

# RETURNING

# HOME

**A Guidebook for  
Service Members**



**and Their Families**





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## **A Guidebook for Service Members**



## **and Their Families**

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In cooperation with the OHIO CARES Committee

# Acknowledgements

OHIO CARES is an initiative of the Governor's Office led by Major General Gregory L. Wayt, The Adjutant General of the Ohio National Guard. OHIO CARES has become a statewide initiative that is coordinated by the Ohio National Guard, the Ohio Department of Mental Health, and the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services.

The purpose of OHIO CARES is to provide service men and women with all of the resources necessary to make their return home successful. OHIO CARES provides linkages connecting the soldier with an array of resources both in the community and to all of the services available through the Military.

**OHIO CARES provides an immediate link through the 1-800-761-0868 toll free number.**

This Guidebook was produced through the cooperation of the OHIO CARES Committee. OHIO CARES is a committee comprised of Veterans, Active Duty National Guard, representatives from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services, and representatives from the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Healthcare Authorities, and the Ohio Council of Behavioral Healthcare Providers.

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# Welcome Home

We are glad to have you back from your service mission. We understand that your time away from home has changed you and brought you back a different person. It is now time to return to your home life. Let's not kid ourselves – this transition may not be an easy one. Things have changed at home too.

For a while, you will experience some bumps along the road home – expect it – plan for it – and do something about it. Don't expect that your readjustment will be easy or come without some work. We know that it will take some time.

We did not send you into service without the best training in the world. We did not send you into battle without the best equipment, supplies, back-up and planning. We will not send you home without a **PLAN OF ACTION**. This plan is called the Returning Home Guidebook. The cornerstone of this Guidebook is you and your **Buddy System**. Your buddies got you through some of the toughest times you will ever see. Now, we are using this same group along with the best military and community system available anywhere in the world to make your readjustment home as good as possible.

You have heard a lot about PTSD. This Returning Home Guidebook can help many of you avoid this difficulty. If you take action and work your Action Plan – use your Buddies for support – use the VA and or community counseling centers that are available to you, you will find that your readjustment will be better. Don't try to “go it alone.” If you learned anything in battle, you should know that a soldier out there by him or herself may not make it. We have lost too many soldiers at home because they didn't talk to someone about what they were feeling.

We now have a system that, if you use it, may save your life. It starts by getting the contact information of three or four Battle Buddies. Follow the instructions listed on the Battle Buddy page. Look over the material in the Returning Home Guidebook and begin to develop an Action Plan and get your Buddy List developed. If you need to reach out to a VA or community professional for additional help call the **Ohio Cares number 1-800-761-0868**. A list of other resources can be found in the back of this booklet. If you are in crisis, use the numbers in the back of this booklet – they could save your life.

**A Word To Families:** This Guidebook may also help you understand a little better what to expect. Be patient and supportive and see if your service member wants to use this Guidebook with you.

# Battle Buddy Support System

During your service you have formed many close relationships. You have survived using your Battle Buddies. We encourage you to use it again, now that you have returned home. List those people you want to be able to contact – and reach out to when you need someone to talk to. Have at least three friends on your Buddy List. You haven't completed your Action Plan until you get those names and put them in this book.

## Rules on Using the Battle Buddy System at Home

This is for peer support. You are not and should not act like a counselor. You are there to listen and be supportive. Do NOT feel like you have to come up with answers. Usually, we find our own answers – sometimes we just need another person to talk to.

Support goes both ways. If you call your Battle Buddy, allow time for them to tell you how they are doing. One person shouldn't take up all the time unless they are in a crisis.

Don't make SOME promises. While it is important to be able to keep private your buddy's conversation – there are some things that you should never promise to keep secret. They are when your buddy wants to hurt themselves or when they want to hurt someone else. Remember, there is a difference between thinking about it and having a plan to do it. If your buddy has a plan, someone needs to know. Use the referral list in this Guidebook or call **Ohio Cares at 1-800-761-0868**

Take time right now to get the phone numbers of the friends you want on your Buddy List.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

# Introduction

## Understanding the Normal Process of Returning Home

Dr. Harold Kudler, VA's VISN 6 (Mid-Atlantic Region) Mental Health Coordinator based out of Durham, N.C., stated in his address to the Ohio Cares Clinical Training Institute that, "We need to understand the process of adjusting to civilian life for a soldier coming home from their military service from a Public Health perspective." This means that we need to understand that when we return from our military assignment, there will be a period of adjustment - everyone goes through it. This period of adjustment is **normal** and we are able to identify a number of common situations that will occur. This Guidebook focuses on identifying the most common areas we face when we come back home. It also uses the natural environment for support and recovery.

In every war, we have seen soldiers come back with these exact same feelings. At first, we didn't know what to call it so we called it battle fatigue or shell-shocked. After the Vietnam War, it came to be known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. We now know that everyone who comes back from an armed conflict will experience some level of post-traumatic stress. We also know that when we recognize it and develop a plan of action, its power over us can be successfully managed. This does not mean that some people will not need professional counseling. If you find that you need this level of help, don't delay in getting it. Having a plan of action that you develop to help adjust back to civilian life has been found to be a key to dealing successfully with that process.

### The Old Way

When we do not understand this readjustment as a normal process, we tend to think there must be something wrong and we will hide our feelings. We not only hide our feelings from others but often times we hide them from ourselves. What tends to happen is that the feelings are bottled up and will get expressed in destructive ways. The reality is that when we understand what to expect and that this is a normal part of readjusting we are much more likely to have a successful and more rapid transition. Soldiers will get into trouble if they do not recognize the adjustments and develop a plan of action for their experiences. It is important to understand that this readjustment is a normal process.



## War Facts The Realities of War

Many soldiers who return from war don't expect that they will have a difficult time adjusting. It is very common for the soldier to be excited to leave behind the day to day grind of combat and get back to their normal lives. They think that they will just flip a switch and everything will be just as when they left. This is what we call "magical thinking." It is going to take some time to readjust to civilian life. You may find yourself experiencing some very difficult times that can be as dangerous as the war you just left.

This is why we want you to take some time to think about and develop a **Returning Home Plan of Action**. We did not send you into the battlefield without extensive training or without a Plan of Action. We are not going to send you home without doing the same thing

## The Rheostat Model

A rheostat is like a dimmer switch that we use to turn up and down the brightness of a light. Returning home and going back to your civilian life is not like flipping a switch – one day you are in battle and the next you are back home getting on with your life. Even though you have gone through several weeks to a couple months away from the battlefield you will still find that there is an adjustment period. What we know is that this adjustment period is much more like a dimmer switch than a light switch.

The truth is that over the next several weeks and months you will be turning down the military dial and turning up your civilian dial. Don't expect this to happen over night – it takes time but it is a normal process. We want you to recognize that there will be a **NORMAL** period of readjustment you will go through. The more you know what to expect and prepare a **PLAN OF ACTION** for your first few weeks and months the better off you will be. The remainder of this Guidebook will give you the **TOOLS** necessary to successfully return to your civilian life.

Don't expect to come home and just throw a switch and everything will go back to the way it was before you left. It doesn't work like that.



Adjusting to civilian life takes time. It's a gradual dialing down of your military experience and dialing back up your civilian life.



## Using the Returning Home Guidebook to Develop A Plan of Action

No operation in the military is undertaken without a plan. Returning home is no exception. Anything of value takes work and we will be asking you to use this Guidebook to develop your plan for your readjustment to civilian life. In this Guidebook you will find pages where you can write down specific thoughts and feelings and PLANS that apply to you. The ACTION PLAN is very important. We have found that it is not enough to just go through the information. You have to apply it to yourself and then develop your plan of action. The Workbook will give you examples of things others have experienced. You can use these examples to identify things that are similar to your experience and also identify ones that match you.

This Returning Home Guidebook model uses the Buddy System as the first and most important part of your plan. We expect that you will want to use the help of others who knew what you experienced. We also encourage you to talk with a professional like a minister, family doctor, or counselor about any of the areas of adjustment that may be difficult. The VA also has trained counselors you can talk to, as well as a number of private counselors in your community. The important thing is **not** to keep your feelings bottled up inside because you think you are the only one who feels this way or because you think that it is a sign of weakness

We will be asking you to make a Buddy List of service members you will be willing to turn to and have them turn to you as you readjust to civilian life. Put people on your list who you would be willing to reach out to and who would be willing to call you if needed. You will find a Buddy Page at the end of this booklet. Use it!



# Things Have Changed

First let's look at what has changed since you have been gone.

How long have you been away from home? Write about where you were and for how long.

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Who are you returning to? List the people who are waiting for you.

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Now think about the ways you have changed. Use one or two words if you don't want to go into detail right now.

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Now think about what has changed back home since you have been gone. Include areas like family, friends, job society etc.

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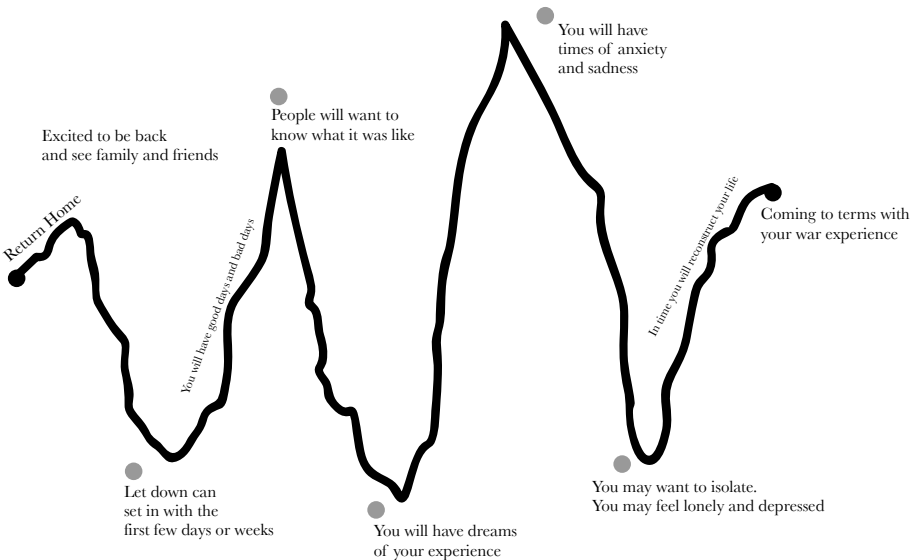
This first exercise should help you begin to think about the things that you will need to do as you readjust to civilian life.

# What Can You Expect?

The next part of this Guidebook walks you through the most common areas of adjustment that you will experience. This Guidebook describes these areas and gives you some suggestions as the TOOLS you can use to work through these times. Then we want you to develop your own Plan of Action for the things you will face. Remember some post traumatic stress is normal and a direct plan of action is the best way to address it.

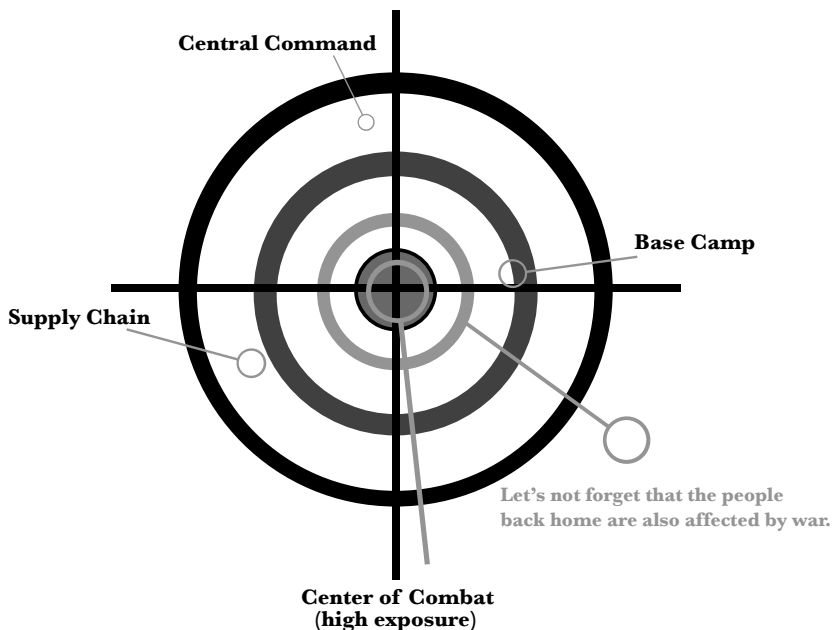
Everyone is unique (different) – the way one person will react to an experience will be different from another. We do know that the closer you are to combat the more intense will be your reactions. The model below represents that in this war there isn't a front line. The supply route is as dangerous as the combat zone. Everyone in this war has a high exposure to danger.

## Redeploying Home the Normal Process



The typical first few weeks, but this may take 6 months to a year.

# How Much is Too Much Exposure to War?



## Everyone is Affected by War

### War Facts

- No one who is involved in war is untouched by it. (First hand and second hand victims),
- Soldiers pull together during & after a war - this support is very important especially upon returning home.
- Stress and grief are normal reactions to the abnormal situation of war.
- These reactions will take time to adjust to and to get back to normal.

### Critical Stressors of the Service Member

- Threat to one's life,
- Threat of harm to one's troop,
- Witnessing Destruction of War,
- Witnessing others' trauma.

## How to Use the Guidebook

We have already identified that this is a Guidebook and in it you will be developing your Action Plan for returning home to your civilian life. This workbook will take you through the process of leaving your zone of action and making the mental changes necessary to return to civilian life. This means that we will have you examine four areas – thoughts, actions, feelings, and faith or spirituality.

Here is an overview of the booklet:

**Chapter One *How You Think*** – These are the mental states of readiness you have to be in so you can react quickly when necessary. Civilian life is a lot slower and this may annoy you for a while.

**Chapter Two *How You Act*** – These are the states of readiness you are in physically. Like always being on the alert. We behave differently in combat than we do when we are back home. Your reactions in combat are different than your reactions back home and this will take time to readjust.

**Chapter Three *How You Feel*** – You see and hear things in a combat zone that are not part of our normal life. You have been trained to emotionally deal with these events in a military way that is different from the way a civilian may react.

**Chapter Four *Triggers*** – We have devoted an entire chapter to the subject of Triggers. There are external events (sounds, smells, sights or feelings) that can throw you back into your experiences while you were deployed. Triggers are tricky because they come when you least expect them and can make you feel like you are going crazy.

**Chapter Five *Spiritual Responses*** – This chapter is brief but can be very important in the readjustment process. Here we recommend that you look to someone you feel comfortable with to discuss spiritual matters. The Chaplains are always available to you.

**Buddy List** – We end this workbook with pages for you to compile the names of buddies you will call and who can call you if needed. We have also supplied you with a list of resources. Use them if you have the need.

# Chapter One

## *How You Think*

### How Have I Changed?

Becoming more aware of changes you have undergone since your war zone experiences will help you:

- Make sense of your thoughts, feelings and behavior
- Take effective action to improve your situation
- Gain mastery over the experience
- Function better both at work and with your family

### Normal Reactions to an Abnormal Event

Highly stressful events are, of course, common in the war zone. A person may have killed, injured or otherwise hurt another. They may have had the feeling that they will die or be seriously injured, or may witness such things happening to others.

**It is important to remember that problems resulting from highly stressful events are NOT a sign of personal weakness. You are NOT “going crazy” or “losing it”. This is the time to talk about what you are experiencing.**

### Fear and Anxiety

Fear and anxiety are common emotions to dangerous situations. Anxiety or tension may occur in certain places, at certain times of day, with particular smells or noises, or in any situation that reminds you of the events. Check the areas you have experienced since your return home.

- \_\_\_ Constant alertness or tension
- \_\_\_ Anxiety when I recall what happened
- \_\_\_ Anxiety out of the blue
- \_\_\_ Anxiety from reminders of what happened
- \_\_\_ Unable to feel calm in a safe place

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## Re-Experiencing Events

People who have experienced acute stress often re-experience part or all of the event. For example, you may have **unwanted thoughts** of the events and find yourself unable to get rid of them. Some people have **flashbacks**, or very vivid sensations that the event is occurring again. **Nightmares** are also very common. Check the areas you have experienced since your return home.

- \_\_\_ Unwelcome memories
  - \_\_\_ Feeling the events are happening again
  - \_\_\_ Nightmares
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## Increased Irritation

A common response to highly stressful events can lead to **impatience** and **irritability** especially if you are not getting enough sleep. Many war zone veterans feel constantly **angry** and irritable. Check the areas you have experienced since your return home.

- \_\_\_ Easily startled
  - \_\_\_ Concentration problems
  - \_\_\_ Sleep problems
  - \_\_\_ Constantly alert: Watching my perimeter
  - \_\_\_ Easily upset or impatient
  - \_\_\_ Irritability or anger
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## Avoidance

Avoiding painful thoughts and feelings about the event is common. This can lead to feelings of **numbness**, where you find it difficult to have any feeling, including pleasant or loving feelings. Check the areas you have experienced since your return home.

- Staying away from possible reminders (triggers)
  - Unable to have positive emotions
  - Isolating from others or relationships
  - Avoiding thoughts and feelings
  - Feeling numb
  - No energy, don't care
  - Problems remembering what happened
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## Self-Image

Highly stressful experiences often lead to feelings of guilt and shame. Many people blame themselves for things they did or failed to do, especially if you or someone else was hurt or killed. Sometimes, other people may blame you for the event or outcome, further reinforcing your negative view of yourself. Check the areas you have experienced.

- Feeling negative about myself
  - Trouble feeling confident
  - Guilt and/or shame feelings
  - Anger at self
  - Constant rehashing of an experience
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## Relationships

After acutely stressful experiences, many people find it difficult to feel close to another emotionally or have difficulty engaging in sexual relationships. What have you experienced?

- Not able to express emotions in a relationship
  - Not able to feel or give love
  - Problems trusting others
  - Trouble feeling close or affectionate
  - Not interested in sex
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## Depression

This is very common and can include feeling down, sad, hopeless or despairing. These feelings can lead to thoughts of wishing for death, or to actually harming or killing yourself. Check the areas you have experienced since your return home.

- Feeling sad
  - Wishing I were dead
  - Thoughts of killing myself
  - Less interested in life
  - Less interested in the future
  - Not motivated anymore
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## Grief Reactions

Many events that occurred during your deployment may have involved loss. Some have suffered the loss of physical capacities, body parts or appearance. Veterans may experience the loss of their sense of safety or peace or their trust in others. Consider now what losses you may have suffered as a result of your deployment. Write them down and consider what feelings they arouse.

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# Let's Look at the Way We THINK

The list below identifies some normal reactions in the way you think. You may experience several of these when you return home. Check the ones you think you may experience or have already experienced.

- Difficulty concentrating
- Easily talked into doing things
- Feeling vulnerable
- Self-blame
- Feeling confusion
- Short attention span
- Blaming others
- Hyper-vigilance (always on the “look-out”)
- Nightmares
- Disorientation (not knowing where you are)
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Not remembering things you think you should remember
- Forgetfulness
- Decreased self-esteem
- Intrusive thoughts and memories
- Dream like or “spacey” feelings
- Thoughts of losing control
- Feeling guilty for surviving when others perished

## Coping with Unwanted Memories

If you have unwanted distressing memories, images, or thoughts, talk about them with someone you trust. Overwhelming reminders of trauma will most often lessen over time. Remind yourself that what you are experiencing are just memories, nothing more. Remember that it is very natural and normal to have vivid memories of trauma events.

If you find it difficult to concentrate:

- Remind yourself that unwanted memories are just that-memories, and no longer events that control you.
- Remind yourself that it's natural to have some sort of memories of the event(s).
- Talk to someone you trust - call someone on your Buddy List
- Remember that although reminders can feel overwhelming, they often lessen over time.

- Engage in a pleasant, calming activity (for example, listening to soothing music).
- Establish a counter memory (something very pleasant) you can consciously call up to override the unwanted memory.
- Make “to do” lists and write down important things that you do not want to forget.
- Slow yourself down and allow extra time to focus on what you need to do.
- Break large tasks down into smaller units that are more manageable.
- Do not over extend yourself and schedule only those events or tasks that are manageable for each day.
- Recognize that you may be feeling depressed since many people who feel depressed have difficulty concentrating. Discuss this symptom with a counselor or doctor.

## **Actions You Can Take That May Help**

Below is a list of things you can do that may help when you experience some of the above feelings. Check some that might work for you.

- \_\_\_ Take a break from what you are doing
- \_\_\_ Call a friend
- \_\_\_ Visit a friend or relative
- \_\_\_ Talk to someone about what you are feeling
- \_\_\_ Take several deep breaths
- \_\_\_ Stop what your are doing and focus your attention on your surroundings

## **Action Plan**

You have just completed the chapter on how you feel. Now look over the work you have done and spend some time developing your Action Plan. List things you would like to try, even if you haven’t already. Then keep adding new ones and/or crossing out ones you decide aren’t right for you.

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## Chapter Two

### *How You Act*

#### Think, **Act**, and Feel

In the last section of the Guidebook we looked at all of the thoughts that are very common in returning soldiers. This chapter of the Guidebook will look at some very common ways soldiers act when they return home. It is a fact that soldiers have had their actions and reactions turned to a military readiness mode while deployed. We often think that now that we are home we will just get back to our old way of acting and are surprised when we catch ourselves acting in the same way we did when we were deployed. Here are some common ways we can find ourselves acting. Check the ones you have experienced.

- \_\_\_ Driving like you did when you were deployed
- \_\_\_ Reaching to see if your weapon is nearby
- \_\_\_ Ducking when you hear a bang or loud noise
- \_\_\_ Waking up with a start
- \_\_\_ Sleeping very lightly
- \_\_\_ Barking out orders to family or kids
- \_\_\_ Being irritated with the ways others are acting

List some of the ways you have caught yourself acting that are carried over from your deployment.

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You have just listed some of the ways you act that are carryovers from your deployment. These are the things that you can see yourself. These are the things that you are dialing down from your military actions as you dial up your civilian actions. Remember that it is not like flipping a switch.

## How Do Others Experience You?

To readjust your actions back to your civilian mode you need to be aware of the ways you are acting that are hidden from your awareness. In this exercise you are going to make a list of actions that others tell you about. Here is an example we all have had and you will see what I mean. You are sitting staring into space and someone says, "What's wrong?" and this brings you back to the present. This exercise is done in two ways. First, keep a list of things like the example above that people mention to you. Next, ask someone close to you whom you trust to point out the ways you are acting that may be carried over from your deployment. Write them down in the space provided below.

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Listed below are some more examples. Check the ones you think you may experience or have already experienced.

- \_\_\_ "Spacing-out"
- \_\_\_ Erratic movements
- \_\_\_ Pacing
- \_\_\_ Acting impulsive
- \_\_\_ Withdrawing from people or activities
- \_\_\_ Non-communicative – won't talk to people
- \_\_\_ Changes in speech patterns
- \_\_\_ Aimless walking
- \_\_\_ Inability to sit still
- \_\_\_ Increased conflicts in your relationships
- \_\_\_ Reduced relational intimacy
- \_\_\_ Impaired work or school performance
- \_\_\_ Distrust
- \_\_\_ Feeling abandoned/rejected
- \_\_\_ Over-protectiveness
- \_\_\_ Being jumpy – startled at a loud noise

These are often feelings that are coming from within you. Others may not know what is going on inside but they do notice that you are behaving differently. You may not even be aware of how you are acting until someone points it out to you. At first you may want to deny it but if you take a closer look, you will realize that they are right. Develop a plan of action when you see this happening to you.

## **Increased Alcohol and/or Drugs Use**

One of the areas that need to be addressed is the use of alcohol and sometimes other drugs as a way to deal with unwanted feelings – this is called self medicating. Alcohol and drugs are used to take away unwanted feelings and for a short time they may work by masking those feelings and memories. If you use getting high as a way to deal with your problems, you will soon find that you have only substituted one problem for another. It is important to take an honest look at your alcohol or other drug use as it relates to your return home. If you find that you are using alcohol or other drugs to deal with your feelings and or memories of your military experience, you need to talk to someone about that. If people are telling you that your drinking is causing problems, you need to take that seriously. If you find it difficult to quit drinking or using drugs, you should talk to someone - these are signs that you may be developing an alcohol or drug problem. These issues are very effectively treated, but if they go untreated they will cause more serious problems.

## **Actions You Can Take That May Help**

Below is a list of things you can do that may help when you experience some of the above behaviors. Check some that might work for you.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Reach out to someone you trust to be honest with you about your use
- \_\_\_\_\_ Stop using alcohol as an escape.
- \_\_\_\_\_ See a counselor to discuss your using
- \_\_\_\_\_ Go to an AA or NA meeting



## Action Plan

You have just completed the chapter on how you think. Now look over the work you have done and spend some time developing your Action Plan. List things you would like to try, even if you haven't already. Then keep adding new ones and/or crossing out ones you decide aren't right for you.

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## Chapter Three

### *How You Feel*

## Think, Act, and Feel

Did you ever turn your feelings off? We all have and during deployment we had to – to survive. In war, soldiers see and experience horrible things that we hope our friends and families never have to experience. For a soldier to get through this experience we have to learn to turn our feelings off – otherwise it would be impossible to get through. It is important to understand that this is a necessary action for the soldier and may be the most difficult aspect of returning to civilian life that you will encounter.

Again we go back to the **Rheostat Model** that we have been using throughout the Guidebook. **If we do not dial back up our civilian feelings we will experience many unnecessary difficulties.** Listed below are some of the feelings that let you know that you are returning to normal.

- Relief at being away from the conflict
- Joy at seeing family and friends

These are the first signs that your feelings are returning to normal but there will still be a lot of work to do.

## Physical Feelings and Your Moods

**Having your feelings return to normal will take the longest and will take the most work.**

In a war zone or other crisis situation, the danger is in the environment and you are wise to pay attention in order to avoid physical harm. You are on the alert all the time. Now that you are home, it will take some time for that to go away. There are two important but different sides to our feelings. They are our physical feelings and our emotional feelings, which are best described as our mood. Have you ever been up one minute and down the next? We will look at mood swings in this chapter.

# Physical Feelings

First are the physical signs. The list below identifies some normal physical reactions that you may experience. Check the ones you think you may experience or have already experienced.

- Muscle tension and pain
- Fatigue
- Fainting
- Chills
- Increased sweating
- Thirst
- Dizziness
- Insomnia (can't fall asleep)
- Decreased appetite
- Decreased interest in sex
- Rapid heart beat
- Elevated blood pressure
- Difficulty breathing
- Headaches
- Grinding of teeth
- Stomach upset
- Chest pains



## Our Mood (Emotional Feelings)

Second is the emotional part of your feelings. The list below identifies some normal reactions in the way you feel. If you have ever had a bad day and there is no reason for it, this is the area of your feelings that we describe as your mood. If we understand where a bad mood is coming from, we often can change it. Check the ones you think you may experience or have already experienced.

- Shock, high anxiety
- Stunned
- Emotional numbing,
- Appear to be “in a fog”
- Deny feeling bad
- Dazed
- Just don’t care about things
- Feelings of unreality
- Panic
- Fear
- Intense feelings of aloneness
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Horror
- Emptiness
- Terror
- Uncertainty
- Anger hostility
- Irritability
- Depression
- Feelings of guilt
- Loss of pleasure from familiar activities
- Difficult experiencing loving feelings
- Blame
- Grief

## Let’s Get Specific

When we talk about feelings, STRESS is the most common problem. For the soldier, the stress of the battlefield is often experienced back home in the following ways. Check the ones you have experienced.

- Re-experiencing of the trauma with unwanted thoughts of the experience, flashbacks or nightmares

- \_\_\_ Feelings of fear and anxiety
- \_\_\_ Constant attempts to avoid thoughts, feelings, people, places, or events that remind you of the experiences
- \_\_\_ Feelings of numbness, where you find it difficult to have pleasant or loving emotions
- \_\_\_ Being easily startled, feeling “jittery,” “jumpy,” or unable to sleep
- \_\_\_ Difficulties in concentration, forgetfulness
- \_\_\_ Feeling easily angry or irritable
- \_\_\_ Difficulty trusting others to the point where relationships may be affected
- \_\_\_ Overwhelming guilt and shame resulting in feelings of self-hate, hopelessness or despair

## Things Not to Do

When this happens we can find ourselves turning to actions that do not help and can actually make things worse, for example:

- Keeping away from old or new friends. Social isolation means loss of support, friendship, and closeness.
- Not talking about what hurts with those who were once close to you.
- Dropping out of pleasurable or recreational activities. This decreases opportunities to feel good or feel a sense of achievement.
- Using anger to control others or keep them away.
- Trying to constantly avoid people, places, or thoughts that are reminders of the traumatic event.
- Working all the time to try and avoid distressing memories of the trauma (the “workaholic”).
- Using drugs or alcohol to reduce anxiety or relax, to stop thinking about the traumatic experience, or to go to sleep.

Below are listed the most common concerns that have been expressed by soldiers and suggested ways to deal with these feelings as you develop your **Action Plan**.

Sudden Anxiety or Panic Attacks can come out of nowhere. Here is what you can do if you experience this.

- Remember that the physical reactions are not dangerous.
- It is the addition of inaccurate frightening thoughts that make them especially upsetting (e.g., I’m going to die, I’m having a heart attack, I will lose control).
- Focus and concentrate on slow and steady breathing.
- The sensations will pass soon and you can still “go about your business” after they decrease.

- Each time you think in positive ways about your arousal/anxious reactions, you will be decreasing the effect they have on you. Practice will make it easier to cope.

Feeling like the experience is happening again is called a Flashback. Here is what you can do if you experience Flashbacks.

- True flashbacks are a rare occurrence, but if they occur, keep your eyes open and scan your present surroundings.
- Get up and move around. Have a drink of water, and wash your hands.
- Talk to yourself. Remind yourself where you are, what year you are in, and that you are safe. The traumatic event happened in the past, and you are in the present.
- Call someone you trust and tell them what's been happening.
- Remind yourself that this is just a stress response, not a real experience of the events.
- Tell your doctor and counselor about these flashbacks.

## Action Plan

In the space provided below you are to develop your Action Plan. Use some of the suggestions found above and think how you will actually do them.

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You may find that you are expressing irritability, anger, and rage without just cause. Here is what you can do if you experience this.

- Take a “time out” to cool off or think things over. Walk away from the situation.
- Use daily exercise as a friend. Exercise reduces body tension and helps release “tension” in a positive and productive way.
- Remember that anger doesn’t help. It actually increases your stress and can cause health problems.
- Talk to your counselor or doctor about your anger. Take a class in “anger management.”
- If you blow up at your family or friend, find time to talk with them as soon as you are able. Let them know how you feel, and what you are doing to cope with your reactions.

You may find that you are having difficulty concentrating. Here is what you can do if you experience this.

- Slow down. Give yourself time to “focus” on what it is you need to learn or do.
- Write things down. Making “to do” lists may be helpful.
- Break tasks down into small do-able “chunks.”
- Plan a realistic number of events or tasks for each day.
- Perhaps you may be depressed; many who are do have trouble concentrating. This is something you can discuss with your counselor, doctor, or someone close to you.

You may find that you are having difficulty feeling or expressing positive emotions. Here is what you can do if you experience this.

- Remember that this is a common reaction to your experiences. Do not “beat” yourself up or feel guilty or get impatient.
- Make sure to regularly participate in activities you enjoy or used to enjoy. Sometimes these can re-ignite feelings of pleasure.
- Communicate caring to loved-ones in little ways: write a card, leave a small gift, phone and say hello.
- Express your difficulty to someone who is close or to whom you once felt was close to you.

## Action Plan

In the space provided below you are to develop your Action Plan. Use some of the suggestions found above and think how you will actually do them.

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## Sleep Management

It is very common that soldiers have difficulty sleeping. This can occur almost from the first night back. It may have been months since you have had a normal nights sleep. It will take some time for you to get back to normal in this area. You can't force normal sleeping patterns. Remember, you are dialing down the military and dialing back up the civilian experience.

## Nightmares and “Panic” Awakenings

It is very common to experience nightmares and “panic” awakenings. When this happens, don't try to deny or avoid it. Recognize that this will happen and it will take some time for it to go away. Some people will find these nightmares and panic awakenings more intense. Some very successful strategies have been developed with other soldiers that help with this problem. Don't put yourself through unneeded stress in this area because you think this is some kind of weakness. It is not - nightmares and panic awakenings are normal. Here are some suggestions when this occurs.

- When you awaken from a nightmare, remind yourself you are reacting to a dream, and there is no real danger now.
- Get out of bed and orient yourself to your surroundings.
- Listen to soothing music or read.
- Watch a comedy show on television or other “distracter.”
- Call and talk with someone, if possible.
- Tell your doctor or counselor about your nightmares; some treatments are helpful.



# 12 Steps to Improving Your Sleep

1. Maintain a regular bedtime; avoid variations in bedtime hours greater than 1-2 hours (even on weekends).
2. Maintain a regular awakening time; avoid sleeping in more than one hour.
3. Be attentive to how much total sleep time fits your needs: that which allows you to feel alert and energetic during the day.
4. Do not nap during the day – especially if you have difficulty falling asleep at night.
5. Regular exercise in the morning or early afternoon may deepen sleep. Avoid strenuous physical activity within two hours before bedtime.
6. Plan sexual activity in relation to its effect on your sleep.
7. Find a comfortable bedroom temperature and maintain it throughout the night; avoid temperature extremes.
8. Avoid heavy meals within two hours of bedtime. A light snack at bedtime, such as milk, cheese and crackers, may help you sleep.
9. Using alcohol and tobacco actually interfere with sleep, so do not use them to help you sleep.
10. Avoid caffeine after 3 p.m. If you have difficulty falling asleep, don't stay in bed more than 30 minutes.
11. Get up and engage in some quiet activity, such as reading, until you become sleepy.
12. Use relaxation tapes or deep breathing in bed as you try to sleep.

## Action Plan

In the space provided below you are to develop your Action Plan for sleep. Identity the things listed above that you think might work for you.

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## Chapter Four

### *Triggers*

Many things can remind us of pleasant or unpleasant events. These things can be sounds, smells or even sights that take us back to our battle field experiences. It is important to understand what triggers you and make plans on how you will react.

### **How Do Triggers Work?**

To understand triggers we need to work backward. A trigger can be a sound, a smell, something we see or something we feel. A trigger is external but it causes an internal reaction. A firecracker may send someone diving under a table. This is a common reaction and is a good example of a trigger. If this ever happens to you, you will feel embarrassed for a minute; Just get up and say that the sound just threw you back to the war. Other common examples are smells. Think of the many smells you had while you were deployed. You may experience some of these smells again and you may find yourself reliving an experience you had. Take some time to identify your triggers that can cause to intense emotions.

Think about times over the last few weeks when your anger came on quickly and was most intense. Now consider what was going on at the time. Where were you? What were you doing? Who were you with? What were you thinking about just before you became angry? Did your reaction seem to fit the situation, or was it more of an over-reaction? What seemed to trigger your anger? Evaluate whether your reactions are associated with your war experiences. You may be surprised at how many are connected.

### **Triggers**

Check any of the items on the list below that are triggers for you. What other triggers would be on your list?

- Anniversary of losses or trauma
- Traumatic news event
- Being over tired
- Work stress
- Sexual harassment
- Family friction - hearing others argue
- A relationship ending
- Spending too much time alone
- Being judged or criticized
- Traffic or even driving - going too fast
- Financial problems

- \_\_\_ Hearing aggressive-sounding noises
- \_\_\_ Feeling left out especially in a crowd
- \_\_\_ Things that remind you of dangerous situations
- \_\_\_ Intimacy
- \_\_\_ Excessive stress
- \_\_\_ Someone telling you how to run your life
- \_\_\_ Extreme guilt
- \_\_\_ Smells
- \_\_\_ Physical illness

Write down your own real life examples of things that triggered you.

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## Action Plan

Now, develop a plan that you feel will help if a triggering event occurs, for example:

- Call a someone from your buddy list and ask them to listen while you talk through the situation.
- Take a deep breath - splash some cold water on your face.
- Orient yourself to where you are.
- Tell the people you are with that you just had a triggering event..

Underline the ones you would like on your own triggers response list. What else should be on your list?

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## **Chapter Five** *Spiritual Responses*

### **Spiritual Responses**

The list below identifies some spiritual reactions some people have. You may experience several of these when you return home. Check the ones you think you may experience or have already experienced.

- \_\_\_ Anger and a distancing from God
- \_\_\_ Stop attending religious services
- \_\_\_ Empty or meaningless feeling at your place of worship or fellowship
- \_\_\_ Belief that God is powerless or does not care
- \_\_\_ Feeling God has failed you
- \_\_\_ Questioning your basic beliefs
- \_\_\_ Anger or cynicism directed at clergy

### **Actions You Can Take That May Help**

Spiritual responses are very individual but can hold a great deal of meaning and can be a great source of comfort and help. Below is a list of things you can do that may help. Check the actions that might work for you.

- \_\_\_ Visit with a spiritual counselor, priest, minister, or rabbi. They are very willing to help you sort through much of the confusion.
- \_\_\_ Talk with parents, spouse, and good friends about your feelings and confusion.
- \_\_\_ Read books or articles on experiences of others.
- \_\_\_ Reestablish a spiritual life and allow yourself to gradually find peace or resolution.
- \_\_\_ Contact a VA Chaplain through your military branch.

# Action Plan

List things you would like to try, even if you haven't already. Then keep adding new ones and/or crossing out ones you decide aren't right for you.

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# Buddy List

## Where You Can Go for Support

It is important that you understand that the period of transition back to civilian life will not happen overnight but will take some time. You have just looked at common areas of adjustment and have begun to develop your Returning Home Guidebook. Most of this readjustment will take place with your natural support system. In this section we want you to list people and places where you may also find support. We know that you have just shared a life changing experience and have made many close friends. Use this support system as an important part of your return home.

## Battle Buddy Support System

During your service you have formed many close relationships. You have survived using your Battle Buddy System. We encourage you to use it again, now that you have returned home. List those people you want to be able to contact - and reach out to when you need someone to talk to. Have at least five people on your Buddy List. You haven't completed your Returning Home Action Plan until you get those names and put them in this book.



# Rules on Using the Battle Buddy System at Home

This is for peer support. You are not and should not act like a counselor. You are there to listen and be supportive. Do NOT feel like you have to come up with answers. Usually, we find our own answers – sometimes we just need another person to talk to.

Support goes both ways. If you call your Battle Buddy allow time for them to tell you how they are doing. One person shouldn't take up all the time unless they are in a crisis.

Don't make SOME promises. While it is important to be able to keep private your Buddy's conversation – there are some things that you should never promise to keep secret. They are when your Buddy wants to hurt themselves or when they want to hurt someone else. Remember, there is a difference between thinking about it and having a plan to do it. If your Buddy has a plan – someone needs to know.

**Use the referral list in this Guidebook or call - Ohio Cares at 1-800-761-0868.**

Take time right now to get the phone numbers of the friends you want on your Buddy List.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Other Resources For Support

Listed below are some of the resources that are available to you.

### OHIO CARES 1-800-761-0868

#### **Important Resources Ohio VA Medical Facilities**

Brecksville	440-526-3030
Chillicothe	740-773-1141
Cincinnati	513-861-3100
Columbus	614-257-5200
Dayton	937-268-6511
Toledo	419-259-2000
Wade Park	216-791-3800
VA Benefits:	1-800-827-1000
VA Tele-Nurse (Ohio):	1-888-838-6446
Military One Source:	1-800-655-4545
VA Center Readjustment Counseling Service:	513-763-3500

#### **Ohio Resource Network (ORN) Referral Helpline for Substance Abuse Services**

1-800-788-7254 (option 2)

*Available 24 Hours/Day, 7 Days/Week*

#### **State of Ohio Mental Health Referral Helpline**

1-877-275-6364 (1-877-ASK-ODMH)

*Available M-F, 9 am to 4 pm*

#### **Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator**

*<http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov/facilitylocator.doc.htm>*

#### **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Referral Helplines:**

1-800-662-HELP (4357)

1-800-662-9832 (Spanish)

1-800-228-0427 (TDD)

*Available 24 Hours/Day*

#### **TRICARE**

*[www.tricare.osd.mil](http://www.tricare.osd.mil)*





## References

Materials for the Returning Home Guidebook came from the following sources:

Major Contributor: Edgardo Padin-Rivera, Ph.D. Director, Center for Stress Recovery, Louis Stokes DVA Medical Center, Cleveland, Ohio.

Copeland, Mary Ellen Ph.D (1997 rev. 2002) *Wellness Recovery Action Plan*, West Dummerston, VT, Peach Press.

Resource Materials For Community-based Responding to Behavior Health Needs Following Disasters and Terrorist Events,

Homeland Security: Leadership for Ohio's Behavioral Health Needs; A report to Governor Bob Taft from Ohio Mental Health Director, Michael F. Hogan, Ph.D.,

Field Manual for Mental Health and Human Service Workers in Major Disasters (ADM90-0537),\*

Responding to the Needs of People with Serious and Persistent Mental Illness in Times of Major Disasters (SMA96-3077),\*

Dr. Harold Kudler, VA's VISN6 Mid-Atlantic Region, Mental Health Coordinator, Durham, North Carolina,

Col. Terry Washam, RC, Social Work Consultant, U.S. Army, OTSG/VA Seamless Transition, Washington, D.C.

\*Publications are available from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, Maryland 20857 (SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center 1-800-308-3515)

Materials from these sources were adapted to meet the needs of the returning service members from the OIF and OEF Military Actions and all service members.





Ohio Department of Mental Health



Ohio National Guard



Ohio Department of Alcohol & Drug Addiction Services



Department of Veterans Affairs



The Ohio Council of Behavioral Healthcare Providers