



Families **JUST THE FACTS:** and Friendships

Talking About Deployment

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It's a good idea to talk about difficult things when:

- You feel ready to share. Don't let anyone pressure you into talking about anything that makes you too uncomfortable.
- You're well-rested.
- You're with someone you know and trust.
- You know you'll have enough time to share your thoughts and feelings and get feedback.
- You're not already feeling upset.
- You have some privacy.

Here are some tips for starting a conversation with someone close to you.

1. **Set up a structure:**

- Pick people who understand and support you.
- Talk with people you've turned to in the past.
- Plan the conversation in advance so that the person you will talk with can give you their full attention.
- Choose a time and place where you will have privacy and few distractions.
- If you've got kids, get a babysitter. This will free you up so you can say what you need to, without your children hearing something that might confuse or scare them.
- Tell others what you need and how they can help.
For example, you may want to ask them to listen, and not interrupt or judge you.
- Some people worry that their "personal business" will get passed around. Let the person you're confiding in know up front that you don't want the conversation to be shared with others.

2. **Take your time to think:**

- Are you comfortable with and trusting of the person you're talking to?
- Remember that **trust** is built over time.
- Test the waters. Say a little and see how they deal with it. This also gives the other person time to think about what you said and how to respond.
- Pace yourself. You don't have to talk about your entire deployment in one sitting.
- Go slow. Make sure you're being understood.
- Begin by talking about how you prepared for the deployment and move on through time.
- Share the funny, good, and interesting events you had along with the difficult times.
- If the response you get upsets you, mention this. Try to understand the other person's point of view.
- It can be helpful to get more than one opinion about what you're going through.

3. **Follow up:**

When you are finished sharing, you can:

- Thank them for listening and for being there for you.
- Schedule a cool-down time after talking.
- Make a plan to continue the conversation (maybe weekly or monthly).
- Seek Out Support: Schedule time to meet with a professional such as a psychologist, counselor, member of the clergy, or your doctor or nurse.
- Join a support group in which you can relate to people who have had similar experiences.
- **If you are thinking about harming yourself or harming someone else, seek help immediately by calling 911 or visiting the closest emergency room.**
- If you are active duty, you can call MilitaryOneSource, which provides services including brief counseling to active duty military personnel, including Reservists and the National Guard (1-800-342-9647; www.militaryonesource.com). Services are also available through the VA at www.seamlesstransition.va.gov, or through a Vet Center at www.va.gov/racs/index.htm.

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Obstacles to Talking About Deployment

“I’m worried that talking about a problem I’m having may affect my redeployment or military career.”

- Know that in most cases, talking about your problems will lead to help, and not harm. However, be aware that some information could affect some areas of your career. Start off talking with someone you know is safe, such as your partner or spouse, a trusted friend, or a spiritual director.
- Ask the people you talk with to keep the conversations you have private.
- Remind yourself that working on a problem now will make you a healthier, more efficient service member.
- Remind yourself that getting support can help you recover more quickly.

“I’m worried that it means I’m weak or going crazy.”

- Remember: everyone needs support from time to time.
- Remind yourself that getting support shows strength, courage, and self-respect.
- Remember that it’s normal to find it hard to talk about difficult experiences, but having problems doesn’t mean you’re going crazy, it just means that you’re human.

“Shouldn’t I be over it by now?”

- It takes time to heal. Be patient with yourself!
- Remember: being critical of yourself only makes you feel worse.

“I’m worried that I will be a burden or that I will depress others.”

- Remind yourself that people who care about you don’t see your concerns as a burden.
- Remember that you felt good the times when you were able to help someone with their problems.
- Realize that even if you say something that upsets someone, talking it through can be a good opportunity to understand and be understood.

“I don’t want to be teased or made fun of.”

- Make sure you talk to someone you trust.
- Ask the person you talk with to keep your conversation private.
- Let the person you talk to know up front how important this is to you.

“I’m afraid I’m going to get so upset that I’ll lose control.”

- Ask friends and family to be patient with you as you work through your feelings.
- Take as many breaks as you need to calm down while you’re talking.
- Remind yourself that you don’t have to tell everything in one sitting. It’s okay to start slow, with just one story.

“I don’t think anyone can really understand me or my experiences.”

- Remind yourself that this is only true if you never give anyone a chance to understand you.
- Remind yourself that you’re not alone—others have coped with similar experiences.
- Ask others about their experiences and how they coped.
- If your experience was very unusual, start by talking to a professional or consider joining a support group.

“I’m worried that people will reject me if they know what I did during deployment.”

- Start by talking to other Service Members, and then carefully choose other people to talk with who you can trust.
- Remind yourself that you did the best you could based on the information you had at the time and that others in your situation could well have made the same choices you did.