

# VETERANS



## *Surviving and Thriving after Trauma*

A REPRODUCIBLE WORKBOOK

CREATED FOR FACILITATORS TO USE

WITH RETURNING VETERANS

AND THEIR FAMILIES

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**Veterans – Surviving and Thriving After Trauma**

A reproducible workbook created for facilitators to use with returning veterans and their families

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# *Dedication to Veterans*

Willing to  
Forego familiar for foreign  
Fight for freedom  
Serve and save  
Suffer scars  
Protect us  
Risk death and devastation  
Return and regroup

**And to those who perished protecting their country and each other.**

**And to those whose skills sustained soldiers behind front lines.**

**And to those who help mend their wounds.**

**And to the loved ones recognized in John Milton's words:**

*They also serve who only stand and wait.*

~~~~~  
**Our gratitude to these professionals for their input ...**

Suzanne Ball, RN, BSN  
Maralynn R. Bernstein  
John Sippola, LTC, Ret., MDiv  
Helene A. Showalter, LCSW

**And to these professionals who make us look good!**

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~~~~~  
***Ester and Carol***

# Foreword

War casts a long shadow. For far too many service members and their families, the initial expressions of welcome, joy and relief are soon overshadowed by hidden wounds to mind, body and spirit. Too many veterans find they are engaged in yet another desperate battle. And, in this hidden war after the war they discover enemies they feel ill-equipped to fight. Aftershocks of war-related trauma and dangerous undertows of depression sabotage their mission for a more satisfying life in community. Moral injury drowns the quest for inner peace, and substance abuse undermines hard-won gains.

This workbook addresses all these challenges and more and will help you equip veterans with the skills, tools and insights they need to fight this inner war and flourish.

This book also speaks veteran vernacular, and veterans using these exercises will immediately sense fluency with military terminology that grabs their attention, inspires confidence, and puts them at ease.

Practitioners will appreciate the treasure trove of wisdom that will have them returning to this practical resource again and again.

— John Sippola, Chaplain, LTC, ret., MDiv

# Purpose of the Book

*Veterans – Surviving and Thriving after Trauma* will assist professional facilitators to help veterans adapt after serving their country. Veterans risked life, limbs, relationships and careers, some lost one or more of these basic life support systems. They freed others, but fight the aftermath of death and destruction. Many suffer emotional and physical scars, guilt, grief and loss. Some are eaten away by anger or enslaved by substances.

Initially, homecoming is happiness, applause and affection, but reintegration to daily life does not resume as they knew it. Veterans, their partners and families have changed. The labor market may not welcome their skills; their finances may plunge. Statistics show alarmingly high suicide and unemployment rates.

Help abounds via the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Department of Defense, Wounded Warrior Project and numerous governmental and private agencies. Many veterans are reluctant to seek assistance due to the perceived stigma of asking for help; others are too overwhelmed, unaware of available resources, or receive little or no help for other reasons.

As more veterans return from combat, society is increasingly aware of their needs. They will be directed toward professional and spiritual counselors. Veterans differ from other abuse survivors; they have seen atrocities and experienced horrors most civilians cannot comprehend. Their intelligence, determination and resilience that served our country are now needed to save themselves, to heal their invisible and visible wounds.

The *Veterans – Surviving and Thriving after Trauma* workbook will help facilitators working with veterans:

- Individually
- In groups
- In conjunction with their partners or families

The book's goal is for participants to ...

- realize they are not alone facing fears, feelings and challenges.
- re-integrate, as changed people, into their families and civilian life.
- deal with trauma, stress, depression, guilt and grief.
- overcome anger and resentment.
- prevent or begin recovering from substance abuse.
- handle relationship issues.
- rebound and rehabilitate emotionally, physically, vocationally, and spiritually.
- cope, using cognitive, creative, expressive, altruistic and other modes.

Veterans with or without serious emotional, physical, relationship and financial problems will benefit from the exercises which apply to the many challenges they face.

Research indicates cognitive therapy helps veterans deal with trauma and helps them improve their lives. The activities focus directly on recognizing and changing distorted ideas. Veterans see how thoughts affect feelings and actions. They are encouraged to think and act as survivors, to empower themselves to thrive despite setbacks or losses.

# For the Facilitator: Using This Book

## Format

- Description of ten topics, page vii, plus resources, pages 159–163.
- Thirty-two chapters with a Facilitator’s Guide and from one to seven reproducible pages for each.
- A cover page for each topic explaining what veterans will gain from participating, a meaningful illustration, and a pertinent quotation highlighting the theme. These may be reproduced and distributed to veterans as part of an introduction to the sessions.
- Titled chapters for each topic.
- Each chapter includes the following material:
  1. **Facilitator’s Guide** – the first page is for the facilitator only, to be read before the sessions. Each chapter can be divided into more than one session depending on time and participants’ input.
  2. **Reproducible pages** – all of the pages with the exception of the facilitator’s guide are for the participants and are reproducible. Changes can be made for a specific population by whiting out words or phrases, writing in data for the particular group and photocopying.
  3. **Education and Assessment** – activities for participants to gather personal information and to engage in self-examination.
  4. **Insight and Empowerment** – exercises to promote coping skills.

Participants are encouraged to keep the reproducible pages, their responses, art work and other exercises in three ring binders; extra notebook paper will be needed.

**The Facilitator’s Guide (the first page of each chapter) has bulleted items to indicate lists of goals or interactive variation options; numbered lists are an agenda and should be followed in order.**

1. **Measurable Behavioral Objectives** show expected accomplishments.
2. **Introduction** engages interest and encourages active involvement.
3. **Activity** guides the facilitator to follow the traditional approach: reading a portion aloud, writing responses, then sharing.
  - Advise participants that where they see one line, they are to use notebook paper; they will keep the reproducible pages and their responses on lined paper in their binders.
  - Instructions direct facilitators to ask participants to share their responses.
  - Depending on the size of the group and the session’s duration, there may or may not be adequate time for all participants to share all their responses.
  - If time is limited, participants may share their most important insights, or facilitators may skip to the conclusion after participants write.
4. **Conclusion** recaps and wraps up concepts discussed.
5. **Interactive Variations** provide options for talking instead of writing or working with a partner or team. Role plays and other exercises are included as appropriate.

# Topics

1. **Homecoming** – to help veterans reintegrate into families and communities and recognize that they and others have changed; to address ways to deal with partners, children and parents.
2. **Stress** – to help veterans recognize and begin to heal from emotional wounds including PTS(D), traumatic brain injury and other conditions; to emphasize cognitive changes, and mental and physical health habits.
3. **Anger** – to help veterans process issues, safely vent and express their feelings, and learn ways to de-escalate themselves and others; to highlight risks for domestic violence and safety.
4. **Depression** – to help veterans recognize signs of depression so that they can begin to heal and avoid digging deeper into despair; to incorporate hope and resilience. Sabotaging suicide is emphasized here and throughout the book.
5. **Guilt** – to help veterans decrease effects of guilt regarding death, destruction, and atrocities they were involved in or witnessed; to incorporate making amends and righting wrongs when possible.
6. **Grief** – to help veterans survive the loss of best buddies and others; to help them recognize the stages of grief and carry the torch for those they lost; to address survival guilt.
7. **Substance Abuse** – to help veterans recognize substance abuse or efforts to self-medicate with alcohol or drugs; to learn how substances intensify the spiral of ups and downs related to war's aftermath and other factors.
8. **Coping Skills** – to help veterans with cognitive, problem solving and expressive activities through art, music, writing, and other methods; to teach and emphasize relaxation techniques.
9. **Relationships** – to help veterans survive issues at home including infidelity and break-ups.
10. **Rebounding** – to help veterans deal with physical injuries and begin the process of physical healing. Options including vocational rehabilitation are included.

**Resources** – to be photocopied and distributed to all participants as one of the first introductions to this workbook. Resources refer participants to websites and agencies that help veterans and provide valuable information. On the last pages are poetry resources for facilitators who might want to suggest them to their clients. Some veterans may find these helpful; others may experience unpleasant memories. Some of the poems are graphic and facilitators might wish to read them first before recommending them to veterans.

## Safety Considerations

- Facilitators are reminded to use their experience and judgment regarding which content to present, when to present and how to present.
- Referring veterans or family members to a higher level of care is crucial if they are in danger of harming themselves or others.
- Although sessions promote coping and healing, veterans' issues may elicit explosive reactions. Facilitators should ensure that other staff members are available to work individually with participants in crisis, or to call 911 or a local Emergency Services number.

# Veterans First

Some veterans have no significant support system or do not want family involvement; therefore topics are designed for veterans. The sessions may be revised to include families, as noted below.

## Family Involvement

**Partners and family are crucial to recovery and need to be included when possible.**

**It is beneficial to work with veterans daily or several times a week.**

**It is also important to involve their partners or families in weekly multi-family sessions.**

**Confidentiality:** Veterans and partners or family members need to be aware of confidentiality; some programs ask them to sign statements regarding the rule: what happens in group stays in group.

**Room set-up:** Ideally there will be space for veterans and partners or family members to sit next to each other or in clusters, out of earshot of peers. Facilitators may need to use the hall, a patio or adjacent rooms to provide space and privacy. Facilitators can circulate among families, encouraging expression and reinforcing their efforts.

**Separate sessions first, then combine:** Some situations enable partners or families to meet first with other partners and families to share concerns, discuss the topic being addressed, and support each other; they then join their veterans for the multi-family session. Developing an educational and support group for partners and families is highly recommended.

## Ways to Involve Partners or Family

**Coaches:** The veteran's partners and/or family members read the Insight and Empowerment statements or questions to the veterans, record their responses, then share with the group if they wish. Partners may give their interpretations of the veteran's responses, validating their feelings, requesting clarification, possibly questioning perceived inaccuracies or denial.

**Helpmates:** Depending on the topic, both the veterans and family members respond to the Insight and Empowerment statements or questions in writing, then share with each other, or read them to each other and write each other's responses. They can share with the group if they wish.

**Active listening:** The veteran's partners or family members read aloud the statements or questions; the veterans respond orally; the partners reflect their feelings by paraphrasing or summarizing to show understanding. Depending on the topic, veterans may likewise read statements or questions to their partners, listen to responses, then convey comprehension.

**Practice:** Conflict resolution skills, for example, as described under the topic of 'Anger' in *De-escalation*, can be practiced by the veterans and partners, using an actual controversy they face. A third family member if present or a peer can prompt them to use the steps.

**Fishbowl:** To heighten interest and involve everyone, some veterans with their partners or families might volunteer to sit in the middle of the room, with peers in a circle around them; alternatively, they may sit in front of the room. The volunteers share written responses with each other or practice skills, (active listening, problem solving, thought changing, etc.). The onlookers, (peers), support them by giving feedback and sharing their own similar partner and family issues.



# Topics for Family Involvement

**Veterans are encouraged to share their reproducible pages and responses with their partners or family members at home.**

While any technique can include partners and families with veterans, possibilities are suggested below:

## **Partners as Coaches or Active Listening:**

- Broken Bodies
- Carry the Torch
- Cognitive Counterforce Tactics
- Deception and Distortions
- Dual Battles
- Foxholes and Hope
- High Hopes for Dark Days
- Is All Fair in War?
- Nature and Nurture
- Painful or Productive Guilt?
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Reconnaissance and Resilience
- Reintegration
- Retrain Your Brain
- Romancing or Recovering?
- Sabotage Suicide
- Shock and Awe
- Shoot and Scoot
- Surviving a Breakup
- Swarming
- Vocational Rehabilitation

## **Helpmates or Active Listening:**

- Anguish and Anger
- Coping and Calming A to Z
- Inducing or Reducing Anger?
- Infidelity and Introspection
- Risks for Domestic Violence
- Your Kids and Your Parents

## **Practice or Fishbowl**

- De-escalation: Learn the Language
- Problems Can Be Opportunities

## **Solitary activities to be shared optionally with partners and family members:**

- Art Activities
- Express Yourself
- The Mighty Pen

# Introduction for Veterans

Thank you for serving our country! You are truly welcomed home.  
We are all thankful you survived.

A happy homecoming may be hampered by visible and invisible wounds. You and people close to you may have changed drastically. You may need help to heal and to re-connect.

You may be dealing with one or many of the following: reintegration, stress, anger, depression, guilt, grief, substance abuse, coping, relationships, and rebounding emotionally and physically in the aftermath of combat.

Fortunately, the bravery and resilience that sustained you during your service can help you now to survive and thrive. Fighting current battles requires a different type of combat and strategies. You have, or can develop, weapons to win the war within. You will need to tap into internal strengths and external resources.

Some veterans view seeking help as a stigma or a sign of weakness; others see it as a sign of strength. As you experience the sessions, be an active warrior. The greater your efforts, the better the pay-off. Listen with an open mind; think for yourself; feel free to respectfully disagree. Take your time; read and write thoughtfully; express your feelings.

We suggest that you keep a three ring binder for the handouts and stock plenty of notebook paper; where you see one line on your Insight and Empowerment pages, use lined paper and elaborate fully.

Remember, this is not school. When writing or drawing, don't worry about grammar, spelling or artistic talent. The work is for your eyes only unless you wish to share with peers and family. Work through the process of free expression, inspiration and recovery.

***A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure  
in spite of overwhelming obstacles.***

~ Christopher Reeve

***Facilitators and veterans are to be applauded  
for working toward reintegration and recovery.  
You are our heroes!  
Ester and Carol***

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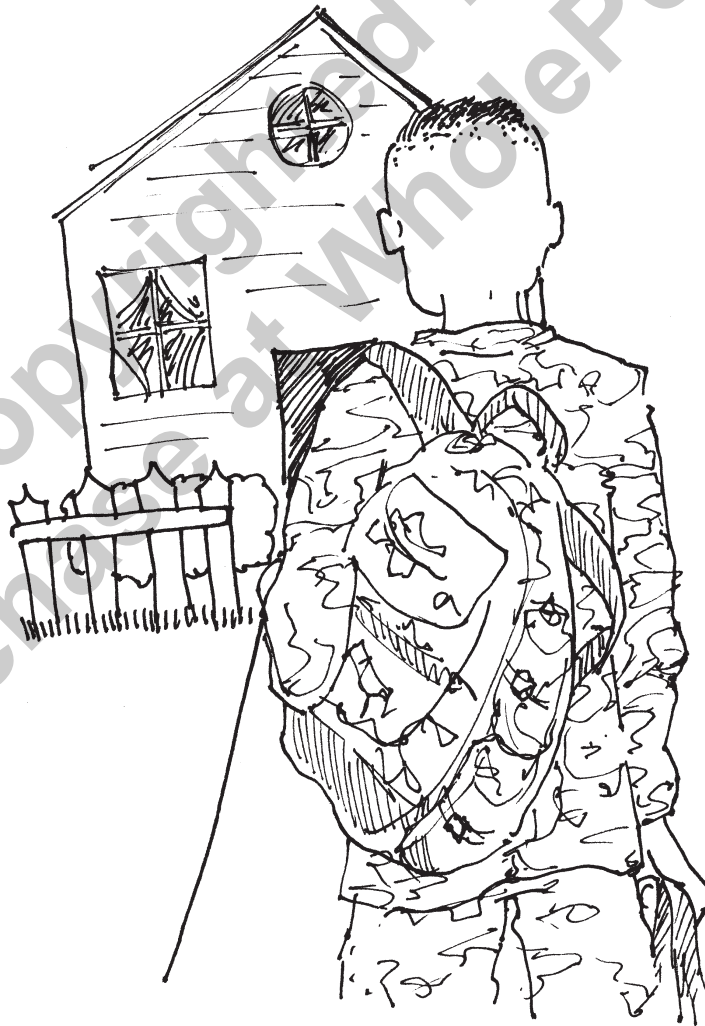
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# Homecoming

*Returning home is the most difficult part of long-distance hiking;  
You have grown outside the puzzle and your piece no longer fits.*

~ Cindy Ross

**R**E-ENTERING CIVILIAN LIFE and re-connecting with family and friends can be both a negative and positive experience for veterans coming home. Homecoming will help veterans identify relationship changes, invisible wounds, needs, challenges, a rationale for hope, and new ways to think. They will focus on improving communication and reestablishing their relationship with their children, partners, parents, family and friends.



# Reintegration Facilitator's Guide

## Measurable Behavioral Objectives

### Veterans will ...

- Rate themselves regarding responses to post-deployment and re-entry issues.
- Recognize reasons to seek help and resources for professional treatment.
- State their top immediate needs, emotions and challenges.
- Answer questions to elicit cognitive and behavioral changes and instill hope.
- Discuss invisible wounds and what they are doing or will do to help them heal.
- Describe the top qualities of winners, in war and civilian life.

## Introduction

1. Before the session begins, read this guide and the reproducible pages.
2. Decide on one of the interactive variations or the traditional approach (below).
3. Photocopy the reproducible pages but retain them until after the introduction.
4. Put the word *Homecoming* on the board and ask participants to compare how they thought homecoming would be compared to the reality of their homecoming experiences.
5. Put the word *Reintegration* on the board and ask participants to brainstorm aspects of resuming daily life.
6. Ask for a volunteer to list the ideas on the board.
7. Explain that this exercise will help everyone to consider ways to cope with the radical changes from military service life to civilian life.

## Activity

1. Distribute the reproducible pages.
2. Take turns reading the Education and Assessment portion aloud.
3. Encourage participants to check the applicable items as they are read.
4. Allow time to complete the written Insight and Empowerment questions.
5. Encourage group members to share their answers through number 20.

## Conclusion

- Encourage participants to share at least one of their responses to the quotations (numbers 21 and 22).
- Ask group members to share other military quotes they have heard, or to make up their own words of wisdom regarding reintegration.

## Interactive Variations

- Ask participants to take turns reading aloud the Insight and Empowerment questions and answering orally.
- Ask them to pair up with peers, read the questions to each other, record their partner's responses, then share with the group if they wish.

EDUCATION AND ASSESSMENT

# Reintegration

**Although you left combat, the war is probably still with you.**

**Reintegration, being a civilian again, means a new normal; life may never be the same as you once knew it.**

**Check the items that you are experiencing. Add your unique responses on the blank lines:**

- I had or am having a wonderful honeymoon phase.
- I am appreciated for my patriotism.
- People recognize my new skills, maturity, and other attributes.
- I am a positive role model for my children.
- My family bonds are strengthened.
- My flexibility and adaptation to change benefit myself and others.
- I am able to re-negotiate rules and roles better after I have been home a while.
- I re-evaluate my relationship, and its goals, and the direction it will take.
- I am grateful I am a survivor.
- I feel a roller-coaster of emotions.
- I will never be the same.
- People do not understand what I have been through and how I have changed.
- I question whether people will accept the new me.
- I need time and space and resent probing questions by well-meaning people.
- My homecoming is not what I expected.
- My reception seemed lukewarm.
- It is difficult to re-connect with my partner emotionally or physically.
- My transition from being single to a couple is difficult.
- My relationship and roles are changing because my partner and I have changed.
- I am engaged in power struggles.
- I encounter resistance as I try to resume my prior authority or role.
- My parents still treat me like a child.
- My children may remain detached because they fear another separation.
- The kids fear my discipline; my partner warned, "Just wait until daddy or mommy gets home!"
- Teens rebel against my rules and expectations.
- I expect schedules and regimentation; my family is undisciplined; my home disorganized.
- I miss contact with veterans who have *been there and done that*.
- My partner does not understand my need to stay connected with buddies.
- I feel survivor's guilt because I lived and some of my buddies died.
- I dislike the whirlwind of welcoming activities.
- I think it is too soon for household chores, school, or work; but feel the pressure.
- I find it hard to do my old job.
- I cannot get work; employers do not value my skills.
- I am the supposed to be hero, but others want credit for responsibilities handled at home or work.
- I am concerned about future or multiple deployments.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

EDUCATION AND ASSESSMENT

# Give Yourself Hope

**Check the items you agree with or hope to eventually believe:**

- Many experiences do evoke sorrow, regret, anger, rebellion and determination to change conditions.
- These feelings and thoughts need not evolve into depression, worthlessness, rage and panic.
- Something that once strongly affected my life need not indefinitely or forever ruin it.
- I do have control over my reactions now, despite my initial response to terror.
- There is not a magic cure for problems; I can seek solutions, and experiment with trial and error.
- I know people behave unjustly in war, but I can accept this without agreeing, and work to better the world.
- Conditions seem unfavorable, but I can accept what cannot be changed and change what I can change.
- I can face fearsome facts rather than avoiding or obsessing about them.
- Progress versus perfection can be achieved.
- Probability and chance exist; I can't control outcomes; I can control my thoughts, feelings and actions.
- Inertia, inaction, hopelessness and helplessness can be replaced with pursuits outside myself.
- While love and acceptance feel great, I need not seek absolute approval from everyone.
- I can act in ways that foster self-respect and are congruent with my values.
- My depression or happiness are not dependent on people or circumstances but on my thoughts.
- I can choose reliable, supportive people versus folks known to be fickle or reckless.
- I can tolerate discomfort and pain, and may be strengthened as a result.
- Mistakes are learning experiences.

Compounding routine reintegration, (usually three to seven months), you may have PTS(D), post traumatic stress disorder, TBI, traumatic brain injury, or other physical or emotional problems. Medical and psychological evaluations are required for overwhelming sadness, anger, inability to eat or sleep, severe pain, and other symptoms.

**If you are thinking about suicide, with a plan and a means to carry it out, call 911 or your local Emergency Services number, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline/Veteran's Crisis Line, 1-800-273-8255 (TALK), or go to your nearest hospital Emergency Room.**



INSIGHT AND EMPOWERMENT

# Combat to Civilian: From Foreign War Zone to Homefront Battles

Place a check by the statement that best describes your re-entry. Then elaborate in the fourth column.

| Reality of Service               | Re-entry Goals                  | Re-entry Battles                 | Elaborate: Which are you right now?          |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Ex: From a military might</i> | <i>to a civilian identity</i>   | <i>to not fitting in ✓</i>       | <i>I don't feel as if I fit in anywhere.</i> |
| Reality of danger                | to safety                       | to new fears                     |  |
| Uncomfortable conditions         | to comfort                      | to different discomforts         |  |
| Camaraderie                      | to other types of companionship | to loneliness                    |  |
| Mistrust                         | to trust                        | to new suspicions                |  |
| Chaos                            | to order                        | to confusion                     |  |
| Following orders                 | to making my own decisions      | to indecisiveness                |  |
| Acting first and thinking later  | to contemplation and planning   | to impulsivity                   |  |
| Numbing emotions                 | to express emotions             | to hide or displace emotions     |  |
| Adrenaline rushes                | to peace                        | to boredom or heightened anxiety |  |
| A life or death job              | to a satisfying role            | to meaninglessness               |  |
| Regimentation                    | to flexibility and choice       | to aimlessness                   |  |

INSIGHT AND EMPOWERMENT

# What You Can Do Now

1. List your top five immediate needs and your plan to share them with your partner or family.

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---

2. Describe a situation that elicits emotions within you.

---

3. What can you tell yourself to prevent the situation and feelings from severely depressing you?

---

4. What will you say to yourself to prevent the past from ruining your present and future?

---

5. Think about a situation that led to sadness. What do you now know that can prevent continued despair?

---

6. Describe a valuable lesson you learned from a mistake:

---

7. Regarding other people's destructive or ignorant behavior: What can you tell yourself to prevent rage?

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8. What potentially unpleasant facts must you currently accept?

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9. What potentially unpleasant circumstances can you change?

---

10. What scary situations would be helpful to face rather than avoid or obsess about?

---

11. Regardless of the outcome, what will you tell yourself after you face your fears?

---

12. Praise yourself for progress concerning a current problem, versus condemning yourself for imperfection.

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*(Continued on the next page)*