

Tips for Approaching Coworkers for Support

Consider ahead of time what to say and the possible emotions that may arise.

Choose carefully *whom to talk to*. Approach people who are open, friendly, and/or understanding.

Test the waters. Say a little and check the person's response and how that response feels.

Share with others how problem situations are best managed. This helps others feel more comfortable by relieving them of their concerns that they may have to step in to manage problem situations.

Identify that the conversation is intended to do the following:

- (a) Explain the effects that the workplace problems are having
- (b) Request support in addressing those problems

Remember people are interested in the experiences of those who served. This may result in some uncomfortable questions, but it also may mean that people will be interested to hear about Service members' experiences.

Do not assume that confidentiality is automatic. People sometimes gossip, and what gets said may get repeated. Active Duty Service members should consider the potential risks should something that they discuss privately be revealed to unintended parties.

Remember many people outside the military are not knowledgeable about war, trauma, depression, or deployment and the military. Discussing these personal experiences will require patience.

Be prepared to handle questions and what to say:

- About being a Veteran or continuing Service member
- About war experiences
- About deployment stress, depression, substance abuse, or other problems

This Handout was taken from the [After Deployment website](http://afterdeployment.dcoe.mil/article/informal-relationships-with-coworkers-and-peers) at <http://afterdeployment.dcoe.mil/article/informal-relationships-with-coworkers-and-peers>

Returning to Work and Expecting the Unexpected

Upon returning to your routine duties, you may notice changes in yourself, your co-workers, or your work environment. The following are a few examples of potential difficulties you may face and some tips on how to overcome them.

Pace change:

The deployment/disaster environment often moves at a pace that is much faster than the normal workplace. After working in that environment, this begins to feel normal. When returning to normal work, it may appear that people are moving at a much slower pace than you remember. It is easy to misinterpret this as laziness or lack of caring or motivation. Remember that it is probably you who has changed - not them. Be slow to judge, criticize, or make assumptions.

Unrelenting fatigue:

Even with what seems like sufficient sleep, you may experience chronic fatigue. This may be a result of several factors. You may need more rest than you realize. Sometimes chronic stress results in never feeling rested. Chronic fatigue may also be a result of a medical condition. See a doctor if chronic fatigue persists.

Cynicism:

Typically, during deployment/disaster work you see the best and the worst in individuals and systems, and it is easy to become cynical. This is expected. These feelings often diminish over time once you are able to focus on the positive results of your work.

Dissatisfaction with routine work:

It is very rewarding to be involved, directly or indirectly, in saving lives and protecting our fellow citizen's health and safety. Most work does not provide such dramatic and immediate reinforcement. You might start seeing your daily work routine as lacking meaning and satisfaction. These feelings are normal. To counter these feelings, incorporate the positive things you have learned during deployment/disaster response into your personal and professional life.

Easily evoked emotions:

Sometimes the combination of intense experiences, fatigue, and/or stress leaves you especially vulnerable to unexpected emotions. For example, you may cry easily, become angry quickly, or experience dramatic mood swings. These are normal reactions that typically subside over time. In the meantime, be aware of your reactions, discuss your experiences, and be sensitive of comments that might be hurtful or upsetting to others.

Relating your experiences:

While you may want to share your experiences with others, you may be unsure if it is appropriate. This is normal. Exercise care when discussing your deployment/disaster relief experiences, especially graphic and disturbing topics while in the presence of children or others who are emotionally vulnerable.

Difficulties with colleagues and supervisors:

You may not experience a welcome back from your colleagues and supervisors that meets your expectations. Coworkers may resent having to assume additional workloads, may not understand the difficulty of the work you did, or may resent the recognition that you are receiving as a Service member. In response to any negative feelings, express appreciation for their support during your deployment and take care in relating your experiences.

This handout was taken from the [Joint Services Support website](http://www.jointservicessupport.org/ESP/ReturningToWork.aspx) at www.jointservicessupport.org/ESP/ReturningToWork.aspx