



OREGON DEPARTMENT
of **VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

EMPOWERMENT TOOLKIT FOR VETERANS

NAVIGATING MENTAL HEALTH WITH SELF-GUIDED STRATEGIES

Welcome to the Empowerment Toolkit for Veterans. This self-guided resource is crafted specifically for military veterans facing mental health challenges such as stress, PTSD, depression, anxiety, traumatic brain injury (TBI) and other related conditions. Our mission is to provide you with practical, self-guided strategies that can help you manage your mental health effectively and enhance your overall well-being.



The toolkit is structured into 8 key sections, each targeting a critical aspect of mental health management:

1. Developing Your Personal Code

Establish a set of self-directed rules to follow during difficult times. These rules serve as a compass, guiding your decisions and actions when you're facing challenges, ensuring clarity and consistency in your responses to adversity.

2. Creating a Buddy Support System

No one should face mental health challenges alone. This section guides you in building a strong support network, including family, friends, and fellow veterans, ensuring you have the necessary support system.

3. Healthy Lifestyle Choices

Your physical health significantly impacts your mental health. This section delves into the importance of engaging in activities that you enjoy, regular exercise, sleep hygiene, and other lifestyle factors, offering tips to maintain a healthy body and mind.

4. Positive Daily Strategies

Incorporate practical tips and routines into your daily life to foster mental well-being. From mindfulness exercises to structured physical activity, these strategies are designed to be easy to implement and highly beneficial.

Each section of this toolkit is designed to be self-paced, allowing you to work through the materials in a way that suits your unique needs and circumstances. Remember, the journey to mental wellness is deeply personal, and progress can be made one step at a time. We hope this toolkit serves as a valuable companion on your path to healing and growth. And remember, you are not alone in this struggle.

For more activities, resources, and opportunities to build community with fellow veterans, visit www.BeyondTheMilitaryUniform.com.



If you or someone you know is a veteran in need of immediate help, **DIAL 988 AND THEN PRESS 1.**

1. DEVELOP YOUR PERSONAL CODE

Establish a set of self-directed rules to follow during difficult times. We know how hard it can be to take that first step in seeking help, but having these rules can make a huge difference. They serve as a compass, guiding your decisions and actions when facing challenges, ensuring clarity and consistency in your responses to adversity.

Examples

"I won't make any pivotal decisions for the next 24 hours."

"I will spend 30 minutes doing positive meditation."

"I will avoid alcohol or other substances that can affect my judgment."

"I will reach out to my support network when feeling overwhelmed."

ACTIVITY

Create a personalized list of rules using our template provided in this toolkit. These rules are your touchstones, helping you navigate through challenging periods with a steady hand. Embracing this strategy can bring you peace and stability during tough times.

MY RULES

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2. CREATING A BUDDY SUPPORT SYSTEM

Create a reliable support network to turn to when you are struggling. It's not easy to reach out and ask for help, but establishing a buddy system ensures you have someone to contact when you need support, encouragement, or simply someone to talk to.

Steps

1. Identify three people you trust and can rely on when you need support.
2. Discuss and agree on specific phrases that indicate you need immediate help (e.g., "I'm struggling today, need you to come over," or "I am not safe right now").

ACTIVITY

Create a buddy system plan using the template in this toolkit. Place it in an easily accessible location. Knowing you have someone to reach out to can provide immense comfort and assurance, making it easier to navigate through tough times.

BUDDY SUPPORT SYSTEM CONTACT INFORMATION

1. Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

2. Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

3. Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

PHRASES

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4. DEVELOP POSITIVE DAILY STRATEGIES

Integrate actionable strategies into your daily routine to effectively manage stress and mental health challenges. We acknowledge that building new habits can be tough, but these small steps can have a profound impact. These strategies are designed to enhance your well-being by promoting resilience and emotional balance.

Examples

- Start your day with a mindful breathing exercise.
- Take regular breaks to stretch and move around.
- Practice gratitude by noting down three things you're thankful for each day.

ACTIVITY

Incorporate these strategies into your daily self-care and wellness plan using the guideline included in this toolkit. These small, daily actions can build a foundation of stability and peace, helping you to stay centered and positive.

MY STRATEGIES

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5. BE OF SERVICE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Engage in acts of kindness and support within your community. Volunteering and service not only benefit others but also enrich your own sense of purpose and connection, enhancing your mental health through meaningful interactions. We understand that stepping into a new role can be challenging, but the rewards of community service are profound.

Steps

- Explore local volunteer opportunities and organizations that align with your interests and skills.
- Reach out to potential volunteer organizations to inquire about current opportunities.
- Commit to regular participation to maximize the benefits for both yourself and the community.

ACTIVITY

Visit www.BeyondTheMilitaryUniform.com for direct links to volunteer opportunities. Engaging in community service can bring a profound sense of fulfillment and connection, helping to strengthen your own sense of purpose.

MY VOLUNTEER/COMMUNITY SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

Date: _____ Opportunity: _____

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6. REFLECTION AND ADJUSTMENT

Set a reminder for regular reflection and adjustment of your toolkit to maintain its relevance and effectiveness over time. We know that personal growth requires ongoing effort, but by reviewing and updating your strategies periodically, you ensure they continue to meet your evolving needs, fostering sustained growth and adaptability.

ACTIVITY

Set a monthly review schedule using our reflection planner to assess and update your toolkit. Regular reflection helps you stay aligned with your goals and adapt to new challenges, ensuring that you remain on a path of continuous improvement.

REFLECTION PLANNER *(check box when completed)*

- January Notes: _____
- February Notes: _____
- March Notes: _____
- April Notes: _____
- May Notes: _____
- June Notes: _____
- July Notes: _____
- August Notes: _____
- September Notes: _____
- October Notes: _____
- November Notes: _____
- December Notes: _____

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7. KNOW WHERE TO FIND PROFESSIONAL HELP

Identify and compile a list of mental health resources available to you. We know how difficult it can be to seek out professional help, but having a clear understanding of where to turn can provide immense relief and support. Knowing that you have access to professional care is a critical step toward maintaining your mental health.

Steps

- Find and connect with your local Veteran Service Officer: Trained and certified VSOs, including county and Tribal veterans services offices, offer personalized assistance to veterans and their families in navigating and applying for a wide range of VA benefits. These benefits include healthcare, behavioral health services, disability compensation, pensions, educational assistance, home loans, and more. Accredited representatives ensure that veterans fully understand their eligibility and guide them through the application process to secure the benefits they deserve. To find a VSO near you please visit www.oregon.gov/odva/services.
- Research local mental health professionals who specialize in veteran care.
- Familiarize yourself with resources provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
- Identify and save contact information for hotlines, crisis centers, and counseling services.

ACTIVITY

Create a comprehensive list of mental health resources, including local therapists, VA services, and crisis hotlines. Use the template in this toolkit to organize these contacts and keep them in an easily accessible location. Having this information readily available can provide peace of mind and make it easier to reach out when you need professional support.

MY MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

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8. DEVELOP A CRISIS PLAN

Prepare a clear plan for how you will respond in a crisis situation if other activities have not eased the situation. We understand that thinking ahead to these moments can be daunting, but having a crisis plan in place can empower you to act decisively, promoting your safety and peace of mind.

Steps

- Call, text, or chat with the Veterans Crisis Line for 24/7 confidential support. Dial 988 and press 1, text 988, or chat at www.veteranscrisisline.net.
- Create a list of emergency contacts and their roles (e.g., therapist, doctor, trusted friend).
- Develop a step-by-step crisis action plan.
- Share your crisis plan with a trusted family member or supportive friend to ensure they can step in if you need them.

ACTIVITY

Compile a crisis resource list using the spaces provided for local resources and contacts in this toolkit. Having a plan in place can make all the difference when a crisis hits, giving you a sense of control and readiness.

MY EMERGENCY CONTACTS

1. Name: _____ Role: _____ Phone #: _____
2. Name: _____ Role: _____ Phone #: _____
3. Name: _____ Role: _____ Phone #: _____
4. Name: _____ Role: _____ Phone #: _____

MY RESOURCES & CRISIS ACTION PLAN

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