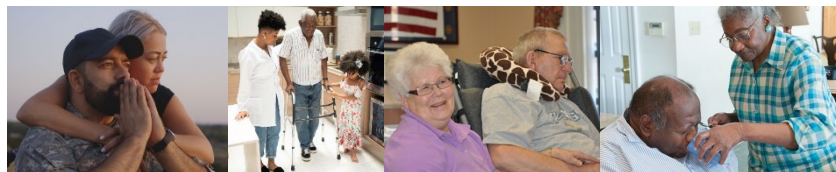


## Guardianship

- You may consider pursuing Guardianship if your Veteran:
  - Has a physical or mental illness or disability that prevents them from taking care of their own basic needs
  - Is, as a result of their incapacity, in danger of substantial harm
  - Has no person who is already legally authorized to assume responsibility for their personal affairs and property
- Process varies from state to state, you will likely need an attorney to represent you



## Questions?



## Taking Action

***There are lots of things to consider when caring for a loved one.***

- Pair and Share Discussion
  - What Caregiver service, resource, or skill do you want to use next?
- Choose a skill boosting resource and take action!
  - MyHealtheVet
  - Respite Care
  - Caregiver Support Program Resources
  - Advanced Medical Directive

## Wrap Up/Next Steps

- Self-Care Exercises: Commit to taking a break
  - Signal Breath
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation
  - Creative Visualization
  - Triangle Breathing
- Attach a strategy to your already established routine
- Practice, practice, practice!

***Keep in touch and stay connected!***

# Action Plan

*This week, consider an action item. We will start the group by discussing what you've come up with.*

- 1) This week, I'm going to try:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) I will need these resources:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) I will ask these people for help:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) I will start on this date:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) *How did it go?*

***REMEMBER TO PRACTICE SIGNAL BREATH, PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION, CREATIVE VISUALIZATION, OR TRIANGLE BREATHING!***

We are also going to ask that you commit to taking a break for yourself. After today, you have 4 self-care exercises that don't take too much time.

- Pick a strategy and use it!
- Check in with yourself before and after for confirmation of your efforts.
- A tip for incorporating something new into your routine is to attach it to an already established part of your daily routine.

**Rating Your Tension this Week:**

Try this on your own this week as you practice the Triangle Breathing exercise. Think of a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not tense at all, 5= terribly tense):

MONDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

TUESDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

WEDNESDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

THURSDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

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SATURDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

SUNDAY - LEVEL OF TENSION BEFORE \_\_\_\_\_ LEVEL OF TENSION AFTER \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes about how it went:**

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We hope that you found the information provided over the past 4 weeks to be helpful. Please use your workbook/resource guide regularly. We encourage you to remain connected and involved with the \_\_\_\_\_(local)\_\_\_\_ Caregiver Support Program. We are and continue to be in place to support you in your caregiving role. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to come together.

If you would like to stay connected with each other, here is a place where you can write down names, numbers, e-mail addresses:

NAME:	PHONE:	E-MAIL:
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

[illegible]

[illegible]

## Resources

There are many resources available to you and your Veteran loved one.

Your Caregiver Support Coordinator, your Veteran's PACT Team, or Social Work Services are great resources in helping you access support and resources through the VA.

Keep in mind that this listing is not exhaustive.



*“There are only four kinds of people in the world: Those who have been caregivers. Those who are currently caregivers. Those who will be caregivers, and those who will need a caregiver.”*

***--Rosalyn Carter***

## VA Caregiver Support Program Resources

### VA Caregiver Support Program

Any Caregiver of Veterans or Veterans receiving care from the VA and caring for a civilian loved one can access this program. By working with your local Caregiver Support Coordinator, you can access supportive services and resources to help you in your caregiving role. Services include:



- Counseling related to Caregiver burden
- Crisis support
- Assistance navigating the VA healthcare system, including respite care
- Access and information about supports and resources available
- Socialization and support events throughout the year

Your local Caregiver Support Coordinator is a licensed professional who can support you by matching you with services for which you are eligible, and providing you with valuable information about resources that can help you stay smart, strong and organized as you care for the Veteran you love. Find your local Caregiver Support Coordinator by visiting [the VA Caregiver Support Program](#) and entering your zip code.

### **Annie Caregiver Text Care Support**

Talk with your Caregiver Support Coordinator to enroll in Annie.

Annie is VA's **computer generated** text messaging service that promotes self-care for caregivers of Veterans enrolled in VA health care. Annie sends you personalized text messages that provide information to help you manage your well-being and provide care for your Veteran. You just need a phone that can receive text messages to enroll!

- Annie will help you manage stress and support self-care.
- You will receive text messages 3 times per week for a year with the option to renew yearly.
- You can pause or stop at any time.
- Messages will be educational, motivational, and activities to manage stress.

### Building Better Caregivers

Building Better Caregivers™ (BBC) is an online workshop for Caregivers who are caring for someone with dementia, memory problems, post-traumatic stress disorder, a serious brain injury, or any other serious injury or illness.

- A six-week, highly interactive, small group workshop.
- Conducted 100% online.
- Made up of 20–25 caregivers who take the online workshop together.
- Led by two trained facilitators, one or both of whom are Caregivers.

BBC helps Caregivers in two key ways:

- Provides training in how to provide better care



- Helps Caregivers learn how to manage their own emotions, stress and physical health

Caregivers are asked to log on at least 2–3 times each week and to complete reading and problem-solving exercises online, for a total of about 2 hours per week. Many Caregivers prefer to log on several times per week for short periods of time and there is no upper limit to how much time participants can spend online. Talk with your local Caregiver Support Coordinator about enrolling.

### **Caregiver Self-Care Courses**

Caregiver Self-Care courses are in-person classroom trainings provided to caregivers with a focus on supporting and meeting the needs of caregivers. The classes are led by trained facilitators and are offered in English and Spanish. Topics include: Managing Stress, Problem Solving & Effective Communication, Taking Care of Yourself, and Utilizing Technology.

### **Caregiver Support Line**

The VA's Caregiver Support Line (**1-855-260-3274**) is a great first step to learn more about the support that's available to you. This support line can provide free crisis counseling and help you access resource information about services and benefits. It also connects you with your local Caregiver Support Coordinator.

- Hours: Monday thru Friday: 8:00am – 10:00pm Eastern Time; Saturday: 8:00am - 5:00pm Eastern Time.

### **Caregiver Support Line Monthly Calls**

As a Caregiver, the very best thing you can do for those who depend on you is to take good care of yourself. One of the ways to do that is to participate in one or more of the monthly Caregiver Support Line calls, which are part of the VA Caregiver Support Line.

- During these calls, Caregivers will receive self-care tips and support on a variety of topics.
- Participants can comment and ask questions at the end of each call.
- To participate, you must be a Caregiver of a Veteran(s) of any era who is receiving VA care. Veterans engaged in VA care who are caring for a loved one are also eligible. Registration is required. Interested Caregivers should contact their local Caregiver Support Coordinator.

### **General Telephone Support**

General Telephone Support is an evidenced-based intervention that is delivered by a VA clinical staff to provide group sessions to stressed and burdened caregivers. The group sessions can be delivered either face-to-face at the VA or by telephone. Topics include: Caregivers of all Era's, Post-911 Spouses, Dementia, Spinal Cord Injury, ALS, MS and PTSD. These are coordinated and facilitated at local VA medical centers.

### **Counseling Related to Caregiver Burden**

Many of the local Caregiver Support Coordinators are licensed, independent, clinical Social Workers. As such, they are there to provide Caregivers with supportive counseling to help them address crises or stressors that can sometimes accompany the caregiving role. Counseling can be provided in person or

by phone and is intended to provide support and assistance to Caregivers who are experiencing caregiver burden or role strain in:

- Crisis management
- Stress Management
- Problem Solving

If you are experiencing symptoms of burnout or depression related to your caregiving role, reach out to your local Caregiver Support Coordinator to talk about resources as well as to engage in solution oriented counseling. Your individual counseling is confidential and private.

### Peer Support Mentoring Program

Caregivers of Veterans of all eras are eligible to participate in the VA Caregiver Peer Support Mentoring Program, both as Mentors and as Mentees. Peer Support Mentoring participants connect with a trained, experienced Caregiver by phone, e-mail, or, at times, in person. Mentors receive training before being paired with another Caregiver and are volunteers with their local VA medical center Voluntary Services Department. Caregivers participating in the Caregiver Peer Support Mentoring Program agree to participate for 6 months, but many participate for much longer. Caregivers uncertain about committing to a Peer Mentor relationship can access brief (one-time) support from an experienced mentor.

To learn more, contact your local Caregiver Support Coordinator.

### REACH VA

The REACH VA Program is an opportunity for Caregivers of Veterans to take better care of themselves and their loved ones by providing them with important information in the challenging areas of caregiving, and building their skills in stress management, mood management, and problem-solving.



The trained and certified REACH VA Program Coach usually provides four individual sessions with the Caregiver over a period of 2 to 3 months, extending the number of sessions if both the Coach and Caregiver feel there is more work to do. The sessions normally last about an hour each and may be held face to face, over the telephone, or over telehealth video conferencing.

- REACH has been shown to significantly improve caregiver quality of life – caregiver burden, depression/emotional well-being, self-care and healthy behaviors, social support, and management of care recipient problem behaviors.
- REACH VA is an effective intervention to decrease caregiver stress and improve the management of Veteran concerns.
- The goal of REACH VA is to decrease Caregiver stress and improve the management of patient behaviors throughout the VHA system.
- REACH VA Coaches help Caregivers build caregiving strength and stay strong.

To be eligible for the REACH VA Program, the Caregiver must be caring for a Veteran or a Veteran caring for a loved one, where the Veteran is receiving services at the VA. Caregivers receive a Caregiver

Notebook, which is the first resource for caregiver issues and challenges, including stress management, mood management, and problem-solving. REACH VA is available for Caregivers of Veterans diagnosed with: ALS, Dementia, MS, PTSD, or Spinal Cord Injury/Disorder.

The REACH VA Caregiver Program is designed to assist Caregivers of Veterans with challenges such as Taking Care of Yourself, Problem Solving, Mood Management, Asking for Help, and Stress Management.

### **Suicide Prevention Toolkit for Caregivers**

This toolkit provides education to caregivers of Veterans, including facts about suicide prevention, mental health, and substance use disorder treatment. In addition, it provides self-care resources and describes when to reach out for help.

### **VA Caregiver Toolbox**

This website offers resources and information to help you stay on top of things and manage the daily stresses of family caregiving. Tools for Caregivers who are new to the caregiving role:

- Diagnosis Care Sheets
- Plain language care sheets for a variety of different medical conditions and concerns.
- Tools for getting and staying organized.
- Tips for managing difficult or challenging situations.

### **Veteran Video Connect (VVC)**

VA Video Connect is a VA application that allows Veterans and caregivers to meet face to face with VA healthcare providers, in Virtual Medical Rooms. The application uses encrypted video that is secure and private. VVC provides a flexible option for meeting with providers and Caregiver Support Coordinators. It's time-efficient and convenient. To learn more, contact your local Caregiver Support Coordinator.

### **Other Key VA Resources**

#### **Coaching Into Care (Mental Health)**

Call toll free **888-823-7458** or [visit the Coaching Into Care website](#).

- 
- Hours: Monday - Friday, 8:00 am – 8:00 pm Eastern Time.

Coaching Into Care is a national VA telephone service which aims to educate, support, and empower family members and friends who are seeking care or services for a Veteran. Coaching Into Care can provide information about mental health services at the VA and tips on how to begin the conversation about treatment with a loved one who is a Veteran.

Their goal is to help Veterans, their family members, and other loved ones find the appropriate services at their local VA facilities and/or in their community.

- Coaching is provided by licensed psychologists or social workers, free-of-charge.
- Coaching involves helping callers figure out how to motivate the Veteran to seek treatment.

### Geriatrics and Extended Care (Veterans Affairs)

being of Veterans with multiple chronic conditions, life-limiting illness, frailty or disability associated with chronic disease, aging or injury. Programs maximize each Veteran's functional independence and lessen the burden of disability on Veterans, their families, and caregivers.

The GEC website provides a guide to long-term services and supports at the VA. You and your Veteran loved one can explore VA home and community-based services, residential options, and nursing homes.

### My HealtheVet

My HealtheVet, the Veteran's Personal Health Record, offers free, easy, and convenient ways for Veterans and their caregivers to become active partners in their health care and well-being. To get the most out of My HealtheVet, Veterans are urged to visit their local VA health care facility to register and/or upgrade their account, known as In-Person Authentication (IPA). This upgrade process is simple and will allow you to:

- View VA appointments
- Refill and track prescriptions
- Communicate through Secure Messaging
- View VA laboratory results
- View VA Notes
- View, print or download your person health information with the VA Blue Button

### VA Respite Care

If a Veteran requires a Caregiver, you are eligible to receive up to 30 days of respite care per year. The care can be offered in a variety of settings including at your home or through temporary placement of a Veteran at a VA Community Living Center, a VA-contracted Community Residential Care Facility, or an Adult Day Health Care Center.



Respite care may also be provided in response to a Family Caregiver's unexpected hospitalization, a need to go out of town, or a family emergency. Staying strong for your Veteran means staying strong yourself. By taking an opportunity to be refreshed through respite care, you may be amazed at how your fresh outlook will help you and your Veteran.

- Eligibility for Institutional (IN), non-Institutional (NI), Homemaker/Home Health Aid (H/HHa), and Adult Day Health Care (ADHC) for respite is needs-based.
  - This means that the Veteran's PCP or PACT Team will conduct an assessment and make the referral based on the needs of the Veteran and Caregiver.

- These methods of respite are not typically combined.
- Veterans may incur co-pays for community care.
  - Keep in mind that ADHC, NI and IN respite programs are all considered respite and not customarily combined.
  - NI and IN respite are no more than 30 total days a fiscal year (the fiscal year is from the **beginning of October** through the **end of September** of the following calendar year).
- There are no co-pays associated with H/HHA services.

### [VA Office of Rural Health](#)

The VA Office of Rural Health hosts a video education series on their website, including “ABCs for Caregivers” and “Information and Support for In-Home Dementia”.

### [Veterans Crisis Line](#)

The Veterans Crisis Line connects Veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text.

- Veterans and their loved ones can call **988 Then Press 1**, chat online, or send a text message to **838255** to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.
- Caregivers can also use this service by calling **988**.

### [Veteran Directed Care](#)

Veteran Directed Care gives Veterans of all ages the opportunity to receive the Home and Community Based Services they need in a consumer-directed way. This program is for Veterans who need personal care services and help with activities of daily living. Examples include help with bathing, dressing, or fixing meals. This program is also for Veterans who are isolated, or their caregiver is experiencing burden.

- Veterans in this program are given a budget for services that is managed by the Veteran or the Veteran’s representative. With the help of a counselor, Veterans hire their own workers to meet their daily needs to help them live at home or in their community.

## **Non-VA Caregiver Resources**

Below are additional non-VA websites and resources for Caregivers:

### [American Red Cross Military and Veteran Caregiver Network](#)

- Helps caregivers of all ages at all stages of their caring through access to online peer support communities, community based peer support groups, and peer mentor support.

### [Caregiver in Action Network](#)

- Provides forums, peer networks, story projects, a tool box, tips, resources and advocacy

### **Elizabeth Dole Foundation**

- The Foundation provides support programs for military and veteran caregivers local, state, and national levels. These programs engage individuals, organizations, and communities across the country to get involved and make a difference in the lives of military caregivers.

### **Family Caregiver Alliance**

- Provides fact sheets, discussion groups, telephone conferences, and other educational resources, including state-by-state resources

### **Military Families Learning Network**

- Provides an interactive learning environment with caregiving skills training, tips, and resources
- Provides access to a series of topical videos designed to alleviate caregiver burden and provide a basic understanding of combat related injuries

### **Military ONE Source**

- Provides military caregiver peer-to-peer forums to share stories, resources, and best practices
- Also includes a forum for tools, strategies, and supports

### **Office of Warrior Caregiver Policy Caregiver Resource Directory**

- A directory of caregiver resources designed specifically for military caregivers

### **Psych Armor**

- Videos and information for caregivers of all ages and at all stages of their caring
- Self-care topics and information about caring for Veterans with specific diagnoses

### **Rosalyn Carter Institute (RCI) for Caregiving**

#### **Sesame Street For Military Families: Caregiving**

- Video series for the caregiving parent and children to help understand the changes that may occur when a family member comes home from deployment with a physical or psychological injury
- Interactive games with printable activities
- Activity book designed for parents and children
- Articles for parents designed to help navigate post-deployment

## VA Non-Institutional Care

Who is the target population for non-institutional care?

- Veterans enrolled in the VA health care system and needing:
  - Skilled services
  - Case management
  - Assistance with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) or instrumental ADLs (iADLs)
- Veterans who are isolated
- Veterans who have Caregivers experiencing significant caregiver strain

### Adult Day Health Care Centers (ADHC)

ADHC Centers are a safe and active environment with constant supervision designed for Veterans to get out of the home and participate in activities. It is a time for the Veteran you care for to socialize with other Veterans while you, the Caregiver, get some time for yourself. ADHC Centers employ caring professionals who will assess a Veteran's rehabilitation needs and help a Veteran accomplish various tasks so he or she can maintain or regain personal independence and dignity.



- Sometimes referred to as “Adult Day Care”.
- Provides an organized program of services during the day in a group setting.
- Ranging from clinical services, meals, medication administration, socialization activities
- Open 5 days a week – Veteran can participate 1-2 days/week or you may utilize for respite on a regular basis.

Who may need ADHC?

- Veterans with:
  - A risk of social isolation
  - A need for ADL or iADL assistance
  - Cognitive impairment
  - A need for Close follow-up/care coordination
  - Caregivers experiencing caregiver stress
  - A risk for needing nursing home care

The Veteran you care for will participate in rehabilitation based on his or her specific health assessment during the day (ADHC centers are generally open Monday through Friday during normal business hours). Since Adult Day Health Care is part of the VHA Standard Medical Benefits Package, all enrolled Veterans are eligible IF they meet the clinical need for the service and it is available. [More information can be found at VA's online guide.](#)



## Home-Based Primary Care

Home-Based Primary Care (HBPC) is a program designed to deliver routine health care services to your home when the Veteran you care for has medical issues that make it challenging for him or her to travel. Home-Based Primary Care is staffed with medical professionals who will come to your home.

Some of their services are:

- Primary care and nursing
- Managing medication
- Helping plan and put together nutritious and tasty meals
- Physical rehabilitation
- Mental health care for your Veteran
- Social work and referrals to VA and community services



Since Home Based Primary Care is part of the VHA Standard Medical Benefits Package, all *enrolled Veterans* are eligible IF they meet the clinical need for the service and it is available.

A copay for Home Based Primary Care may be charged based on your VA service-connected disability status and financial information. You may have a basic copay each time a VA staff team member comes to your home for a medical visit (the same as if you went to a VA clinic). Contact your VA social worker/case manager to complete the *Application for Extended Care Benefits (VA Form 10-10EC)* to learn the amount of your copay.

## Homemaker and Home Health Aide Program

The Homemaker and Home Health Aide Program is designed to help a Veteran with personal care needs. Your local VA medical center can help arrange for a home health aide who will come to your home on a regular schedule to allow you time to take care of your own needs. The program:

- Assists the Veteran with activity of daily living care needs, such as feeding, dressing, and bathing
  - Veteran must be deficient in at least 3 of his/her activities of daily living
  - May have cognitive impairment
  - May meet criteria for nursing home level of care
  - Must be referred by Veteran's Primary Care Physician
- Arranges services through providers (Home Health Agencies) who hold contracts with VAMC in or near the area where the Veteran resides

Since Homemaker Home Health Aide services are part of a service within the VHA Standard Medical Benefits Package, all *enrolled Veterans* are eligible if they meet the clinical need for the service. A copay for Homemaker and Home Health Aide services may be charged based on your VA service-connected disability status. Homemaker Home Health Aide services can be used in combination with other Home and Community Based Services.



### Home Telehealth

Veterans whose Care Team requires close monitoring of vital signs and/or frequent communication with the Veteran and/or Caregiver could benefit from Home Telehealth.

- Enhances & extends health care management and access to a care coordinator using the telephone
- Provides support and encouragement for self-management of complex medical issues
- May include education and training or on-line and telephone support groups



### Skilled Home Care

The Skilled Home Care service provides a medical professional who comes to your home to help care for a homebound Veteran.

- Veteran must be homebound/have extreme difficulty in traveling.
- Veteran must have a need for short or long-term in-home skilled care services.
- Veteran lives an excessive distance to the VAMC providing care.



Some of the care a Veteran can receive includes:

- Basic nursing services.
- Physical, occupational, or speech therapies.
- Social services, such as counseling

To be eligible for this service, a Veteran must be homebound, which means he or she has difficulty traveling to and from appointments and so needs to receive medical services at home. The Skilled Home Care service is similar to Home-Based Primary Care, but it involves VA purchasing care for a Veteran from a licensed non-VA medical professional.

## Institutional Care

### VA Community Living Centers

Community Living Centers provide these services:

- 24-hour skilled nursing care (e.g., help with a wound or IV care)
- Restorative care
- Access to social work services
- Geriatric evaluation and management

Some Community Living Centers also provide these services:

- Mental health recovery care
- Special care for Veterans with dementia or other cognitive deficits
- Respite Care
- Palliative Care and Hospice Care for end of life

Most of the 132 VA Community Living Centers are on or close to the campus of a VA Medical Center. Not all VA Community Living Centers provide all services, so contact your local VA Medical center to find out what services are provided.

### Community Nursing Home Program

- Contracts for care of Veterans in VA approved community nursing homes.
- Makes it easier for some Veterans to remain closer to family.

Community Nursing Home care provides:

- 24-hour skilled nursing care (such as wound care or help with IV medication).
- Occupational and physical therapy.
- Access to social work services.

Some Community Nursing Homes also provide:

- Short term rehab services.
- Hospice and palliative care for the end of life.
- Special care for dementia.



Eligibility for a Community Nursing Home is based on clinical need and setting availability. The VA will only pay for Community Nursing Home care if you meet eligibility criteria involving your service connected status, level of disability, and income. If you do not meet these requirements, you will need to use your own resources to pay for nursing home care, which may include Medicare benefits and/or applying for Medicaid assistance if you cannot afford to pay. Talk with a VA social worker/case manager about your eligibility and to figure out a plan for paying for Community Nursing Home care services.

## Medical Foster Home Program

Medical Foster Homes are private homes in which a trained caregiver provides services to a few individuals. Some, but not all, residents are Veterans. VA inspects and approves all Medical Foster Homes. A Medical Foster Home can serve as an alternative to a nursing home. It may be appropriate for Veterans who require nursing home care but prefer a non-institutional setting with fewer residents.

- Not provided by or paid for by the VA.
- Cost based on income and level of care needed.
- Must be enrolled in Home Based Primary Care.
- Alternative to nursing home placement for Veterans requiring nursing home level care.
- Home/Family style setting with paid/trained caregiver.
- Provides nursing home level care.



To be eligible for a Medical Foster Home you need to be enrolled in Home Based Primary Care, and a Home needs to be available. Your VA social worker or case manager can help you with eligibility guidelines for Home Based Primary Care and Medical Foster Home care.

You will have to pay for the Medical Foster Home yourself or through other insurance. The charge for a Medical Foster Home is about \$1500 to \$3000 each month based on your income and the level of care you need. The specific cost is agreed upon ahead of time by you and the Medical Foster Home caregiver.

## State Veterans Home Program

State Veterans Homes are located in all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

- Grant program for eligible Veterans where VA pays part of daily cost for nursing home care
- Rate of payment based on actual cost of care and Veteran's ability to pay



Talk with a VA social worker/case manager about the eligibility requirements of State Veterans Homes near you and to figure out a plan for paying for State Veterans Home care services.

## **Planning for the Future**

### **Advance Directive**

An advance directive is a legal form that helps your doctors and loved ones understand your wishes about medical and mental health care. It can help them decide about treatments if you are too ill to decide for yourself, for example, if you are unconscious or too weak to talk.

- There are two types of advance directives: durable power of attorney for health care and living will. The VA form contains both.
- [The form can be found here.](#)

## Legal Guardianship

You may consider pursuing Guardianship if your Veteran:

- Has a physical or mental illness or disability that prevents them from taking care of their own basic needs
- Is, as a result of their incapacity, in danger of substantial harm
- Has no person who is already legally authorized to assume responsibility for their personal affairs and property

The process varies from state to state, but is typically involves a petition (to the courts) for guardianship, an investigation of the petition, and court proceedings:

- If the person consents to the appointment of a guardian, the court will review the facts and reports to ensure that the legal requirements for appointment of a guardian have been met, and if so, appoint a guardian.
- If the person is unable to understand the proceedings or make an informed decision, the court will hold a hearing at which evidence and testimony is presented to support the petition for a guardian and, if the legal requirements are satisfied, appoint a guardian.
- If the person objects to the petition, the court will schedule a trial at which evidence and testimony will be presented on the issue of whether the petition should be granted, with the petitioner bearing the burden of proof. The allegedly incapacitated person is entitled to be represented by a lawyer at the hearing and, if unable to afford a lawyer, may receive court-appointed representation.
- If a guardian is appointed, the judge will issue to the guardian legal documents that permit the guardian to act on behalf of the ward. These documents are often called *letters of authority*.
- As it is important that a person receive medical care, shelter and other necessities of life, guardianship proceedings tend to proceed through the courts relatively quickly. At times it is necessary for a court to appoint an emergency guardian who can act on behalf of an incapacitated person before a full hearing can be held, such as following a sudden, severe health crisis or car accident.

If your loved one is a veteran and you have officially become his or her guardian, you must be sure to provide documentation of this in order to receive VA benefits such as the Aid and Attendance (A&A) Pension (note that spouses of deceased veterans are also eligible for Aid and Attendance benefits).

The A&A Pension provides benefits for veterans who require the regular attendance of another person to assist in ADLs and can provide up to \$1,788 per month to a veteran, \$1,149 per month to a surviving spouse, or \$2,120 per month to a couple.

## [Veteran Decision Aid for Care at Home or in the Community](#)

Veteran Decision Aid (VDA) is a collaborative, patient-directed decision-making process that helps Veterans, together with their family caregivers and health care team, set goals and priorities, and make choices that meet patient needs while honoring patient values and preferences. The Veteran Decision Aid is an effective approach for making difficult decisions such as planning for long term care.

- [Shared Decision-Making Worksheet](#)
- [Caregiver Self-Assessment Worksheet](#)

## **Coping Strategies Worksheet (Class 3)**

Use the following worksheet as a guide for organizing your personal coping resources into a strategy that you can become familiar with. Remember, if you have a plan that you feel confident in, you are more likely to use it!

What are some strategies that you think you could use to manage depressive or other symptoms? Remember to think of your mood (feeling angry or sad) and your physical (can't sleep, no energy) experience. What resources could you might access to aid in managing your symptom (can include people, places, and things)?

**1. What strategy would I like to use:**

- a.
- b.
- c.

**2. When would I like to use it:**

- a.
- b.
- c.

**3. What steps are involved in using this strategy:**

- a.
- b.
- c.

**4. What resources will I need to use this strategy:**

- a.
- b.
- c.

### **Using Coping Strategies and Resources**

Talking about what you could do is much different than actually doing it. The following guidelines will help you begin using coping strategies successfully.

#### **10 Guidelines**

1. Keep a list of your coping strategies and resources handy.
2. Practice coping strategies frequently.
3. Mentally rehearse managing symptoms or distress using a specific coping strategy.
4. Use your list of coping strategies whenever you experience even the mildest distress.
5. Intervene early. Use a strategy while your distress is still mild.
6. Intervene even earlier. Use a strategy before you face a situation you expect to be challenging.
7. Choose the strategy or resource (or two) that fits the situation and your distress.
8. Give the strategy sufficient time to work—at least 10 full minutes for a brief technique.
9. Avoid directing your frustration at the strategy itself.
10. Remember coping and managing are not all or none propositions. When a technique “helps a little” it is a success.

### **Contingency Plan**

Now that you have some idea of what coping strategy(ies) you may use to handle distressing symptoms, let's consider what you would do if that strategy is not possible to use in a particular situation. Murphy (of Murphy's Law fame) would suggest that it may be wise to have a back-up or alternate plan.

Take a few moments to consider what could easily go wrong with your plan for coping and make a few notes about it.

**Strategy:**

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**What could go wrong?**

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**What is my solution?**

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***Being prepared for the "what ifs" in life can help us cope more effectively with difficult or challenging situations. Coping more effectively helps us feel more confident and less susceptible to feeling overwhelmed, burned out, or depressed.***

## Problem Solving Worksheet (Class 3)

**Step 1. Stop and breathe.** Take a moment to step back. Take a deep breath and remind yourself that you can handle this problem. You are capable and you can do this. Think about how to proceed, then decide to use your tools!

**Step 2. Define the problem.** Be specific, think about who, what, where, when, and why.

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**Step 3. Brainstorm potential solutions to the problem.** Don't judge whether these solutions are "good" or "bad" or exclude any possibilities. Jot down any potential solution that comes to mind no matter how realistic or ridiculous you might think it is. Let the creative thought process flow!

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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4. 

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5. 

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*Use more paper if necessary. Really exhaust the creative process here!*

**Step 4. Review your list of potential solutions and evaluate the alternatives.** Choose one (or more) solution(s) and **list** the pros and cons of each alternative.

PROS

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CONS

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Is it worth giving it a try? If yes, proceed with next steps. If not, go back to your list from Step 3 and repeat steps 4 and 5 until you come up with a potential solution that you feel comfortable with.

**(continued on next page)**

**Step 5. Make a plan to put your problem-solving solution into action!**

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**Step 6. What do I need to put this plan into action?**

What do I need to activate this plan? (resources)

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Who will help me with this plan? (people)

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What is the outcome I am hoping for?

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**Step 7. Pick a date to put this plan into action and do it!**

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**Step 8. Evaluate the outcome.** How did it go? Did you solve the problem? What went well? What did not go so well? Do you need a new plan? Make a few notes for yourself.

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Congratulations! Even if things did not go perfectly, you took a huge step in managing problems more effectively. If we have a plan to deal with a problem, we feel less stressed and anxious. As well, if we can take a moment to think through the problem and our potential solutions, we are less likely to act impulsively and make decisions that we ultimately regret.



## Other General Resources

### Home Safety Tips

#### Bathroom



The bathroom can be a very dangerous place for persons with physical or cognitive limitations. Between hard surfaces, wet and slippery tiles, medicines and cleaning agents, there are many hazards to consider when thinking about bathroom safety and the safety of your Veteran loved one.

- ✓ **Remove the door lock (or keep a key accessible).** Consider removing the door lock. We all wish for privacy in the bathroom, but if a fall happens, you want immediate access to your loved one
- ✓ **Use non-skid mats in the tub/shower.** Increase shower/bath safety with some non-skid strips or mat in the shower or tub.
- ✓ **Use a shower chair/tub stool.** A shower or tub stool can decrease fall risk in the shower or tub and help increase independence.
- ✓ **Use a hand-held shower nozzle.** A hand-held shower nozzle can be a useful tool to accompany the use of a shower or tub stool.
- ✓ **Cover the water spigot with a soft material.** A soft, padded material or spigot cover can prevent accidental injury while in the tub.
- ✓ **Set water heater to 120 degrees or less.** Be sure to have your hot water heater set to 120 degrees or less. That will reduce the chances of accidental scalding. The water simply won't get hot enough to scald someone.
- ✓ **Use raised toilet seats.** Raised toilet seats can increase independence and make transfers easier and safer.
- ✓ **Install grab bars.** Grab bars can provide stability and help decrease fall risks.

#### Firearms



Many of our Veterans are comfortable with and even unwilling to be without their guns. When a Veteran has mental health or cognitive impairment, guns in the home can become deadly in an instant. When it comes to gun safety:

- ✓ **Remove guns if at all possible.** Perhaps your Veteran will allow an adult child to take them from his/her home or be willing to sell them. Encourage the removal of all guns (or total number of guns).
- ✓ **Place gun locks/trigger locks on your guns.** Trigger locks can prevent a gun from firing. These are typically available free of charge from your local VA Suicide Prevention Coordinator.
- ✓ **Keep guns in a sturdy, locked cabinet—NOT GLASS!** Glass cabinets can be easily broken into and are not as secure as a gun safe or solid gun cabinet.
- ✓ **Remove any ammunition from the home.** If you can't remove all guns, perhaps you can remove all live ammunition? If not, place it in a different, locked location, with a separate (different) key.
- ✓ **Ask a local gunsmith** about ways to increase gun safety in your home, given your situation. A gunsmith can be a great resource for helping you increase safety around guns and prevent catastrophe.

Increasing the number of steps that an agitated or confused loved one has to navigate to access a gun can give you enough time to calm them down, to call for help, or get to a safe place.

## Preventing Fire Hazards



To determine safety of your home from fire hazards, consider the following:

### Matches, Lighters, Candles, and Smoking Hazards

- ✓ Keep matches and lighters out of children's reach.
- ✓ Make sure matches and smoking materials are out before disposing of them.
- ✓ Use large, non-combustible ash trays.
- ✓ Never smoke in bed.
- ✓ Extinguish candles when you leave a room or area.
- ✓ Place candles on non-combustible surfaces or containers.
- ✓ No not leave children unattended in areas with lit candles.

### Electrical Hazards

- ✓ Use qualified electricians to install/extend home wiring. Verify breakers and fuses are properly sized.
- ✓ Purchase only Underwriters Laboratories (UL) listed electronic devices and appliances.
- ✓ Do not overload extension cords. Use circuit breaker-protected outlet strips.
- ✓ Do not place electrical cords under carpeting or run through doors or openings.
- ✓ Replace frayed or damaged electrical cords.

### Heating Hazards

- ✓ Have your heating system inspected and serviced before the heating season begins.
- ✓ Have your chimney cleaned and inspected at least once a year.
- ✓ Portable space heaters should be placed well away from combustible materials.
- ✓ Turn off portable space heaters when going to bed.
- ✓ Kerosene heaters use oxygen, so always provide adequate ventilation in spaces where it's being used.

### Cooking Hazards

- ✓ Never leave anything unattended cooking on the stove top.
- ✓ Extinguish a grease fire in a pan by covering it with a lid, large skillet, or cookie sheet.
- ✓ Avoid loose-fitting clothing while cooking.
- ✓ Turn pot handles in when cooking to avoid the pan being knocked down or pulled from the stove.

### Housekeeping Hazards

- ✓ Store combustibles at least 3 feet away from all heat sources.
- ✓ Never use gasoline or other flammable liquids for cleaning clothes, furnishings, or floors.
- ✓ Clean dryer lint after each use.

### Yard and Garage Hazards

- ✓ Store gasoline and kerosene in clearly labeled, approved safety cans.
- ✓ Store propane cylinders outside of the house or in a detached garage or structure.
- ✓ Keep your yard cleaned of leaves, debris, and combustible rubbish.

## Books for Caregivers

Some prefer to seek support and information through books. Below are a few books that some have found helpful. Feel free to share titles and authors that you have found helpful, as well!

Please keep in mind that this is not a complete list. There are thousands of books out there on just about every topic under the sun.

- Quick Tips for Caregivers, Marion Karpinski, RN
- The Caregiver Handbook: Powerful Tools for Caregiving, Vicki L. Schmall, Ph.D., Marilyn Cleland, R.N., Marilynn Studivant, R.N., MSW, LC/Sw. ([www.Legacyhealth.Org](http://www.Legacyhealth.Org))
- When Aging Parents Can't Live Alone, Ellen R. Rubenson, MSW
- Caregiving: The Spiritual Journey of Love, Loss, And Renewal, Beth W. Mcloud
- Helping Yourself Help Others, Rosalynn Carter, Susan K. Golant
- Another Country: Navigating the Emotional Terrain of Our Elders, Mary Bray Pipher
- Chicken Soup for The Family Caregivers Soul, Joan Lunden And Amy Newmark
- The Caregivers Notebook: An Organizational Tool and Support to Help You Care for Others, Jolene Philo
- Dementia Caregivers Share Their Stories: A Support Group in A Book, Lynda Markut
- It's My Life Too!: Reclaim Your Caregiver Sanity By Learning When To Say "Yes" And When To Say "No", David Nassaney
- Confidence to Care: A Resource for Family Caregivers Providing Alzheimer's Disease or Other Dementia Care at Home, Molly Carpenter
- Gentle Caregiver: Practical Advice and Support for The Family Caregiver, Marti Robards
- Soul Care for Caregivers: How to Help Yourself While Helping Others, Susanne West
- Become A Compassionate Caregiver: Reduce Stress, Avoid Burnout, Richard Anastasi
- Coaching for Caregivers: How to Reach Out Before You Burn Out, Yosaif August
- Self-Care Now! 30 Tips to Help You Take Care of Yourself and Minimize Caregiver Burnout, Pauline Salvucci

### **OTHER Books:**

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## Other General Websites for Caregivers

- Some prefer to seek support and information through the internet. Following are some websites, both VA and non-VA, that some have found helpful.
- Please keep in mind that this is not a complete list. There are tens of thousands of websites and resources out there on just about every topic.
- However, for every helpful internet website or resource, there are many, many others that are not so helpful. Below, please find a brief “how to” guide from the publication “Keeping it All Together” through Military One Source.

## How to Search the Web

There is much information on the Internet (the “Web”) that can be helpful to families of injured, ill or wounded service members. People involved in your service member’s care are likely to refer you often to Internet information.

Don’t be embarrassed if you haven’t used the Internet often. It can be easy to learn, and many people at the hospital can help you find a computer and get started. These basics can also help:

### Finding a website when you know the Web address

You may want to look up a “Web address” (also called a “URL”) that someone has given you or that you have read about. For example, someone may suggest that you look at a website called *www.fisherhouse.org* for information about the Fisher House program, which provides housing for military families near medical centers.

When you’re at a computer, here is how to find a Web address:

1. Click on the picture (also called an icon) that lets you enter the Internet. It will probably have the word “Internet” on it. It might say “Explorer,” “Firefox,” “Navigator” or “Safari.” This will open a software program called a browser, which lets you look for things on the Internet.
2. Now you should see a narrow empty box, probably near the top of the screen. This is the search box. In the search box, type the Web address that you have.
3. Click on the word “go” or on the arrow next to the address box.
4. The website’s home page should appear on the screen. Click on different parts of the home page to get even more information.

### Finding information when you don’t have a Web address

You may not have a Web address to help you look up information on the Web. That’s OK. You can do an Internet search that will find websites for you with information on a subject you want to know about.

For example, you may want to research organizations that can give you information about living with a spinal cord injury. Here is how to do a basic search:

1. Click on the picture (or icon) that lets you enter the Internet. It will probably have the word "Internet" on it. It might say "Explorer," "Firefox," "Navigator" or "Safari." This will open a software program called a browser, which lets you look for things on the Internet.
2. Go to the website of a "search engine." A search engine is a software program that searches the Web to find websites that contain the search terms that you type into the search box. Some of the better known search engines are Google at [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and Yahoo at [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com). A long, narrow box will appear. This is the search box.
3. Type your search terms into the search box. For this search, you might want to enter "spinal cord injury."
4. Hit the "Return" or "Enter" key on the keyboard, or click on the word "search," which will be next to or under the search box. A list of websites will appear on the screen.
5. Click on a website that looks useful. For example, the search term "spinal cord injury" produces a list that includes "National Spinal Cord Injury Association" and "Spinal Cord Resource Center."
6. Read the website by clicking on information that looks useful. If a site contains a box that says "resources," be sure to click on it. If a site contains a box that says "links," be sure to click on it, too. Links are connections to other websites that can be useful.

### More tips

If a search is producing too many websites that aren't really related to what you're looking for, "narrow" your search. For example, if you typed in the search term "child care," you would get thousands of websites from all over the world. If you "narrow" the search by adding more specific terms, for example, "child care San Diego" (if you're looking for information about child care available in San Diego), you will get better results.

- You can leave words like "and" and "the" out of your search.
- When you find helpful sites, "bookmark" them so you can find them again easily.
- Know if a website is commercial or noncommercial. The owners of a commercial site may be trying to sell products or services to people who visit the site.

Remember that you can tell something about a site by the last letters in the Web address:

- *.com usually means the site is commercial*
- *.org means a nonprofit organization*
- *.edu means an educational institution*
- *.mil means a military site*
- *.gov means a government site*

### Additional Websites:

- [VA Caregiver Support Program](#) - Comprehensive VA caregiver website with information about VA resources and useful links to tools and other useful information
- [Military Caregiver Support Resource Directory](#) - A one-stop website with information regarding just about every aspect of caregiving, including national programs, financial information, VA information, and community resources

- [National Center for PTSD](#) - Information about understanding PTSD, tools and resources to help you and your Veteran cope more effectively, information about treatment
- [Psych Armor](#) - Free self-guided workshops which provide information about Veteran care, caregiving, self-care, etc.
- [YouTube](#) – A nearly endless source of instructional (and entertaining) videos—type the topic into the search bar and you will get dozens and dozens of potential videos to view
- [NIH Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias Resources](#) - Information and publications on diagnosis, treatment, caregiving needs, education and training, and more related to Alzheimer's disease
- [Family Caregiver Alliance](#) - Family caregiver alliance is a community based, non-profit organization that offers supportive services to those caring from adults with a variety of different diagnoses.
- [Well Spouse Association](#) - Non-profit organization that gives support to spouses/partners of chronically ill or disabled adults
- [Caregiver Zone](#) - Comprehensive internet resource, including an online magazine, caregiver coping tools, and medical/household products for older persons (for purchase)
- [Today's Caregiver](#) - Comprehensive listing of sources for general caregiving information and services for specific chronic illnesses
- [MyHealtheVet](#) - My HealtheVet portal for caregivers with information on topics ranging from sleep, to eating wisely, to other information caregivers may find useful
- [Geriatrics and Extended Care](#) - Resources and a national directory for caregivers
- [VA Office of Rural Health](#) - Resources for supporting Veterans living in remote and/or rural areas with long-term health and well-being; includes comprehensive video education series to help caregivers of persons with dementia
- [Military OneSource](#) - Comprehensive resources for wounded, injured services members and their families—"Keeping It All Together" is a great handbook for the Veteran and caregiver alike.

## Mobile Apps for Veterans and Caregivers

Please Note: The apps listed here may change and new apps are frequently being developed.





### You can find new apps and updated app information at:

1. [VA App Store](#)
2. [Health.Mil Connected Health Mobile Apps](#)
3. [Health.Mil Clinical Integration Site](#)
4. [Mobile Behavior Design Lab](#)
5. [National Center for PTSD App Site](#)

You may also check your iPhone App Store or Google Play Store for additional apps created by T2 (National Center for Telehealth and Technology) or the Defense Health Agency.

Source: VA Caregiver Support Program Knowledge and Data Management Committee (2019).





### Apps for Mental Health Symptom Management

<p>Mood Coach</p> 	<p>This app is designed to help you boost your mood through participation in positive activities. You can make a plan with positive activities and track your progress. Mood Coach can be used on its own by those who would like mood management tools, or to augment face-to-face care with a healthcare professional. It is not intended to replace therapy.</p>
<p>Moving Forward</p> 	<p>Moving Forward provides on-the-go tools and teaches problem solving skills to overcome obstacles and deal with stress. It is especially helpful in managing challenges such as: returning to civilian life, balancing school and family life, financial difficulties, relationship problems, difficult career decisions, and coping with physical injuries. It may be used alone or in combination with the Moving Forward online course.</p>
<p>STAIR Coach</p> 	<p>STAIR Coach is designed to supplement in-person psychotherapy using Skills Training in Affective &amp; Interpersonal Regulation (STAIR). It also may be useful to people experiencing symptoms of trauma. STAIR uses cognitive and behavioral techniques to help with managing emotions and relationships. The app includes in-depth psychoeducation, interactive tools for emotion and behavior management, reminders and links.</p>
<p>T2 Mood Tracker</p> 	<p>Tracks a user's range of emotions and behaviors to show how their life is affected by thoughts, moods, changes at home or at work, and events. Helps identify trends and triggers, and info can be shared with a health care provider.</p>



<p>Dream EZ</p> 	<p>Helps the user rewrite nightmares into less disturbing dreams for a better night's sleep, using the principles of imagery rehearsal therapy (IRT).</p>
<p>PTSD Coach</p> 	<p>PTSD Coach was designed for those who have, or may have, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This app provides you with education, information about professional care, a self-assessment for PTSD, opportunities to find support, and tools that can help you manage the stresses of daily life with PTSD. Tools range from relaxation skills and positive self-talk to anger management and other common self-help strategies. You can customize tools based on your preferences and can integrate your own contacts, photos, and music. This app can be used by people who are in treatment as well as those who are not.</p>
<p>Vet Change</p> 	<p>VetChange is an app for Veterans and Service members who are concerned about their drinking and how it relates to posttraumatic stress after deployment, and for all people who are interested in developing healthier drinking behaviors. This app provides tools for cutting down or quitting drinking, tools for managing stress symptoms, education about alcohol use and how it relates to PTSD symptoms, and guidance to find professional treatment. You can use VetChange alone or in combination with counseling. Please tell your healthcare provider if you are using the app while you are in counseling.</p>
<p>Life Armor</p> 	<p>Has information on 17 common health concerns, including sleep, depression, relationship issues, and post-traumatic stress. Includes self-assessments to help measure and track symptoms.</p>
<p>Virtual Hope Box</p> 	<p>Contains simple tools to help users with coping, relaxation, distraction, and positive thinking using personalized audio, video, pictures, games, mindfulness exercises, activity planning, inspirational quotes, and coping statements.</p>
<p>Positive Activity Jackpot</p> 	<p>Helps users who may be overwhelmed by depression find nearby enjoyable activities.</p>
<p>Together Strong</p> 	<p>Together Strong is an interactive app that lets you practice what to say and do when a peer is struggling with adjustment to civilian life. Through interactive role-play and simulations, you'll become prepared to have a conversation that will motivate a friend to seek help, build resilience, and lead a positive life.</p>






## Apps for Breathing, Mindfulness and Relaxation




<p>Tactical Breather</p> 	<p>Provides guided breathing instruction to gain control over heart rate, emotions, concentration, and other physiological and psychological responses during stressful situations.</p>
<p>Breathe2Relax</p> 	<p>Provides instruction on diaphragmatic “belly” breathing, which helps lower stress and reduce anxiety. Graphics, animation, narration, and videos lead users through several breathing exercises.</p>
<p>Mindfulness Coach</p> 	<p>Mindfulness means paying attention, on purpose, to whatever is going on in the present moment without passing judgment on it. Mindfulness has been shown to be effective for reducing stress, improving emotional balance, increasing self-awareness, helping with anxiety and depression, and coping more effectively with chronic pain. This app was developed to help Veterans, Service members, and others learn how to practice mindfulness. It offers exercises, information, and a tracking log so that you can optimize your practice.</p>
<p>Mindfulness Coach 2</p> 	<p>The app provides a gradual, self-guided training program designed to help you understand and adopt a simple mindfulness practice. Mindfulness Coach also offers a library of information about mindfulness, 12 audio-guided mindfulness exercises, a growing catalog of additional exercises available for free download, goal-setting and tracking, a mindfulness mastery assessment to help you track your progress, reminders, and access to other support and crisis resources.</p>




## Apps to use with Evidence-Based Psychotherapies

<p>CPT Coach</p> 	<p>CPT Coach is for those with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who are participating in Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) with a professional mental healthcare provider. This app contains support materials for a complete course of CPT to help patients manage their treatment, including between session assignments, readings, PTSD symptom monitoring, and mobile versions of CPT worksheets. CPT Coach is not intended to be used as self-help without the guidance of a professional mental healthcare provider.</p>
<p>ACT Coach</p> 	<p>Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) aims to help you live with unpleasant thoughts, feelings, and impulses without avoiding them or being controlled by them. In ACT, you are encouraged to commit to actions so that you can live your life by your values, even in the face of these unpleasant experiences. This app was developed for Veterans, Service Members, and other people who are in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy in consultation with a therapist. It offers exercises, tools, information, and tracking logs so you can practice what you're learning in your daily life.</p>




<p>Anger and Irritability Management Skills (AIMS)</p> 	<p>AIMS is designed for Veterans and military Service members but can be used by anyone coping with anger problems. The AIMS app is based on the Anger and Irritability Management Skills online self-help course. The app provides users with education about anger, opportunities for finding support, the ability to create an anger management plan, anger tracking, and tools to help manage angry reactions. Users can also create custom tools based on their preferences, and can integrate their own contacts, photos, and music. The AIMS app may be used alone, or in combination with the online course or in-person therapy.</p>
<p>PE Coach</p> 	<p>PE Coach is designed to be used during therapy for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with a health professional who is trained in Prolonged Exposure (PE) therapy. The app will guide you through the exercises assigned by your therapist and allows you to track and record your progress. In addition, the app provides techniques such as controlled breathing that will help you tolerate and decrease your distress. You will be able to audio record your sessions directly onto your phone so you can review them later as part of your treatment. By itself this app is not sufficient to treat PTSD. However, those who are receiving PE treatment can work together with their therapist to use the tools in this app.</p>
<p>CBT-I Coach</p> 	<p>CBT-i Coach is for people who are engaged in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia with a health provider, or who have experienced symptoms of insomnia and would like to improve their sleep habits. The app will guide users through the process of learning about sleep, developing positive sleep routines, and improving their sleep environments. CBT-i Coach is intended to augment face-to-face care with a healthcare professional. It can be used on its own, but it is not intended to replace therapy for those who need it.</p>

### Apps for Managing Health




<p>MOVE! Coach</p> 	<p>MOVE!® Coach is a weight loss app for Veterans, service members, their families, and others who want to lose weight. This 19-week program guides the participants to achieve success with weight loss through education, and use of tools, in an easy and convenient way. Participants can monitor, track, and receive feedback regarding their progress with weight, diet, and exercise goals.</p>
<p>BioZen</p> 	<p>Shows users live biofeedback data via wearable body sensors that display results on their phone, including EEG, EMG, GSR, ECG, and EKG. See "Resources" for a list of compatible devices and a user's guide.</p>
<p>Stay Quit Coach</p> 	<p>Stay Quit Coach is designed to help with quitting smoking. It is intended to serve as a source of support and information for adults who are already in treatment to quit smoking, to help them stay quit even after treatment ends. The app guides you in creating a tailored plan that takes into account your personal reasons for quitting. It provides information about smoking and quitting, interactive tools to help users cope with urges to smoke, and motivational messages and support contacts to help you stay smoke-free.</p>

<p>Concussion Coach</p> 	<p>This app provides you with information about concussion, a self-assessment instrument for symptoms and their severity, tools to help you build resilience and manage symptoms, and recommendations for community-based resources and support. This app can be used by itself, but it may be more effective in combination with treatment by a healthcare professional.</p>
<p>VA Pressure Ulcer Resource</p> 	<p>The VA Pressure Ulcer Resource (VA PUR) App is designed to help Veterans and their Caregivers learn about preventing and taking care of existing pressure ulcers/injuries. The VA PUR App is an easy-to-use tool that allows you to prevent, understand, and track pressure ulcers/injuries. The app also provides other resources to help manage your daily care.</p>
<p>REVAMP App for Veterans</p> 	<p>The Remote Veterans Apnea Management Platform (REVAMP) App pairs with your Positive Airway Pressure (PAP) machine and enables you and your VA sleep care team to track your sleep data. You can use the app to obtain educational information and troubleshooting support about sleep apnea as well as complete questionnaires regarding your sleep health. Additionally, a built-in message system allows you and your VA sleep care team to exchange secure messages. The REVAMP App for Veterans is available at select VA Sleep Centers for Veterans who have been registered in the application by a member of their sleep care team.</p>

### Apps for Managing VA Health Care and Benefits


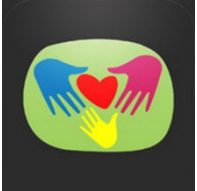


<p>VA Launchpad App for Veterans</p> 	<p>The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Launchpad App for Veterans (VA Launchpad) houses all VA applications (apps) for Veterans and their Caregivers. The app organizes all apps into five categories. The VA Launchpad has no logon, as app security is determined by each app opened by the user. VA's single sign on capabilities passes user authentication between secured apps (apps that require a sign on) without the need for repetitive sign on, as long as the browser remains open.</p>
<p>Mobile Blue Button</p> 	<p>If you are a Veteran enrolled in VA health care, the Mobile Blue Button App helps you better manage your health care needs and communicate with your care teams. By using the Mobile Blue Button App, you can access, print, download and store information from your VA Electronic Health Record (EHR) in a secure, reliable and simple way. For instructions to save an icon to your home screen visit <a href="https://mobile.va.gov/saving-vva-mobile-app-home-screen">https://mobile.va.gov/saving-vva-mobile-app-home-screen</a>.</p>
<p>Rx Refill</p> 	<p>The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Rx Refill mobile application (app) allows you to request refills of your refillable VA-issued prescriptions, track VA prescription deliveries, view VA prescription history and access additional medication information on My HealtheVet from the convenience of your mobile device. The app works in conjunction with the Rx Refill feature within My HealtheVet, and refill requests submitted through the app or the My HealtheVet website are trackable using the app's Track Delivery feature.</p>

<p>VA Online Scheduling</p> 	<p>If you have VA health care benefits, you can schedule your VA primary care appointments online if you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are scheduling your appointment with a VA medical facility that accepts online scheduling, and</li> <li>• Have had an appointment at that VA medical facility within the last 2 years, and</li> <li>• Have a My HealtheVet Premium account or DS Logon Premium account</li> </ul>
<p>VA Video Connect</p> 	<p>VA Video Connect connects Veterans with their health care team from anywhere, using encryption to ensure a secure and private session. It makes VA health care more convenient and reduces travel times for Veterans, especially those in very rural areas with limited access to VA health care facilities, and it allows quick and easy health care access from any mobile or web-based device. Veterans and their health care providers jointly decide whether to use VA Video Connect for a medical visit. Please speak with your VA care team if you are interested in potentially receiving care through VA Video Connect.</p>
<p>Ask A Pharmacist</p> 	<p>If you are a Veteran, the Ask a Pharmacist App enables you to access information about VA pharmacies and medication easily. If you have a verified My HealtheVet account (credentials for VA's personal health record), you can link to VA pharmacy and Secure Messaging services via the app, allowing you to quickly go to your personal medication and health information as well as learn about pharmacy-related topics.</p>
<p>MyVA Health Journal</p> 	<p>If you are a Veteran enrolled in VA health care, the MyVA Health Journal App allows you to access your official VA medical record and enter information about your health. With the app, you can store contact information and health and military histories, as well as record your wellness goals, monitor your mood and create entries about a variety of health topics. You can also set reminders about appointments or to create new health entries so you remember to track your health.</p>
<p>Summary of Care</p> 	<p>If you are a Veteran enrolled in VA health care, the Summary of Care App lets you receive and view your VA medical information in one place and from the convenience of your mobile device.</p> <p>For instructions to save an icon to your home screen visit <a href="https://mobile.va.gov/saving-vva-mobile-app-home-screen">https://mobile.va.gov/saving-vva-mobile-app-home-screen</a>.</p>
<p>Annie App for Veterans</p> 	<p>The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Annie App is a Short Message Service (SMS) text messaging capability that promotes self-care for Veterans enrolled in VA health care. When your provider signs you up for Annie for a health issue, you will receive automated messages that prompt you to track your own health. You are asked to reply to messages so that Annie can let you know how you are doing. Annie also can send you messages from your local VA medical facility. Annie is for self-care. Your text and message replies to Annie are kept in a computer system. Your VA health care team will be able to view the messages, but will not routinely review them. Annie is not a way to text your VA clinician. You are responsible for your own health and should contact your VA health care team directly when you have health issues. Text messaging is not secure (texts can be read by anyone with access to your phone) and has costs, depending on your plan.</p>

<p>311 VET</p> 	<p>The 311VET App was designed for Veterans to ask general VA Benefits questions and receive answers 24/7/365 from any mobile device, allowing answers at any time and from anywhere. 311VET allows Veterans to gather information on Health Care Benefits, Pensions, Life Insurance, Dependents and Survivors Benefits, and much more.</p>
<p>Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry</p> 	<p>If you are a Veteran or Servicemember who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations after August 2, 1990, or in Djibouti, Africa or Afghanistan after September 11, 2001, you are eligible to participate in the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry.</p> <p>For instructions to save an icon to your home screen <a href="#">visit this web resource.</a></p> <p>The Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry is an online database of health information from Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn (OEF/OIF/OND) or 1990-1991 Gulf War Veterans and Servicemembers collected through a questionnaire about exposures to airborne hazards. The Registry will help you become more aware of your own potential health issues and help VA better understand the potential health effects of deployment-related exposures.</p>
<p>VA DoD Veteran Link</p> 	<p>The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) DoD Veteran Link mobile application (app) allows Veterans receiving VA health care and service members to find and communicate with other Veterans and service members who have common interests and life circumstances. App users can create a profile indicating the personal information they want to share, find information about health-related issues, search for other Veterans and service members based on information they have shared and join groups to discuss specific topics with others.</p>



## Apps & Websites for Families

<p>PTSD Family Coach App</p> 	<p>Living with a family member who has PTSD can be incredibly stressful. PTSD Family Coach includes tools to help you manage this stress, including mindfulness exercises, tools to help you re-build your social networks, and tools to help with difficult thoughts and emotions. The app also provides a way for you to track your stress level over time, with specific feedback about your progress. Finally, PTSD Family Coach offers ways for you, and your loved one, to connect with support.</p>
<p>Parenting2Go App</p> 	<p>Parenting2Go helps Veterans and Service members reconnect with their children and provides convenient tools to strengthen parenting skills. It can be used alone or in combination with the online Parenting for Service Members &amp; Veterans course. Parents can find quick parenting advice; relaxation tools to use when frustrated or stressed; tools to improve their relationship with their children through positive communication; and strategies to switch gears between military life and home. The app addresses challenges that come with parenting children of all ages and backgrounds. The app also offers guidance for seeking professional help and access to additional resources.</p>
<p>Military Kids Connect Website</p> 	<p>The award-winning Military Kids Connect (MKC) website helps children with challenges they face as part of a military family. Kids can share ideas, experiences, and suggestions with other military children in MKC's monitored online forums so they can know they're not alone in dealing with the stresses of military life. <a href="#">The website also has information for parents and educators.</a></p>
<p>Sesame Street for Military Families Website</p> 	<p><a href="#">Sesame Street for Military Families</a> is an initiative funded by the Department of Defense (DoD) and developed by Sesame Workshop (the creators of Sesame Street) to provide military parents and their young children with multimedia educational resources to deal with transitions common to military life (like deployments, moves, and homecomings).</p>

### Clinic Satisfaction Tool

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Patient Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Physician: \_\_\_\_\_

To ensure that you get the most benefit from your visit today, please list 3 things you want to have addressed. These can include questions about medication, tests, treatment options, activities of daily living, etc.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Please keep this form with you and have it available when you speak with the provider. At the conclusion of your visit, please complete the questions below:

How could the clinic support your Veteran's care (or your care) better?

\_\_\_\_\_

Were all of your questions addressed today? Y / N


Are you satisfied with your visit? Y / N

Physician initials \_\_\_\_\_

*Adapted from: Gottfried ON, Rasheedat Z, Choi A, Howell E. Clinic Satisfaction Tool. Duke University School of Medicine, Department of Neurosurgery, Spine Clinic.*

## VA Advance Directive Form

OMB Approval Number 2900-0556  
Estimated Burden Avg. 30 minutes  
Expiration Date: 04/30/2024

 <b>Department of Veterans Affairs</b>		
<b>VA ADVANCE DIRECTIVE</b> <b>DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR HEALTH CARE AND LIVING WILL</b>		
<b>INSTRUCTIONS</b> <p>This advance directive form is an official document where you can write down your preferences for your health care. If someday you can't make health care decisions for yourself anymore, this advance directive can help guide the people who will make decisions for you.</p> <p>You can use this form to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name specific people to make health care decisions for you</li><li>• Describe your preferences for how you want to be treated</li><li>• Describe your preferences for medical care, mental health care, long-term care, or other types of health care</li></ul> <p>You may complete some, none, or all sections of this form. If you need more space for any part of the form, you may attach extra pages. Be sure to initial and date every page that you attach. You also must initial the sections you complete and sign the form. If you are unable to initial or sign the form because of a physical impairment, you can place an "X", thumbprint, or stamp on the form instead of your initials and signature. If a physical impairment prevents you from doing any of these things, you can ask someone else who is with you to sign, place an "X", thumbprint, or stamp on the form.</p> <p>When you complete this form, it's important that you also talk to a member of your health care team, family, and other loved ones to explain what you meant when you filled out the form. A member of your health care team can help you with this form and can answer any questions that you have.</p>		
<b>PART I: PERSONAL INFORMATION</b>		
NAME ( <i>Last, First, Middle</i> ):		DATE OF BIRTH ( <i>mm/dd/yyyy</i> ):
STREET ADDRESS:		
CITY, STATE, ZIP:		
HOME PHONE WITH AREA CODE:	WORK PHONE WITH AREA CODE:	MOBILE PHONE WITH AREA CODE:
<b>Privacy Act Information and Paperwork Reduction Act Notice</b>		
<p>The information requested on this form is solicited under the authority of 38 C.F.R. §17.32. It is being collected to document your preferences for your health care in the event that you can't speak for yourself anymore. The information you provide may be disclosed outside the VA as permitted by law. Possible disclosures include those that are described in the "routine uses" identified in the VA system of records 24VA10P2, Patient Medical Records-VA, published in the Federal Register in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974. This is also available in the Compilation of Privacy Act Issuances. You may choose to fill out this form or not. But without this information, VA health care providers may not understand your preferences as well. If you don't fill out this form, there won't be any effect on the benefits you are entitled to receive. The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 requires us to let you know that this information collection follows the clearance requirements of section 3507 of this Act. We estimate that it will take you about 30 minutes to fill out this form, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the information you write down. A Federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information, unless it displays a current valid OMB control number. The OMB Control No. for this information collection is 2900-0556.</p>		



NAME ( <i>Last, First, Middle</i> ):	DATE OF BIRTH ( <i>mm/dd/yyyy</i> ):
<b>PART II: DURABLE POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR HEALTH CARE</b>	
<p>This section of the advance directive form is called a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care. It lets you appoint a specific person to make health care decisions for you in case you can't make decisions for yourself anymore. This person will be called your Health Care Agent.</p> <p>Your Health Care Agent should be someone:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You trust</li> <li>• Who knows you well</li> <li>• Who is familiar with your values and beliefs</li> </ul> <p>If you get too sick to make decisions for yourself, your Health Care Agent will have the authority to make all health care decisions for you. This includes decisions to admit and discharge you from any hospital or other health care institution. Your Health Care Agent can also decide to start or stop any type of health care treatment. He or she can access your personal health information, and medical records, including information about whether you have been tested for HIV or treated for AIDS, sickle cell anemia, substance abuse or alcoholism.</p> <p><b>NOTE:</b> If you wish to give general permission for VA to share your medical records or health information with others, you can complete VA Form 10-5345 (Request for and Authorization to Release Medical Records or Health Information). You can get VA Form 10-5345 from your VA health care provider or you can get it using a computer from this website <a href="http://www4.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/vha-10-5345-fill.pdf">http://www4.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/vha-10-5345-fill.pdf</a>.</p>	
<b>A - HEALTH CARE AGENT</b>	
Place your initials in the box next to your choice. Choose only one.	
Initials	I don't wish to appoint a Health Care Agent right now. (Skip this section and go to Part III, Living Will.)
Initials	I appoint the person named below to make decisions about my health care if I can't decide for myself anymore.
Name ( <i>Last, First, Middle</i> ):	Relationship to Me:
Street Address:	
City, State, Zip:	
Home Phone with Area Code:	Work Phone with Area Code:
Mobile Phone with Area Code:	
<b>B - ALTERNATE HEALTH CARE AGENT</b>	
Fill out this section if you want to appoint a second person to make health care decisions for you, in case the first person isn't available.	
Initials	If the person named above can't or doesn't want to make decisions for me, I appoint the person named below to act as my Health Care Agent.
Name ( <i>Last, First, Middle</i> ):	Relationship to Me:
Street Address:	
City, State, Zip:	
Home Phone with Area Code:	Work Phone with Area Code:
Mobile Phone with Area Code:	

NAME ( <i>Last, First, Middle</i> ):		DATE OF BIRTH ( <i>mm/dd/yyyy</i> ):	
<b>PART III: LIVING WILL</b>			
This section of the advance directive form is called a Living Will. This section of it lets you write down how you want to be treated in case you aren't able to decide for yourself anymore. Its purpose is to help others decide about your care.			
<b>A - SPECIFIC PREFERENCES ABOUT LIFE-SUSTAINING TREATMENTS</b>			
In this section, you can indicate your preferences for life-sustaining treatments in certain situations. Some examples of life-sustaining treatments are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation)</li> <li>• a breathing machine (mechanical ventilation)</li> <li>• kidney dialysis</li> <li>• a feeding tube (artificial nutrition and hydration)</li> </ul> Think about each situation described on the left and ask yourself, "In that situation, would I want to have life-sustaining treatments?" Place your initials in the box that best describes your treatment preference. You may complete some, all, or none of this section. Choose only one box for each statement.			
	<b>Yes.</b> I would want life-sustaining treatments.	I'm not sure. It would depend on the circumstances.	<b>No.</b> I would not want life-sustaining treatments.
If I am unconscious, in a coma, or in a vegetative state and there is little or no chance of recovery.	Initials	Initials	Initials
If I have permanent, severe brain damage that makes me unable to recognize my family or friends (for example, severe dementia).	Initials	Initials	Initials
If I have a permanent condition where other people must help me with my daily needs (for example, eating, bathing, toileting).	Initials	Initials	Initials
If I need to use a breathing machine and be in bed for the rest of my life.	Initials	Initials	Initials
If I have pain or other severe symptoms that cause suffering and can't be relieved.	Initials	Initials	Initials
If I have a condition that will make me die very soon, even with life-sustaining treatments.	Initials	Initials	Initials
Other:	Initials	Initials	Initials

NAME (Last, First, Middle):	DATE OF BIRTH (mm/dd/yyyy):
<b>B - MENTAL HEALTH PREFERENCES</b>	
<p>This section is optional. You may skip this section if you do not have a serious mental health problem or if you do not want to write down your preferences for mental health care. If you have a serious mental health condition, you might want to write down medications that have worked for you in the past and that you would want again, or you might want to write down the mental health facilities or hospitals that you like and those that you don't like. If you need more space, you may attach extra pages and use this space to refer to attached pages. Be sure to initial and date every page that you attach.</p>	
<b>C - ADDITIONAL PREFERENCES</b>	
<p>This section is optional. In this space, you can write other important preferences for your health care that aren't described somewhere else in this document. For example, these might be social, cultural, or faith-based preferences for care, or preferences about treatments such as feeding tubes, blood transfusions, or pain medications. If you need more space, you may attach extra pages and use this space to refer to attached pages. Be sure to initial and date every page that you attach.</p>	

NAME (Last, First, Middle):		DATE OF BIRTH (mm/dd/yyyy):
<b>D - HOW STRICTLY YOU WANT YOUR PREFERENCES FOLLOWED</b>		
Place your initials in the box next to the statement that reflects how strictly you want others to follow your preferences. Choose only one.		
Initials	I want my preferences, as expressed in this Living Will, to serve as a general guide. I understand that in some situations, the person making decisions for me may decide something different from the preferences I express above, if they think it's in my best interests.	
Initials	I want my preferences, as expressed in this Living Will, to be followed strictly, even if the person making decisions for me thinks that this isn't in my best interests.	
<b>PART IV: SIGNATURES</b>		
<b>A - YOUR SIGNATURE</b>		
<b>By my signature below, I certify that this form accurately describes my preferences.</b>		
SIGNATURE (Sign in ink):		DATE (mm/dd/yyyy):
<b>B - WITNESSES' SIGNATURES</b>		
Two people must witness your signature. Witnesses to the patient's signing of an advance directive are attesting by their signatures only to the fact that they saw the patient or designated third party sign the VA Advance Directive form. Neither witness may, to the witness' knowledge, be named as a beneficiary in the patient's estate, appointed as health care agent in the advance directive, or financially responsible for the patient's care. Nor may a witness be the designated third party who has signed the VA Advance Directive form at the direction of the patient and in the patient's presence.		
<b>Witness #1</b>		
I personally witnessed the signing of this advance directive. I am not the designated third party who signed this VA Advance Directive form at the direction of the patient and in the patient's presence. I am not appointed as Health Care Agent in this advance directive. I am not financially responsible for the care of the patient making this advance directive. To the best of my knowledge, I am not named as a beneficiary in the patient's estate.		
SIGNATURE (Sign in ink):		DATE (mm/dd/yyyy):
Name (Printed or Typed):		
Street Address:		
City, State, Zip:		
<b>Witness #2</b>		
I personally witnessed the signing of this advance directive. I am not the designated third party who signed this VA Advance Directive form at the direction of the patient and in the patient's presence. I am not appointed as Health Care Agent in this advance directive. I am not financially responsible for the care of the patient making this advance directive. To the best of my knowledge, I am not named as a beneficiary in the patient's estate.		
SIGNATURE (Sign in ink):		DATE (mm/dd/yyyy):
Name (Printed or Typed):		
Street Address:		
City, State, Zip:		

NAME ( <i>Last, First, Middle</i> ):	DATE OF BIRTH ( <i>mm/dd/yyyy</i> ):
<b>PART V: SIGNATURE AND SEAL OF NOTARY PUBLIC (<i>Optional</i>)</b>	
<p>This VA Advance Directive form is valid in VA facilities without being notarized. However, you may need to have it notarized to be legally binding outside the VA health care setting. Space for a Notary's signature and seal is included below.</p> <p>On this _____ day of _____, in the year of _____, personally appeared before me _____,</p> <p>known by me to be the person who completed this document and acknowledged it as their free act and deed.</p> <p>IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have set my hand and affixed my official seal in the County of _____,</p> <p>State of _____, on the date written above.</p> <p>Notary Public: _____ Commission Expires: _____</p> <p>[SEAL]</p>	

# Veteran Decision Aid

## for Care at Home or in the Community

- Consider your needs and preferences for long term services and supports.
- Visit [www.va.gov/Geriatrics](http://www.va.gov/Geriatrics) to learn more about long term services and supports in VA and the community.
- Talk with your caregiver or family support person about Advance Care Planning.
- Talk with your social worker and care team about the home and community services that are best for you.

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

[www.va.gov/Geriatrics](http://www.va.gov/Geriatrics)

*Your eligibility is based on clinical need and service or setting availability.*

## Step 1. Consider Needs

<b>What do you need help with?</b>	<p><b>I need help to:</b> <i>(Check any that apply)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Eat, get dressed, bathe, go to the toilet or get around the house.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Do chores such as fixing small meals, paying bills and shopping.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Get care that requires a nurse or therapist.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Check my blood pressure or blood sugar, keep track of medical visits or fill my pill box.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Deal with my drug or alcohol issues.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Deal with my mental health concerns.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Make decisions and remember things I need to do.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Do social things with family or friends.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____</li> </ul>
<b>Who helps you?</b>	<p><b>I have help from:</b> <i>(Check any that apply)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> My spouse or partner.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Family member or friend who lives with me.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Family members or friends who come over to help me.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Paid caregiver.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> I do not have any regular help.</li> </ul>
<b>Where do you want to live?</b>	<p><b>I want to live:</b> <i>(Check only one)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In my home because that is the most important thing to me.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In my home, if my health needs are met.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In my home, but it is not best for me now.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In a different home, but closer to VA services and supports.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> In a different place where I can receive more care.</li> </ul>



## Step 2. Explore Options

**Long term care options I would consider are:**

*(Check your choices – to learn more go to [www.va.gov/Geriatrics](http://www.va.gov/Geriatrics))*

### **Options at my home**

- ☐ Adult Day Health Care
- ☐ Home Based Primary Care
- ☐ Homemaker/Home Health Aide
- ☐ Hospice Care
- ☐ Palliative Care
- ☐ Respite Care
- ☐ Skilled Home Health Care
- ☐ Remote Monitoring Care
- ☐ Veteran-Directed Care

### **Options in a residential setting**

- ☐ Adult Family Home
- ☐ Assisted Living
- ☐ Community Residential Care
- ☐ Domiciliary Care (in a State Veterans Home)
- ☐ Medical Foster Home

### **Options at a nursing home**

- ☐ Community Living Center (VA Nursing Home, also called CLC)
- ☐ Community Nursing Home
- ☐ State Veterans Home

**I chose these options because it is important to:**

*(Examples: stay at home, be close to friends/family, have help at night)*

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



## Step 3. Involve Others

**Who is involved in your long term care planning?**

**People that help me make decisions about long term care are:** *(Check any that apply)*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spouse or partner          | <input type="checkbox"/> Nurse care manager   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family member/friend       | <input type="checkbox"/> Primary care provider (physician, nurse practitioner, physician assistant) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social worker/case manager | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health provider     |   |

**People who agree with my care choices are:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**People who disagree with my care choices are:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Long term care options we agree could be right for me are:**

*(Check your choices – to learn more go to [www.va.gov/Geriatrics](http://www.va.gov/Geriatrics))*

### **Options at my home**

- ☐ Adult Day Health Care
- ☐ Home Based Primary Care
- ☐ Homemaker/Home Health Aide
- ☐ Hospice Care
- ☐ Palliative Care
- ☐ Respite Care
- ☐ Skilled Home Health Care
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### **Options at a nursing home**

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- ☐ Community Nursing Home
- ☐ State Veterans Home

## Step 4. Take Action

- ☐ Use the [www.va.gov/Geriatrics](http://www.va.gov/Geriatrics) website
- ☐ Talk with my care team about my health needs
- ☐ Talk with my mental health provider about my care needs
- ☐ Talk with my social worker about home and community services and advance care planning
- ☐ Get support from my family and friends
- ☐ Write down my questions and bring them with me to my next visit
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Questions:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Bring to your next visit:

- ☐ This Decision Aid after you fill it out
- ☐ The Caregiver Self-Assessment, if it applies
- ☐ A list of your questions
- ☐ Someone who can support you, if available

### Care Team or Social Worker contact:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_