

Emotional health and wellbeing for Service leavers and veterans

Life after the
Armed Forces

SAMARITANS

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Each year, thousands of UK Service personnel leave the military. While suicide rates among Service personnel are lower than for the general population, there are groups of people within the veterans community at increased risk, particularly early Service leavers under the age of 24.

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Samaritans' vision is that fewer people die by suicide. Samaritans has 201 branches across the UK and Republic of Ireland and we respond to around 10,000 calls for help every day. We're here day and night, 365 days a year for anyone who needs us.

Leaving the military can be difficult for some. Regardless of whether you're transitioning out of the military now or have already left, reflecting on your own emotional health and the emotional health of your close family is really important.

This booklet aims to help you recognise and navigate through some of the emotional challenges associated with transitioning out of the military and your life after the Armed Forces, so that you can better support yourself and others.



Emotional health and wellbeing

What is emotional health and wellbeing?

Emotional health is about how we think, feel and how we relate to ourselves and others. It also informs how we behave and interpret the world around us. Wellbeing is the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy both in body and mind. Mental wellbeing in particular describes your mental state, how you are feeling and how well you cope with day-to-day life.

What does wellbeing look like in practice?

Good emotional wellbeing:

- Feeling really confident in yourself.
- Having positive self-esteem.
- Building and maintaining positive relationships with others.
- Feeling engaged in the world around you.

- Feeling and expressing a range of emotions.
- Living and working productively.
- Effectively coping with the stresses of daily life.
- Being able to adapt to times of change.

Poor emotional wellbeing:

- Moods and feelings – anxious, irritable, low mood, difficulty concentrating or remembering things.
- Social connections – suspicious of others, withdrawn, feeling misunderstood or distant.
- Daily life – managing daily activities such as preparing food or washing can become more challenging.
- Thought patterns and beliefs – feelings of hopelessness, being trapped or overwhelmed.

Leaving the military

Preparing yourself emotionally as best as possible will make you more resilient and help you thrive in the long run. There's no 'right' or 'wrong' way to experience your transition; it's a personal journey but not one you have to complete alone.

What transitioning out can look and feel like:

- Wondering 'where is my place in society now?'
- Feeling nervous and anxious about the unknown.
- Struggling to support a family through the transition while struggling with the change personally.
- Feeling that family and friends are unable to relate to the situation.
- Feeling unsettled that reality does not match expectations.
- Being distrustful of civilian societal norms and job sectors.
- Feeling out of your comfort zone and overloaded with information.
- Feeling a need to be more serious.

Getting connected

What is social isolation?

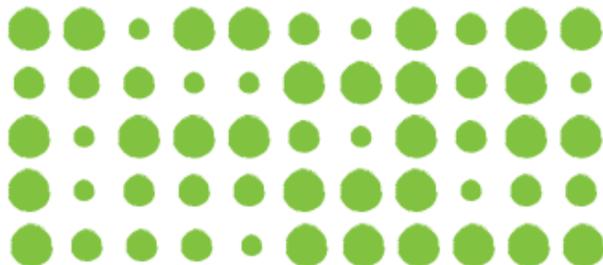
Social isolation is the absence of social interaction, contact and relationships with others.

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is the feeling of having no social connection or of having lost connections. It can occur when there's a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that a person has, and those that they want.

How can this manifest in your daily life?

- Not wanting to engage with others, even those closest to you.
- Feeling uncomfortable with having to form new social networks.



- Feeling unwilling to adapt to new behaviours and norms around you.
- Experiencing low self-esteem.
- Feeling or seeing an impact on your physical health.
- Having many self-critical or self-destructive thought processes and behaviours.
- Feeling misunderstood and unable to reach out to others.
- A perceived lack of like-minded people in your new social networks.
- Less productivity and decreased energy levels.
- Feelings of hostility, helplessness or worthlessness.
- A repetitive cycle of feeling lonely because of the state of your emotional health, and feeling that your loneliness has damaged your emotional health.

Tackling cultural change

Cultural change happens when an existing tried and tested way of doing things gives way to an unfamiliar set of new cultural norms.

How to recognise a culture change:

Feelings:

- Struggling to relate to the new people around you.
- Feeling misunderstood by your social network.
- Feeling frustrated and like you have no space to be yourself.
- Struggling to adapt to new organisational values and beliefs.

Behaviours:

- Notice yourself 'reining in' things that used to be the norm for you.
- Only wanting to re-engage with your old military network or other ex-military who understand you and what you've been through.

Leaving the military can cause a sense of loss. It can also leave you feeling as if you no longer have a true direction or drive to achieve the objectives in your life.

What can feeling a sense of loss or a loss of purpose look like?

- A feeling of emptiness.
- Feeling as if you are in a period of mourning or grief.
- A feeling of vulnerability.
- Feeling as though you've lost the role, the rank and the respect you've earned.
- Missing the community, structure and routine you once had.
- Missing the belonging and identity you once had.
- The realisation that people no longer depend on you in the same way as they used to.
- You may start avoiding new goals and feel less motivated.

General wellbeing and routine:

- Stay healthy by exercising regularly and eating healthy meals.
- Do something you're good at. It can also be an opportunity to meet like-minded people.
- Avoid 'quick fixes' such as alcohol or drugs.
- Get a good night's sleep as often as possible.
- Learn a new skill. Give yourself the opportunity to focus on something practical and useful for the future.
- Maintain a good structure and positive routine.

Reaching out to others:

- Give something back. For example, volunteering for an organisation close to your heart can be rewarding.
- Becoming a member of your Regimental or Service Association can be a great way to stay connected with friends and meet other like-minded people.
- Keep the people closest to you involved. You can discuss and make plans with family and friends.

- Don't be embarrassed to ask for help, you don't have to struggle alone.

Interacting with non-military people:

- Keep an open mind and be patient.
- Don't put too much pressure on yourself.
- Be prepared for insensitive questions but don't let this get in the way of making new social connections.
- Agree to disagree to avoid confrontations.
- Respectfully decline to talk about things that make you feel uncomfortable.

Additional tips:

- Practising relaxation techniques like deep breathing can help you feel level-headed and can be a helpful way to pause and reflect.
- Take the time to really know yourself so that you can spot any early warning signs.
- Have a plan of action for your adjustment that includes a list of goals for both your personal and professional life.

Samaritans Veterans app

Want to learn and explore more? You can download the free Samaritans Veterans app which has more emotional health and wellbeing information and support.

Available through our website, Apple and Android smartphones, the app provides UK military Service leavers and veterans with emotional health and wellbeing information, guidance and resources.

Type 'Samaritans Veterans' into the App Store (Apple) or Google Play (Android) or visit [samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/military/samaritans-veterans-app](https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/military/samaritans-veterans-app) to use the desktop version.

Android



iOS



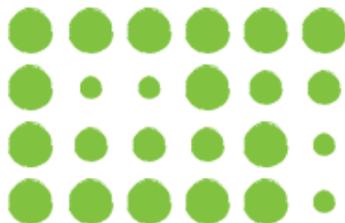
Through the app, you'll be supported to:

- Fully reflect on your service so you can better understand your experiences and move forward.
- Learn ways to manage your emotional responses and deal with your new day-to-day reality.
- Identify the challenges you face and develop ways to overcome them.
- Access volunteering and peer support by connecting you to the wider veteran community.
- Discover what additional support is out there for you and your individual needs.

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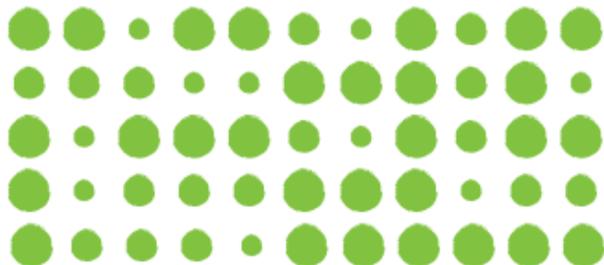
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charity

SSAFA

SSAFA is a Armed Forces charity who offer transitional mentoring for Service leavers providing support, motivation, resilience and empowerment as you enter civilian life.

Call: 0800 260 6767

Visit: ssafa.org.uk/get-help/joining-civvy-street/transitional-mentoring-for-service-leavers



Veterans UK



Veterans UK is the MOD's dedicated support organisation for Service personnel, veterans and their families. We work in partnership with the wider MOD, other Government departments and organisations such as charities to provide support and guidance to the veteran community, those preparing to leave the military and their family members.

Call (Freephone UK only): 0808 1914218

Telephone (overseas): +44 1253 866043

Visit: [gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/veterans-uk)

The Ripple Pond



TRP is a support network of the adult family members of British Service personnel and veterans. TRP aim to put you in touch with others in the same situation to give and receive support, to reduce the feelings of isolation that members of the Armed Forces community often experience when they are supporting a loved one.

The Ripple Pond team are available 9.30am–2.30pm Monday to Friday.

Call: 0333 9001028

Visit: theripplepond.org

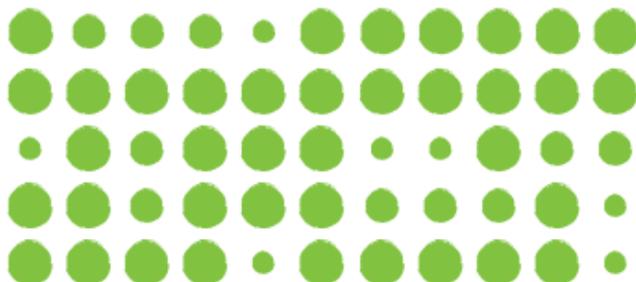


Veterans' Gateway

Veterans' Gateway is the first point of contact for veterans seeking support – 24/7, 365 days a year. Get in touch via telephone, web, text, live chat and email.

Call: 0808 802 1212

Visit: veteransgateway.org.uk



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to stand alone**

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Call free day or night on

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