

## Post-deployment



# Talking about your experiences

For many returning home the immediate action is to erect an emotional firewall and not tell anyone about what you have been doing whilst you were away, particularly avoiding talking about any traumatic situations you have experienced.

Having faced difficult situations, you may find it impossible to believe that others outside of your immediate group of colleagues will adequately understand what you have been through. The reasons people give for not talking to family and friends can range from:

- Worry – that loved ones will react badly to hearing about their experiences
- Concern – that discussing their experiences may open up emotional wounds that will hurt them and their family
- Unwillingness – to burden their family, as they already feel guilt about having been away

You may not share experiences with your work colleagues, particularly if your colleagues have not carried out duties similar to your own, because you may be concerned about:

- Appearing weak and needy
- Fearing that, if you open up, you may lose control, start crying and be unable to stem your tears
- Others teasing, humiliating or embarrassing you in the presence of colleagues and co-workers

The concerns outlined above are perfectly understandable. Undertaking operational duties can be an emotional, sometimes frenzied experience and talking to family and friends about these events can be seen as a potentially risky venture into new territory. However, there are many potential advantages from sharing your experiences and talking about the many challenges that you have faced.

Whilst it is understandable you may not feel able to share everything the first time round, remember the story will get easier and the potential for emotional reactions will reduce with each time of telling.

### So what are the advantages of opening up?

- You can connect with each other more deeply
- It helps family and friends to better understand the pressures you have been under
- For some, it will help to explain why, since your return, you may seem 'different'

With colleagues and friends

- When you speak to colleagues, they may be more comfortable sharing the feelings or challenges they themselves experienced during past deployments or at other difficult times of their lives
- In turn you are both better placed to give each other mutual support

### So how and when, are you going to do this?

With spouses, partners, family and loved ones

- Set the stage for experience sharing. Before talking about your experiences ask your spouse/partner what it was like for them whilst you were away. Show genuine concern for what life challenges they had to deal with during your absence.
- Choose suitable times to talk to loved ones (when they are not rushed, distracted, tired or pressed for time). Find a time when both of you are emotionally and mentally 'available'. If you have children, consider employing a baby sitter so you can talk without interruption or distraction.
- Avoid what is known as 'all or nothing thinking'. Do not feel you have to share all your experiences in one sitting. Be flexible, you don't have to keep everything locked up inside you, but nor do you have to tell every detail. Remember not to focus solely on the bad times; ensure you share the good, funny, surprising and interesting aspects of your deployment.

With colleagues and friends

- Be selective when choosing the colleagues and friends with whom you feel you can share your experiences. Choose people you know you can trust. These may be people you have turned to before.
- A good tip is to always evaluate how safe and secure you feel in your relationships/friendships prior to sharing your experiences



[www.youngdiggers.com.au](http://www.youngdiggers.com.au)

Your non-military, non-government, confidential volunteer help and support service



Australia

Veterans & Veterans Families Counselling Service (VWCS)

Phone: 1800 011 046 – 24 hrs, 7 days



New Zealand

Veterans' Affairs New Zealand (VANZ)

NZ Freephone: 0800 4 838372

International: +0011 64 7 859 7676

8am-5pm Monday to Friday (NZ time)