

Excerpted from *Veterans: Surviving and thriving after trauma*  
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## Problems Can Be Opportunities

While chemical imbalances (treated with medication) and negative thinking (treated with thought changing) contribute to emotions, problems create havoc. Veterans face a slew of them, from employment issues, to finances, to housing, to relationships, etc.

***Problems are only opportunities in work clothes***, according to Henri Kaiser. Opportunities involve openings, breaks, prospects for a better you, an improved mood, a more effective way of life. Work involves effort and rewards.

Linking symptoms to situations, defining problems and goals, identifying and selecting options and evaluating your progress are basic aspects of Problem Solving.

An alternative is to focus on what's right in your life, what works for you, decisions about what has decreased problems in the past, and application of similar methods now.

Additionally, you can replace damaging attitudes and actions with caring and constructive habits and then reap relationship rewards, which will improve your mood.

The following questions incorporate adaptations of the above therapies and/or philosophies.

1. What symptoms cause you emotional discomfort?

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2. What situation or primary problem activates your distress?

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3. When, where, and with whom does the problem usually occur?

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4. What is a specific, measurable, and achievable goal for you regarding this issue?

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5. What strengths do you have to help you? Describe specifics related to your experience, ability, motivation, creativity, etc.

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6. What external resources can you tap into? Describe specifics including the people who can help, support groups, sources of information on the internet and elsewhere, professional assistance, etc.

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7. In your wildest imagination, conjure up possible solutions to a current problem. Use the back of this paper to complete your list, as you should need lots of time to dream and room to write!

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8. Now cross off impossible solutions; list a few feasible ones in the table below, and fill in pros and cons.

*Example: Problem – No one understands my trauma and suffering.*

<b>Solutions</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
<i>Ex: Join the local veterans' club.</i>	<i>Other veterans know what I've been through; we share our problems.</i>	<i>I drink there and focus on my misery.</i>
<i>Ex: Join a different veterans' club.</i>	<i>They understand my pain and lobby Congress for better benefits.</i>	<i>It's ten miles farther to drive.</i>

<b>Solutions</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>


9. Decide what you think is the best solution, Plan A or, in case Plan A doesn't work, Plan B.

*Ex: Problem – No one understands my trauma and suffering.*

*Plan A – Join a veterans' club that promotes programs to help survivors. Plan B – Get professional help for my emotions.*

Your Focus Problem:

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Your Plan A

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Your Plan B

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10. For your problem as noted in number 9, list the steps you need to take to complete Plan A.

*Ex: Plan A Steps for Join a veterans' club:*

- ✓ *Look online and in the phone book for local clubs.*
- ✓ *Try a few clubs; select the one that works toward improvements for service people and veterans.*

Your Plan A

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List the steps to complete Plan A

✓	
✓	
✓	
✓	

11. For your problem as noted in number 9, list the steps to complete Plan B.

*Ex: Plan B Steps for Get professional help for my emotions:*

- ✓ *Call the Veterans' Administration or my health insurance company.*
- ✓ *Make an appointment for the soonest date possible and keep it.*

List the steps to complete Plan B

✓	
✓	
✓	
✓	

12. Take the steps, then review whether and how they worked; if necessary, define new solution ideas and steps.

✓	
✓	
✓	
✓	

13. Regardless of the outcomes, whether or not the problem was totally resolved, what did you learn about your attitudes, abilities and the feasibility of your ideas?

✓	
✓	
✓	
✓	

14. Think about a current problem; describe what you did to help remedy or decrease it, or a similar problem, in the past, (even if it helped only a little bit).

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15. What have you been doing to keep the problem from worsening?

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16. How can you do more of what works or do it better?

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17. Share what you are doing or productive actions you can take to fulfill yourself in each area:

- ✓ Survival
- ✓ Love and belonging
- ✓ Power
- ✓ Freedom
- ✓ Fun

18. Some destructive habits are criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, and bribing or rewarding to control. How have you hurt yourself and others by doing any or all of these?

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19. Constructive habits include supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting, and negotiating differences. Share how you are using, or will implement, these in your most important relationship(s):

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20. How will your relationships and mood improve by practicing constructive habits?

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