

Dealing with Stress

As opposed to our civilian counterparts, as Veterans we have probably spent a considerable amount of time with our colleagues and buddies. Our friends & colleagues become one of our main support mechanisms, the downside is if they ill, suffer mental health issues or die, we feel the effects very acutely.

However, the upside to this situation is that we are in a very strong position to give real support to our colleagues. In the aftermath of an illness or traumatic event you may be the first to become aware that character of the person has altered or changed. Thankfully, this will probably be a temporary change and with your help they will quickly return to their normal selves. Whilst they are dealing with these issues, you may notice that they have changed in a number of ways:

In the immediate aftermath of a stressful event:

- They appear numb and seem detached from the rest of their friends
- They keep highly active in order to cope
- They start to have nightmares and develop poor sleep patterns.
- They appear sad and continually seem tired
- Lack the ability to concentrate

Later symptoms:

- They appear to be drinking and smoking excessively
- Their work performance is suffering and they tend to be more accident prone
- You become aware that your friend is encountering relationship difficulties
- They have anger issues and tend to intimidate their peers and others
- They reduce contact with others and avoid social contact and friendship

The main point to remember is that your friend is still the same person they were before the event, they may just need a little help from both your circle of friends and you. There are some practical things you can do to assist. Consider using the following:

- Listen carefully when they are ready to speak about the incident.
 - Be prepared to spend some time with them.
 - In the workplace or at home, if they are having difficulty with certain everyday routine jobs, give them a hand, be a good buddy or shipmate.
- If they are having a tough time, don't ridicule them or make them feel small. Support them and try to maintain their feelings of self worth and self esteem.

If after a few days or weeks matters are not resolving with your friend seek help from your T4V Facilitator, GP or RMA Welfare Representative. They are all there to help.

Also stop occasionally and reflect whether you need any help. It is very easy to "lose yourself", when your buddy is struggling with a number of post incident symptoms or trying to readjust on their return from theatre. For you to help them you need to be in good physical and emotional shape. Make sure you follow the advice you give to others.

How And What Experiences To Share

We cannot overstate the importance and therapeutic value derived from talking to trusted people about your operational & non operational experiences. Talking is generally always a good thing as long as you engage with the right people at the right time. So our advice is get talking to people you both trust and respect.

Below are some suggestions about how you might start a discussion when you are not sure how to start the conversation:

- Share things related to your experiences. These may include photographs, memorabilia or a diary. (Choose these items carefully as they may trigger powerful and unwelcome memories).
- Talk about your reactions to your operational experiences. Explain how you feel when you hear a loud or sudden noise. Describe your feelings on returning when you came home from a deployment (For example, you will know it is safe at home but somehow you can't seem to stop being constantly alert to danger).
- Discuss how you are coping with your experiences. If things are difficult say so and ask people to give you some help, time and space if you feel it to be necessary.
- Share with them any helpful pamphlets and handouts that you have been given in the aftermath of any traumatic incident that you may have witnessed or been involved in