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TOOLKIT

Promoting Mental Health Among Veterans

An employee resource group toolkit

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Mental health and mental illness impact our lives in a number of ways. Unfortunately, many people suffer in silence or lack an accurate understanding of the specific ways these issues can affect our lives. It is important that all individuals receive accurate information related to mental illness, mental health, and professional care so they can seek out and receive helpful, relevant care if and when they need it.

This toolkit is intended to provide helpful information and facilitate conversations related to mental health and mental illness to members of employee resource groups (ERGs) for those employees who have veteran, reserve, or active duty military status. While the majority of the information in this toolkit can be applied to anyone in this group, some things may apply only to certain people.

This information is foundational in nature and may not apply to everyone who identifies within this group. This toolkit is not a complete list of all the ways military experience can impact mental health. While these topics can be more complex than the information presented, these points should be helpful for people who desire to understand more about mental health as it relates to veteran life.

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Clarifying answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ)

Review the list below to understand some common questions people have that can be a barrier to seeking mental health services.

Are mental health and mental illness the same thing?

The terms “mental health” and “mental illness” are different, but related. Mental health refers to our overall well-being related to the social, emotional, and psychological parts of ourselves. The state of our mental health can change over time and across experiences and life stages. It’s important for people to engage in activities that promote mental health and wellness.

Sometimes, people can experience significant difficulties in these areas—negatively impacting how they function day to day for a prolonged period of time. This is referred to as “mental illness,” and can come with a specific diagnosis by a mental health professional.

How common is mental illness?

In the United States, at least 1 in 5 adults will experience a form of mental illness every year. One in 25 Americans will experience a serious mental illness (SMI), such as major depression or bipolar disorder.

Although the rates for depression and anxiety are similar between veterans and non-veterans, veterans are significantly more likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicidal ideation. For example, research found that, although veterans are slightly more likely to develop PTSD (7 percent) than non-veterans (6 percent), these rates can differ by era served. Data shows that 21 percent of Persian Gulf War Veterans and 29 percent of post-9/11 era veterans reported having PTSD at some point in their lives. These results suggest that, while many veterans have pride in having served their country, this service can come with difficulty and stress.

I want to seek professional services, but I often feel ashamed or afraid of doing so. Why is this?

Feeling shame or weakness for seeking mental health services is common and often results from mental health stigma or a negative association with experiencing mental illness. It can be a difficult barrier to overcome. Messages from the media, popular culture, and our communities can further affirm this myth—making it even harder to have the courage to seek services. For some veterans, acknowledging that they are struggling with mental health can be even more of a challenge due to messages they may have received while in the military about the showing of emotions being a sign of weakness or fear of their military career being impacted by talking to a therapist. For ways to address mental health stigma in the workplace, see this article.

What kind of people go to counseling?

Anyone, anywhere can benefit from mental health support at some point in their lives.

Research suggests there are certain groups of people who are more likely than others to seek mental health treatment. This includes: women, people with college degrees or insurance coverage, and those who identify as white (non-Hispanic). This research in no way suggests there is a particular type of person who should or could benefit from counseling.

The truth is that anyone, anywhere can benefit from mental health support at some point in their lives.

What is the difference between counseling and therapy?

The terms “counseling” and “therapy” are often used interchangeably to describe meeting with a mental health professional. However, many professionals define “therapy” as an intervention with a licensed mental health professional (likely with a master’s degree or higher) that involves a clinical assessment, which can inform a diagnosis and treatment plan.

In contrast, counseling is often viewed as a less formal process of speaking with someone who may not be licensed or specifically trained to provide psychotherapy (e.g., pastoral counseling, career counseling).

What is coaching and how does that differ from therapy?

Mental health coaching is an intervention that helps people make desired changes in their lives to enhance their well-being. Coaching is driven by clients’ goals. It can help with issues like stress management, anxiety, relationship difficulties, adjusting to changes, clarifying goals and values in life, making decisions, getting unstuck from a particular situation, and prolonged sadness.

However, coaches are not trained as therapists. Coaching is not a substitute for any form of medically-prescribed or therapeutic services (including psychiatric services, psychotherapy, or counseling). Coaching does not involve the diagnosis or treatment of psychological disorders.

What is the difference between a psychologist and a psychiatrist?

While both professionals work in mental health-related fields and have doctorate degrees, a psychologist holds either a PhD, PsyD, or EdD, and is trained in therapy techniques and psychological assessment. Psychologists spend most of their time working with evidence-based therapy techniques to help clients regulate their mood, behaviors, and thoughts.

Psychiatrists are also trained in therapy techniques, but they spend most of their time assisting people through medical interventions, such as medication prescription and management. As a physician with a medical degree, only psychiatrists can prescribe medication as treatment.

Why should I talk to a stranger about my personal problem(s)?

While it can feel unnatural to talk about personal (and possibly upsetting) information with someone you don't personally know, it's worth it. It can also be an opportunity to get a new and objective perspective from someone who doesn't have a personal investment in the outcome of a situation. Mental health professionals have education and training in understanding the human experience and can offer additional insights and research-supported strategies that friends and family cannot. This means they can offer techniques to help regulate mood, thoughts, and behaviors in a way that has been shown to be effective in other people. Finally, mental health professionals are not involved in your personal life and are obligated to keep the information you share confidential. Because of this, you can feel comfortable speaking in an uncensored way, without worrying about what you say being shared with people you know.

How do I figure out if I need an appointment with a mental health professional?

Therapy isn't only for those experiencing a mental health crisis or having a "breakdown." Anyone can benefit from professional services at any point in their lives.

Generally, most people who seek out care do so because they are experiencing some sort of distress. For example, some people notice that their thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors are becoming more overwhelming, intense, or "out of character" in a way that interferes with their everyday lives. They may find themselves unmotivated, unusually sad, or disengaged in daily activities. Or perhaps they notice that a life circumstance (positive or negative) is causing stress, worry, or confusion and their best efforts at managing the situation aren't working.

Professional support can also be helpful when you're aware of the "right thing to do" and know some ways to cope, but you are having a tough time making those changes.

If I decide to try out services with Lyra, who should I see?

Fortunately, you have Lyra benefits through your employer and there are people waiting to help. Remember, the choice is ultimately yours. A trusting, helpful relationship with your provider should be prioritized above all. With Lyra, you can also request certain demographics for your provider.

What will happen during my first visit with a mental health professional?

There are some things you can expect when seeing any mental health professional. For example, you'll receive documentation with an overview of things like fees, treatment approach, and confidentiality policies. The mental health professional will review some of these things with you. If you agree (or consent) to treatment, the first meeting or two will involve the professional getting to know you and why you decided to seek services. Be prepared to answer questions about your history—the more information you're able to provide, the more likely someone is to get an accurate understanding of who you are. This is also an opportunity to ask your mental health professional any questions to understand if they are a good fit for you.

Lyra offers online therapy through our Blended Care Therapy program. If you choose to see a blended care therapist, you should expect that, in addition to what is highlighted above, your therapist will orient you to how supplemental digital tools such as videos and between-session assignments will be used to help you work toward your goals for therapy.

If I decide to try therapy, will I have to go forever? How do I know when it's time to stop?

This is an understandable concern, especially given that mental health is a journey, not a destination. Life stages and changes can influence if and when we need counseling. Your therapist should be able to discuss this with you and offer options for decreasing, temporarily suspending, or stopping sessions. This article offers some helpful indications for when it may be time to take a break.

Common cultural considerations

Below are some topics related to mental health and illness that research indicates affect many people who are veterans.

Trauma and loss of identity

Trauma

- Many people experience a traumatic event at some point in their lives, which can involve exposure to something emotionally disturbing and/or life-threatening. It can also occur when we learn that something traumatic has happened to someone we dearly care for. Military service members and veterans can be exposed to traumas such as combat in a war zone, training accidents, or dangerous missions that could lead to severe life-threatening injuries.
- One can also experience trauma through events occurring in childhood/adolescence, which can include neglect, physical, and sexual abuse. Trauma can be transmitted in many ways, including through cultural messages, emotional wounding, physical harm, and even during pregnancy. When our parents or caregivers don't have access to the proper tools to cope with and heal from trauma, it gets passed down to the next generation. Trauma that is passed from one generation to the next is known as intergenerational trauma. Intergenerational trauma can be a result of cumulative experiences of war, terrorism, political persecution, intimate partner violence, and more. This can increase our likelihood of developing PTSD or being triggered by certain combat experiences in ways we're not able to explain or identify.
- Trauma can affect our minds and bodies as well as how we show up to work and for our relationships. It can cause sadness, confusion, anxiety, and more. It can also result in feelings of disconnection (internally and with others) and difficulty feeling a secure and consistent sense of who you are and how you can show up in relationships.
- After these events, it's common to experience physical and psychological changes. When symptoms persist for longer than a month, it may be helpful to be evaluated for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This article provides some key facts about the disorder.

Loss of identity

- For some, loss of identity can come from discharging or retiring from the military. Some veterans may have been in the military for many years and have pride in the role they served while in the line of duty, so, when transitioning to civilian life, it can be jarring—especially when they are in a different field of work.
- No matter the reason for experiencing loss of identity and connection, your identity as a member of the military is a big part of who you are and how you show up. You have the right to seek connection in whatever way feels most authentic to you.

Difficulty adjusting to life after active duty

Difficulties with adapting to a civilian workplace

- Transitioning from active military service to the civilian workplace can be a significant culture shift for veterans. While in the military, service members may be used to following a clear chain of command, listening to direct orders from superiors, and adhering to strict rules. In a civilian workplace, rules may feel more ambiguous, leadership structure can feel less hierarchical, and they may feel overwhelmed by having to learn new skills or figure out how to translate their military skills in this new environment.
- Furthermore, it can be overwhelming to go from an environment where you are told what to do and when to do it to one where you have more freedom and flexibility in your choices/tasks.
- Veterans may feel disconnected from their colleagues when transitioning into a civilian role. They may not know how to act around them, feel unaware of or misaligned with workplace norms, or feel frustrated with the differences in their approach to their work. For example, in the military, service members are trained to work until the mission is complete, with no exceptions—so the mentality of setting boundaries at work or leaving at the end of a workday when tasks are still not complete may feel jarring to veterans.

The struggle for social support

- If individuals were deployed and away from family for a period of time, going back home can be challenging because they may feel "out of the loop" of their home routine and family activities. It may feel overwhelming and lead the veteran to feel disconnected from their family. They may also feel like they have changed and have more difficulty connecting with their friends—especially if they feel pressure to talk about their deployment experiences. Veterans may feel different or that they have grown apart from their friends, and this feeling can be heightened when also feeling disconnected from colleagues as well. This can lead to urges to isolate and to avoid leaving their homes.

Navigating changes in disability or medical status

- Many veterans may have experienced serious, life-threatening injuries while in the military. They may also be navigating unknown or confusing ailments that could be tied to their military service resulting from environmental hazards, such as exposure to toxic chemicals while on deployment to a war zone. These conditions may require multiple, repeated visits to their medical providers for testing and treatment, which can be stressful due to the uncertainty of their conditions as well as fear of consequences from taking too much time off of work. It may also mean they have to navigate the daunting task of advocating for themselves at work for accommodations and accessibility in the workplace. While this is necessary, it can also take a toll on mental health and leave some veterans feeling weak and burdensome.

Health considerations

Mind and body connection

Our minds and bodies influence our daily behavior. Here are some examples:

Stress

- Stress can lower our immune system response. It can increase our risk of heart disease, headaches, sleep disturbances, and more. It can also cause anxiety and worry and keep us distracted and unable to focus on tasks at hand.

  It's critical that people understand the negative impact of chronic stress on the body in order to promote good physical and psychological health. It's also important to reflect (either alone, in groups, or with a mental health professional) on the ways stress can show up both physically and emotionally.

Health conditions/illness

- Health disparities occur when rates of a particular illness or condition are significantly higher in certain groups of people due to a social, economic, or environmental disadvantage. Research shows that veterans are at a higher risk for health conditions such as stroke, skin cancer, cancer, COPD, arthritis, kidney disease, and diabetes.
- Depending on where veterans served and duties performed, they may have experienced injuries such as traumatic brain injury (TBI), amputations, or hearing loss, and may be at higher risk of certain health conditions due to exposure to toxic chemicals.
- The presence of chronic medical conditions, such as cancer and diabetes, can also increase someone's risk for mental distress and illness. Therefore, it's important to note that our mental and physical health are closely connected.

Substance use

- Research indicates that rates of alcohol and other substance use disorders are higher among veterans than non-veterans. One study found that, among veterans presenting to a Veterans Administration hospital for the first time, almost 11 percent met criteria for a substance use disorder diagnosis.
- Veterans with a substance use disorder often also struggle with mental health conditions such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety.
- Some scholars have suggested that the high rates of alcohol and substance use are associated with unique stressors veterans have faced, including deployments overseas, combat exposure, and challenges reintegrating into civilian life.

Sleep, exercise, and nutrition

- These three aspects of our health are critical to our daily health and functioning. Reduced levels in any of these areas can directly affect our mood and mental health. This relationship also works in reverse: When we are in distress or are experiencing mental illness, these elements can also be directly affected (e.g., lack of sleep, weight loss or gain, lack of appetite, lack of motivation or energy to exercise).

Grief and loss

- Many veterans may have lost a close friend or fellow service member in the line of duty, which can lead to a flood of challenging emotions, including grief, sadness, anger, and even survivor's guilt.
- Grief can occur in response to many kinds of losses, not just the death of a loved one. Feelings of grief and loss can also occur in response to a relationship breakup (friend or partner), illness/loss of health, changing jobs, moving to a new home, loss of financial security, and/or loss of baseline functioning.
- Experiencing grief is a unique process every time it happens, but it comes with mental, emotional, and physical ripple effects.

Suicidality

- Rates of suicide are higher for veterans than the general population. Fortunately, from 2018-2020, suicide rates among veterans declined by almost 10 percent. This may be due in part to an increased focus on promoting mental health and treatment of conditions like PTSD.
- One study found that substance use can precede suicidal behavior in the military, with alcohol or drugs involved in as many as 30 percent of suicides among Army personnel and 45 percent of suicide attempts.

The process of accepting the loss, trauma, and isolation that can be a part of life in this community may be a far more difficult and distressing process than it seems. If you feel this way, you are not alone and are worth seeing and caring for.

Remember: Check on your "strong" friends! They may be suffering in silence. Just because someone doesn't express their distress and is still able to show up in their lives does not mean they aren't struggling. Here is a helpful article to take steps to do so.

Housing insecurity

- Veterans with serious mental illness may be at greater risk for homelessness than the general population. People with a serious mental illness—including major depression, PTSD, bipolar disorder, and panic disorder—face greater barriers to accessing safe, stable housing. In fact, 1 in 5 people experiencing homelessness have a serious mental illness. In a given year, 11 to 20 percent of veterans experience PTSD, compared to less than 4 percent of the general population. Research also shows that veterans who were diagnosed with a drug use disorder or were unmarried were more than twice as likely to become homeless than veterans who did not meet that criteria.
- Studies also indicate that experiencing homelessness can create or heighten psychological distress, which can worsen symptoms and interfere with recovery.

Barriers to care

Stigma about seeking mental health care

- It can be challenging for individuals to admit they are having mental health problems and can use help, due to the stigma that mental illness still carries in our society.
- Men in the military can also adhere to traditionally masculine ideals, which can involve reinforcing expressing anger and aggression while equating showing other emotions as being weak. Service members may also feel pressured to be self-reliant, so the idea of asking for help or seeking mental health treatment can make them feel like they are failures. They may feel they don't have time to care about their mental health. They may also worry that acknowledging their mental issues may overly worry their family, so they may initially opt to keep them to themselves or try pushing through them on their own. According to research, strict adherence to these traditionally masculine gender norms can actually be worse for mental health, and even make it more likely that veterans experience more severe PTSD and be a barrier to seeking treatment.

When discussing mental illness, we must also explore the systemic and structural barriers involved in the treatment of these illnesses.

Logistical barriers

- Some veterans may find it challenging to attend medical or mental health appointments due to experiencing long drive times (around 4.7 million veterans live in rural areas), difficulties taking time off work, or challenges even being able to contact staff to schedule appointments.
- Fortunately, with the increase of telehealth services, access to care has greatly increased—helping address many of these barriers.

Mistrust in health care system/medical providers

- Historically, veterans have experienced distrust in health care systems, which are rooted in structural barriers they may have faced in seeking care, such as long wait times, providers who are not adequately trained to assess unique veteran concerns, or feeling like their concerns are minimized or not taken seriously. Research suggests that only about half of veterans who need mental health treatment end up receiving it. These factors can lead to veterans' reduced confidence in the health care system.

Life as the "first" and/or the "only"

- When veterans spend the majority of their time in settings in which they are the only one who shares that identity, it can create a unique type of stress and fatigue. The potential for microaggressions and isolation, pressure to assimilate into mainstream culture, invalidation of experiences, and more can take a psychological toll. This effect can also be magnified among veterans who have one or several minoritized identities (e.g., race/ethnicity, sexual orientation). This is particularly true for people with jobs focused on improving diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) efforts. These individuals are tasked with a difficult job and are working in isolation. Veterans may feel that civilians don't understand them—leading to increased feelings of isolation.

Even if work is accomplished and progress is made, it may take a mental toll to do so as the "first" or "only" of your social identity. Therefore, the mental health and wellness of these people should be prioritized.

Championing mental health: Helpful how-tos

How to talk to a colleague about mental health topics

- This helpful article offers some specific ways to thoughtfully respond to an individual you care about who may be experiencing a difficult time related to their veteran status or something else.
- Everyone has a part to play in reducing mental health stigma in the workplace. In addition to reading this article about reducing stigma in the workplace, it can be helpful to simply discuss mental health and mental illness as if both are a common, expected part of life. While this doesn't mean you have to share intimate parts of your journey with your co-workers, it does mean conversations can occur that help dispel the myth that mental health struggles are a sign of weakness.
- Because veteran status is not a role everyone shares, it is also appropriate to normalize talking about how these roles impact your mental health and how you show up to work.

How to respond to a psychologically unsafe working environment

If you or someone you work with experiences something related to prejudice, discrimination, or unfair treatment in the workplace (particularly related to their veteran status), it can be confusing to know where to go and what to do next. While you may not control the procedures and policies in place, you have a critical role when it comes to supporting yourself and others. Here are some ways you can assist:

Lend an ear. It's important that someone who has been wounded in this way feels heard and seen. Offer to listen and hear their story, and do your best to engage in empathic and active listening. You are not obligated to give advice or fix the problem, but simply having a safe and confidential place of support can be helpful and comforting. This is important not just in the immediate days after the incident occurred, but in the weeks and months to follow. If you have experienced this yourself, you deserve to feel supported as well. Utilize the safe people around you to meet this need if you have it.

Acknowledge the impact. When something occurs that leaves someone feeling threatened and unsafe, it's helpful to explicitly acknowledge the mental and emotional toll of what happened. You don't have to understand or directly relate to acknowledge how the incident left them feeling. Statements like, "What you are experiencing is real and valid. You aren't weak or crazy for feeling this way. In fact, it's an understandable response to the wrongdoing you've experienced," can be validating and reassuring. You can also write or speak these affirmations to yourself at any time.

Support the process. Too often, individuals who want to support co-workers are left feeling insecure and unsure about the process to report or to seek care. They can also believe that the impact of the incident is not worth seeking formal support. You can offer assistance by supporting their process for reporting and documenting the incident. This can take the form of helping research human resources materials, providing supporting documentation or documenting what you observed, and more. You can also encourage and normalize the use of professional services, including mental health care, by helping them call or research potential providers, sharing names of recommended providers, or sharing information like this about what to expect in their first appointment. It might also be helpful to explore resources available through potential Veterans Affairs benefits.

How to seek culturally-responsive care for you and your family

- Finding culturally-responsive care is important but also more difficult than it sounds—especially if you are unsure where to start. The great news is that, with Lyra, culturally-responsive care is available for you and your dependents. Lyra gives incredible thought and intention to supporting and training therapists and coaches on how cultural norms and social identities, including your veteran status, impact the way an individual experiences their world. Also, learn more about Lyra's commitment to prioritize whole family care, especially for children and teens, here. More information is available at care.lyrahealth.com or (877) 978-2142.
- When it comes to the type of mental health care you receive, it's important to remember that you have the power to advocate for your wants and needs. You are welcome to request a provider of a certain demographic (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation), with a certain knowledge base (e.g., veteran status), or with a particular approach to therapy. You can also ask a potential provider about their work with veterans or certain social identities and then decide whether they are a good fit for you, and your dependents have the option to do the same.

  Remember, one of the most important aspects of your experience with a mental health professional is the relationship built between the two of you. While certain demographic requests can be helpful, it's possible to establish a trusting and helpful relationship with a provider who does not share one of your primary identities or identify as a veteran. An open mind and willingness to invest in yourself and your wellness journey are key.

How to embrace your unique identity

Here are some ways to embrace and acknowledge who you are and how you identify while protecting your mental health:

Unapologetically take up space. For some, the workplace can come with spoken or unspoken pressure to assimilate and decrease visibility of the unique aspects of your identities, particularly the ones that come with your veteran status. This can range from concealing parts of your military history to a pressure to perform at the same level as your civilian colleagues who may have more years of experience working at your company. One way to embrace and celebrate your identity is to feel more comfortable as you exist today, and release yourself from the expectations to conform to the culture around you to make others more comfortable. Another way to take up space is to embrace your autonomy and assert healthy boundaries. This can look like being transparent about how and with whom you spend your time, not apologizing for taking time off, communicating with others about differences in your work style and boundaries, and more.

Embrace the journey of identity. Return to civilian life can come with unique thoughts, feelings, and experiences. During the early stages of readjustment, it can feel difficult to relate to people who do not know or understand what military personnel have experienced. For example, it can feel difficult to understand co-workers' values or motivations. Or it might be difficult for us to understand why someone might delay jumping into a project or push a deadline. Reconnecting and re-establishing a role in the family can also come with its set of unique challenges and opportunities for exploration. This can look like getting to know loved ones in a new way and mapping out or restructuring what responsibilities will look like between family members. Moreover, life as a veteran can include a lifetime of adjusting to a new pace of life and work. It is common (and even expected) to have a range of emotions and continually learn about these parts of who you are and how you show up in the world. This can look like learning about the details of your veteran benefits, learning new habits, navigating a health condition, potential new therapies, and more. These things can also shift with different life stages and changes, which means you may have seasons of "unlearning" or "relearning" as well. Remember to be patient and compassionate with yourself along the journey.

Develop a culturally-based "safe space." At times, life as a veteran in civilian life can feel isolating and stressful, and it can be easy to overlook the importance of self-care and purpose in your everyday life. Taking time to place yourself in spaces and around people that are supportive, are helpful, and understand the unique impacts of being a veteran can do wonders for your endurance and overall mental health. This could be as simple as developing a habit of talking with other veterans, having virtual meetups, or meeting informally in person.

Create or maintain connections with other veterans. Being a veteran amongst civilians can be a confusing and overwhelming experience. Reaching out to other veteran colleagues can be a great way to seek mentorship on how to adjust to your company's culture, decipher the nuances in the workplace expectations and communications, and learn how to translate your many skills learned while in the military to your current role. It may also help you with feeling less alone to connect with others who may have faced similar challenges and fight the urge to isolate. Involvement in an employee resource group (ERG) is a great place to start!

Tell the whole story. Being a veteran can feel like an all-consuming part of your identity because of the immense physical, mental, and emotional investment that came with you serving our country. In reality, there is much more to you and your story that lives outside of being a veteran. Take time to consume literature or media that allows you to reflect on what other unique identities you hold. You have the freedom to intentionally take time to think and talk about other important parts of yourself.

How to embrace your full, authentic, complex self

Deepening our understanding of ourselves and how we operate in the world includes incorporating all of our different identities. Veterans are unique people with a wide range of ways they experience and understand what this identity means to them.

Furthermore, there are differences in the ways a person's additional identities influence how they see the world, perceive their community, and experience marginalization. Gender, sex, religious/spiritual affiliation, ability status, and more can influence how we define ourselves and what our experiences are like when we enter a room. For example, a person's identity as a lesbian Black female who was a member of the Air Force from 1965–1985 may differ from someone else's identity as a heterosexual Latino male who was in the Army from 2002–2022 and completed three tours in Iraq. The ways multiple identities intersect and result in a unique experience of the world is known as intersectionality.

You don't have to apologize for or ignore identities that don't overlap with other members of the military; they are worth acknowledging and sharing with trusted people. In fact, exploring them is essential to more fully understanding ourselves and getting and giving the support we need.

Below you will find recommended strategies and questions for leaders that can be used to guide conversations about the contents of this toolkit. There are a wide range of helpful topics and information covered, so there are many different ways to talk with ERG members about how these topics show up in their daily lives. To maximize engagement and understanding, we encourage you to have a series of conversations based on the different sections outlined in the toolkit.

Questions to ask:

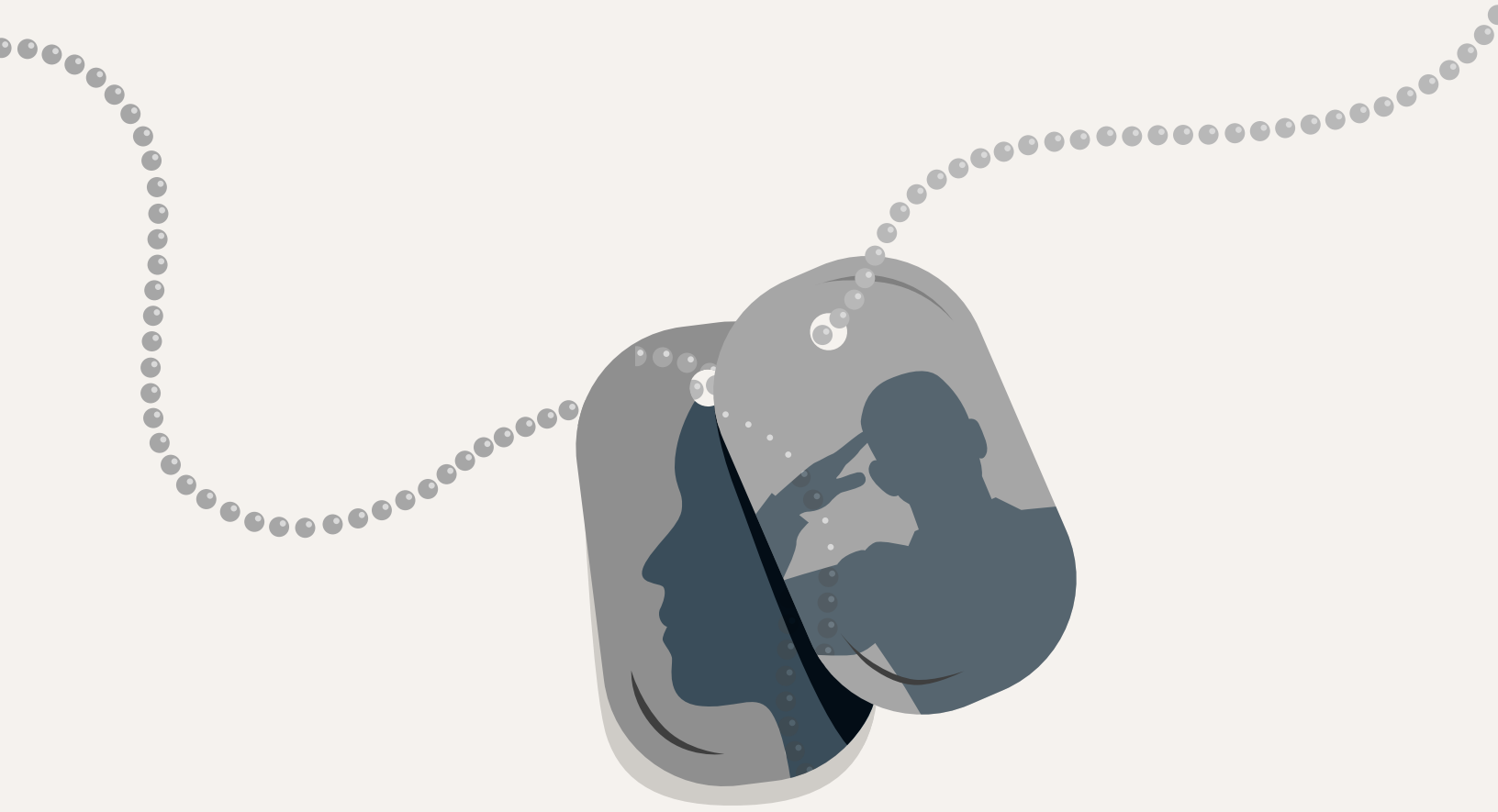
1. What new information did you learn from the frequently asked questions section related to mental health terms and the process of seeking mental health care?
2. What did you learn from the section on common cultural considerations that you did not previously know or have language for?
3. What has made it difficult for you to seek help in the past?
4. Sometimes trying to champion mental health can be easier said than done. For example, you may have encountered difficulties in finding culturally-responsive care or responding to an unsafe work environment that made it hard to meet your goals. What are some of the barriers you have encountered when trying to champion mental health in the ways outlined in this toolkit?
5. How could you overcome some of these barriers in order to champion your mental health?
6. What does it look like to embrace your full, authentic self? Can mental health services assist you with this process; if so, how?
7. Based on the information in the section about how to embrace your unique identity, how do you think you can embrace your status as a veteran at work?
8. How has this ERG been a safe cultural space for you? How can it be safer?
9. What are some unique stressors you have experienced as a veteran, and how do they impact mental health?
10. What wasn't addressed in the toolkit that you think is important to talk about when it comes to mental health in this community?

Strategies to consider:

Create a virtual or in-person space where people can share something authentic about themselves that would be helpful for their co-workers to know. For example, leaders can devote time in a meeting for people to think about and share one way that intersectionality shows up in their lives in order to embrace the diverse perspectives and experiences of your ERG members (as described in: Helpful how-tos: How to embrace your full, authentic, complex self).

Take time to review important company information about mental health policies and resources so employees can increase their mental health literacy and normalize seeking support and self-advocacy, especially in the event of prejudice or discrimination at work. Some examples include reviewing available benefits and how to access them, familiarizing yourself with ADA accommodations, and understanding your company's policies and procedures for reporting an unsafe work environment.

Spotlight success stories about seeking support in order to model self-care and vulnerability. If a member is comfortable sharing their story, allow them to talk about their process of seeking care to demystify the experience for those who want to do the same. You can do this via a meeting, email, or newsletter.



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About Lyra Health

Lyra Health is the leading provider of workforce mental health benefits, serving 10 million global employees and their dependents. Lyra is transforming mental health care using intelligent matching technology, concierge support, and an innovative digital platform to deliver a frictionless experience for members, providers, and employers. Lyra quickly connects members to an exclusive network of evidence-based providers, mental health coaches, digital wellness tools, and personalized medication programs. Lyra's approach to mental health care has been proven to help members improve or recover faster and reduce medical claims costs for employers. For more information, visit lyrahealth.com and follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter.