



Feelings of Sadness and Loss

Service members go through a range of emotions after deployment. Difficult and painful memories can linger. Feelings of sadness and loss can cloud even the happy times.

What you need to know

Sadness is a response to losing something important to us. This can be caused by the painful experiences you faced during deployment. Fellow soldiers may have been injured or died. You may feel loss over your own injuries. You may feel loss over the changes at home. It is important to work through these emotions so that healing can begin.

- **Explore your feelings.** Some emotions or feelings can be masked by another. For example, anger can mask sadness and grief. Be open about what is really bothering you.
- **Accept your feelings.** Grief and loss are a normal part of life. Talk about why you feel sad, angry or guilty. Don't hide your emotions.
- **Allow yourself time to grieve.** Grieving is a necessary part of the healing process. Do not bury away your feelings. It will only prolong the sadness.

How can you deal with sadness in a positive way?

- **Take part in things that relax you.** Take a walk to clear your head. Listen to music. Go to the movies or out to dinner. Practice yoga or meditation. Find what works for you.
- **Stay positive.** Focus on what you can do. Accept what you can't change. Forgive mistakes and give yourself and others a second chance.
- **Keep a diary or journal.** Some people find it helpful to write their feelings down. Explore your emotions through writing.
- **Share your feelings with others.** Talk to friends and family about what is bothering you. Find someone you can trust and ask them to listen.

- **Practice healthy habits.** Have regular medical checkups. Eat a well-balanced diet and get enough sleep. Avoid alcohol or drugs to make you feel better.

What if the sadness won't go away?

Feeling sad is a normal emotional response to a difficult situation. We have all experienced sadness in our lives. Over time, the sadness should lift and healing should begin. When the sadness lingers, it may be a sign of depression.

Below is a list of the signs and symptoms of depression. Five or more of these lasting more than 2 weeks are a warning sign of depression.

- Sadness or an “empty” mood
- Feeling guilty, worthless, hopeless or helpless
- Problems concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Appetite or weight changes
- Lack of energy or feeling tired and “slowed down”
- Problems with sleep: trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or sleeping too much
- Feeling restless or irritable
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities, including sex, that were once enjoyed

When should you get help?

It is important to seek help for persistent feelings of sadness and loss. Ask yourself the following questions. If you answer ‘yes’ to any of these questions, seek help.

- Do these feelings interfere with my daily life?
- Am I becoming more withdrawn from others?
- Am I physically and/or verbally aggressive?
- Am I experiencing signs of depression?
- *Am I having thoughts of suicide?

Pay attention to the warning signs of depression. Seek help from your healthcare provider. Depression is treatable. Ask about medicines, talk therapy, and support groups that are available.

***If you are having suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself or others seek help right away.**

Where can you get help?

Counseling is available from your local VA Medical Center or Vet Center. Most services are given in an outpatient treatment setting. The service member and family live at home. They attend individual or group appointments.



REMEMBER...

Grief and loss are a normal part of life. Working through these emotions can help healing begin. When the sadness lingers, it may be a sign of depression. Seek help from your healthcare provider. Depression is treatable. If you are having suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself or others, seek help right away.

