

PRACTITIONERS

# Veteran mental health during holidays



Phoenix  
AUSTRALIA

## Practical tips to support veteran mental health during the holiday season

For some veterans the end of the year can be a time of anxiety, stress and loneliness, and of common mental health problems like posttraumatic stress disorder, risk of self-harm/suicide, depression, and alcohol and other drug problems.

If you are new to veteran mental health, here are some simple tips to support a veteran client:

- **Plan for longer consultations:** Mental health problems can hide behind anger and blame because military culture values strength and bravery over 'softer' emotions. Make time for the veteran to discuss their issues.
- **Make an effort:** Practitioners who understand the veteran's experience are more likely to gain their trust.
- **Give reassurance:** Offer reassurance that mental health problems are common.
- **Avoid argument:** If there is resistance from the veteran, change strategies. They are the most valuable resource for finding solutions.

Some example conversation starters and screening questions are listed below and over the page to assist in highlighting any particular issues.

- "Remembrance Day can be a time of reflection and gratitude – and a time of unwanted triggers. What was your recent experience?"
- "Mental health can be negatively impacted at the end of the year. How have you been feeling?"



## Example Conversation Starters

### Depression

- During the last month, have you often felt down, depressed or hopeless?
- During the last month, have you had little interest or pleasure in doing things?

Source: NICE guidelines

### Alcohol Problems

- Have you ever felt you needed to cut down on your drinking?
- Have people annoyed you by criticising your drinking?
- Have you ever felt guilty about drinking?
- Have you ever felt you needed a drink first thing in the morning (Eye-opener) to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover?

Source: CAGE Questionnaire

### PTSD

Have you had an experience that was so frightening or upsetting that in the past month, you...

- had nightmares about it or thought about it when you didn't want to?
- went out of your way to avoid situations that remind you of it?
- were constantly on guard or easily startled?
- felt numb or detached from others or your surroundings?

Source: US VA Clinical Practice Guideline for PTSD

### Risk of Self-Harm / Suicide

- Are there times when things seem so hopeless that you think about ending your life or harming yourself?
- Have you had thoughts about how you might do this?
- Do you have access to...?
- Have you harmed yourself or tried to end your life previously?

Source: NICE guidelines

For more COVID-19 related resources visit  
[www.phoenixaustralia.org/covid-19](http://www.phoenixaustralia.org/covid-19)

Adapted with permission from the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Uniformed Services University.

## Useful services and resources

Coronavirus Health Information Line  
1800 020 080

Department of Health  
[www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

healthdirect hotline  
1800 022 222