



# RECOVERY. RESILIENCE.

Wounded, Ill, and Injured



## Preventing Social Isolation on All Fronts: Caregiver's Handbook

September 2014



**NAVY AND MARINE CORPS PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER**  
PREVENTION AND PROTECTION START HERE

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## Introduction: Preventing social isolation and promoting social engagement

A serious wound, illness, or injury can create a shift in focus for an individual, which has a ripple effect on the social system in which that individual operates.<sup>1</sup> Factors such as doctors' appointments, hospitalizations, treatments, and recovery time combined with physical limitations, pain, and psychological and emotional changes all have a direct impact on an individual's relationships and social life. These changes in a service member's social environment and support network can positively or negatively affect their treatment, recovery, and quality of life.

Social isolation happens when a person feels disconnected from their family, friends, and peers, and often limits access to the support they need. Issues associated with isolation or problems with social support include: depression, anxiety, apathy, and frustration; all of which can negatively impact the recovery process and total wellness. As a caregiver, you understand that social isolation can happen even if someone is surrounded by people. It can become a habit for those who don't address the issue or take steps to prevent this situation.

For service members who are wounded, ill or injured, maintaining contact and communication is especially important to their recovery process. Service members have learned through training and serving with their unit that working with others can enhance personal performance and provide a sense of belonging and satisfaction. Caregivers play an important role on a healthcare team, and know that you accomplish more as a team than you can on your own.

The goal of this handbook is to provide information, education, and resources for early intervention to help prevent social isolation. This handbook is one of three Social Isolation Prevention Handbooks, each written for different a group of people from a service member's care team:

1. Wounded, ill, or injured service members,
2. Caregivers, and
3. Providers.

### Inside the Providers Handbook

- **Social Engagement Conversation Guide.** This is a list of questions asking service members about their level of social engagement before and after their wound, illness, or injury.
- **Plan of Action Worksheet.** This is a one page worksheet designed to help Service members organize their goals and track progress.
- **Strategies for Social Engagement.** This section includes some tips that other Service members have found helpful in connecting with your family, friends, peers, and community.
- **Resource Guide.** The Resource Guide includes links and descriptions of support services available to Service members and their families.

Preventing social isolation and building or maintaining a strong support network is a team effort and each of these groups has an important role to play to support the overall health and wellness of the service member. The resources in these handbooks; the Social Engagement Conversation Guide, the Plan of Action Worksheet, the Strategies for Social Engagement (in the Caregiver and Service Member Handbooks), and the Resource Guide; are designed to start a dialogue about social isolation, as this can be a neglected area of treatment. These resources can be introduced and used by any member of the care team, but will be most effective if they are used by the service member, caregiver, and provider together, addressing the value of social engagement from all fronts. This handbook can help service members engage as active members of their care team through conversations about social isolation and engagement.

*All three handbooks are available for download on the Navy Marine Corps Public Health Center website:*

**Providers:** [http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/Documents/health-promotion-wellness/wounded-ill-and-injured/Rel-and-Int/WII\\_RelAndInt\\_SocialIsolation\\_Providers.pdf](http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/Documents/health-promotion-wellness/wounded-ill-and-injured/Rel-and-Int/WII_RelAndInt_SocialIsolation_Providers.pdf)

**Caregivers:** [http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/Documents/health-promotion-wellness/wounded-ill-and-injured/Rel-and-Int/WII\\_RelAndInt\\_SocialIsolation\\_Caregivers.pdf](http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/Documents/health-promotion-wellness/wounded-ill-and-injured/Rel-and-Int/WII_RelAndInt_SocialIsolation_Caregivers.pdf)

**Service members:** [http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/Documents/health-promotion-wellness/wounded-ill-and-injured/Rel-and-Int/WII\\_RelAndInt\\_SocialIsolation\\_ServiceMembers.pdf](http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/Documents/health-promotion-wellness/wounded-ill-and-injured/Rel-and-Int/WII_RelAndInt_SocialIsolation_ServiceMembers.pdf)

## Social Engagement Conversation Guide

### Purpose

The Social Engagement Conversation Guide is designed to start a discussion on how the onset of a wound, illness, or injury may affect socialization. It asks the service member how often they engaged in a number of social activities; more than before, the same amount, or less than before their wound, illness, or injury. Reviewing the answers or discussing the questions can help the service member, caregiver, and provider identify goals to improve and maintain socialization and prevent social isolation. **The Social Engagement Conversation Guide is available in [Appendix A](#).**

### Instructions

Service members can complete this on their own time, with a provider, or you can complete it with them. Or they can complete it on their own and then review it with you or bring it to their next appointment with the healthcare team. The Conversation Guide is most effective when the service member and their provider and/or caregiver can discuss the questions and answers.

### Follow up Discussion

This Conversation Guide can be completed by a service member on their own, but is designed to be a jumping off point for a discussion with their caregiver and/or provider about social isolation and setting goals to get involved in social activities. This is not an assessment or evaluation of a service member's social engagement but a way to talk about the service member's life before and after their wound, illness, or injury. If they have reduced social interaction for most or all of the activities listed, that might indicate there are some overarching changes that they might consider to prevent social isolation. However, if there are only a few areas where the service member indicates he or she has limited engagement, this might be an opportunity to talk about why that has changed or to set specific goals related to that activity.

Talking through the Guide, you can look at the service member's answers and discuss changes and the reasons that these shifts may be occurring. Caregivers can also take the time to review resources for the service member and make suggestions on how to help the service member participate in enjoyable activities and increase social interaction. During the discussion you can refer to:

- The [Plan of Action Worksheet](#) to help service member's organize their goals and develop strategies to reach those goals. This includes the **SMART approach** to goal setting which encourages service members to set goals that are Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

- The [Strategies for Social Engagement](#) for tips on ways to maintain and expand a service member's social network and increase social interaction.
- The [Resource Guide](#) which can be used to identify specific and appropriate resources that the service member can access.

It is important to encourage the service member to include new activities into their life as it will help the recovery process and their overall health and wellness. The service member may not have the same capabilities as before but reassure him or her that there are often options to adapt an activity to their ability and/or find other activities to enjoy.

## Plan of Action Worksheet

### Purpose

The purpose of the Plan of Action Worksheet is to create an organized, documented plan with the service member including action items to help them achieve their goals. This will help organize the service member and give them a place to start to take steps to address potential social isolation issues. **The Plan of Action Worksheet is located in [Appendix B](#).**

### Instructions

1. After the service member completes the Conversation Guide, introduce the Plan of Action Worksheet.
2. Use the Worksheet to identify specific goals related to any gaps in social engagement.
3. Review the SMART technique with the service member to ensure effective goal setting.
4. Encourage the service member to bring the sheet to care team appointments to assist with follow-up. Use the Progress column to help the service member track challenges and success.

### Follow-up Discussion

After working with the service member to set SMART goals, discuss the obstacles and challenges to reaching those goals. Obstacles may be related to transportation, adaptive equipment, or emotional issues such as anxiety or loneliness. The more specific the service member is when describing their concerns, the better they will be able create actionable next steps.

Use the Resource Guide to develop strategies and next steps. The Guide includes services that will help the service member connect with peers, find social activities, and garner support from people going through similar challenges.

Below, in the Strategies for Social Engagement section, there are also some suggestions for ways to prevent social isolation through self-reflection, communication, and action.

#### Setting SMART Goals

The SMART approach to goal setting suggests that each goal be:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Time-bound

## Strategies for Social Engagement

### Changes in your social life

A serious wound, illness, or injury can disrupt everyday routines, existing personal relationships, and a person's social life. As a person's social life changes and their social network evolves, temporary periods of social isolation may occur. During treatment and recovery, they may spend less time with their social network due to the time and energy required for their treatment and recovery. They may withdraw from other people because they are worried that what they say or do may be upsetting or cause problems. Communicating and maintaining strong bonds with family, friends, peers, and community are essential to long term psychological and emotional well-being and physical health.

### Maintaining relationships

The relationships service members' built before and during treatment and recovery may change, but often remain their primary support system. Maintaining these relationships takes effort, but they can provide ongoing rewards that last a lifetime.

### Your significant other

Nurturing the relationship with a service member's significant other during this time of change is important. Finding a balance between spending time together and making time for themselves can be a challenge for both the service member and his or her partner. If one or both partners are withdrawing, consider going on a date or setting aside time for each other away from the hospital, home, or other causes of stress. Seek out new activities and hobbies that can be a source of enjoyment for both of you. Plan out when to socialize and then stick with the plan even when you'd rather be alone.

### Family and friends

A vital part of sustaining relationships with family, friends, and peers is reaching out to them and accepting their gestures to connect. Communication doesn't always have to be in person; social media, video chatting, texting, and phone calls are all methods of communication that can help a person maintain contact with their social network. Being honest regarding what to expect, and how to talk about a wound, illness, or injury can help with preventing misunderstandings and opening the door for better communication.

### Expanding your social network

Forming new relationships and exploring new interests allows a person to learn about themselves, increase engagement in the community, and participate in enjoyable activities. Consider the following activities to support current relationships and establish new ones.

### **Exercise, sports, and recreation**

Sports and recreational activities can provide fun and entertainment as well as an opportunity to socialize. Service members can talk to their healthcare provider about the best options for exercise and recreation. They can look into local activity clubs, Navy and Marine Corps and Wounded Warrior leagues, or talk to the MWR coordinator to find out what is available in the area.

### **Volunteer**

Community involvement is a good way to meet new people and find new hobbies, interests, or causes. Volunteering is a good way to boost a person's mood and the feeling of helping others can give them a sense of contribution and accomplishment. There are hundreds of opportunities to support local and federal non-profit organizations, including those that serve Navy and Marine Corps service members and families.

### **Continuing education**

Community colleges and adult learning institutions are a great place to learn a new skill or pursue education while interacting with others with shared interests. Course options often include foreign language, sports, art, film, cooking, or even music lessons.

### **Support groups**

For service members, it can be helpful to connect with someone who is going through or has experienced a situation similar to their own. Support groups can be a place (online or in person) to find others who they can relate to and understand their circumstances. Support groups may be specific to a person's wound, illness, injury, or branch of service.

See the Resource Guide below for services and organizations that support social activities and support for wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers.

## Resource Guide

### Sites and Organizations that Provide Multiple Services

- **The Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center, Wounded, Ill, and Injured (WII)** <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/wounded-ill-and-injured/Pages/wii.aspx> works to enhance the readiness, resilience and recovery of WII Sailors and Marines by offering tailored informational tools and materials for healthy living.
  - **Traumatic Brain Injury Resources** <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/Pages/Wii-tbi.aspx>
  - **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Resources** <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/Pages/Wii-ptsd.aspx>
  - **Relationships and Intimacy Resources** <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/Pages/Wii-relationships-intimacy.aspx>
  - **Caregiver Support Resources** <http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/Pages/Wii-caregiver-support.aspx>
- **The National Resource Directory** [www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/nrd](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/nrd) connects service members, Veterans, their families, and their caregivers with local resources for the support you need.
- **Military OneSource** [www.militaryonesource.mil](http://www.militaryonesource.mil) is a confidential Department of Defense-funded program providing comprehensive information on every aspect of military life at no cost to Active Duty, National Guard and Reserve Component members, and their families. The services include information on family or individual therapy, deployment, reunion, relationship, grief, spouse employment and education, parenting, childhood development, and financial management. Military OneSource also offers 24/7 confidential non-medical counseling services online, via telephone, or face to face. Visit the website or call **800-342-9647**.
- **After Deployment** <http://afterdeployment.dcoe.mil> provides self-care solutions targeting post-traumatic stress, depression, and other common challenges faced after a deployment and with daily living.
- **Wounded Warrior Project** [www.WoundedWarriorProject.org](http://www.WoundedWarriorProject.org) is a website that can provide resources and information for you whether you wounded, injured, or ill. They have different sections to meet individual needs; including mind, body, economic empowerment, and engagement (ensuring service members stay connected).

## Crisis and Peer Support Lines

- **Military Crisis Line** [www.militarycrisisline.net](http://www.militarycrisisline.net) provides confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year for service members in crisis. You can access the Military Crisis Line is accessible by phone, online chat, or text message and is staffed by caring, qualified responders from VA—many of whom have served in the military themselves.
- **Marine Corps DSTRESS Line** [www.dstressline.com](http://www.dstressline.com) was developed by the Corps to provide professional, anonymous counseling for Marines, attached Sailors, and families. You can call 1-877-476-7734 to speak to a peer.
- **Real Warriors Message Board** [www.realwarriors.net/forum/](http://www.realwarriors.net/forum/) is a part of the Real Warriors Campaign to encourage help-seeking behavior among service members, veterans, and military families coping with invisible wounds. The message boards include spaces for Active Duty, Veterans, and military families.
- **Vets4Warriors** [www.vets4warriors.com](http://www.vets4warriors.com) provides Active Duty service members, National Guard and Reserve members and their families worldwide with 24/7 peer-to-peer support by phone (855-838-8255), email, or live online chat.

## Counseling Services

- **Medical Treatment Facilities (MTFs)** <http://www.tricare.mil/mtf> each have services for therapy and counseling.
- **Fleet and Family Support Centers** [www.cnic.navy.mil/ffr/family\\_readiness/fleet\\_and\\_family\\_support\\_program.html](http://www.cnic.navy.mil/ffr/family_readiness/fleet_and_family_support_program.html) provides customer-focused, consistent, and efficient FFSP programs and counseling services to support sustained mission and Navy readiness.
- **National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICoE)** [www.fallenheroesfund.org](http://www.fallenheroesfund.org) is designed to provide clinical and therapeutic services for military personnel and veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and/or complex psychological health issues.
- **Community Counseling Centers** are on-base resources that provide Marines with counseling, group counseling, assessments, case management, and referrals. Marines can find their on-base centers by asking a health professional chaplain, peer, or on the base website.
- **Military Family Life Consultants** [https://www.mhngs.com/app/programsandservices/mflc\\_program.content](https://www.mhngs.com/app/programsandservices/mflc_program.content) connect licensed clinical providers with Service Members and their families to assist with issues they may face throughout the cycle of deployment.

## Non-Medical Case Management and Care Support

- **Navy Wounded Warrior – Safe Harbor** <http://safeharbor.navylive.dodlive.mil/> is the Navy's organization for coordinating the non-medical care of seriously wounded, ill, and injured Sailors, and providing resources and support to their families.
- **Marine Wounded Warrior Regiment** [www.woundedwarriorregiment.org](http://www.woundedwarriorregiment.org) provides and enables assistance to wounded, ill, and injured Marines and Sailors and their family members in order to assist them as they return to duty or transition to civilian life.
- **Chaplains** are there to provide spiritual guidance and counseling to Sailors and their families. Contact your local chaplain in the field or at home for confidential support.

## Activity Resources

- **Navy Wounded Warrior Adaptive Athletic Reconditioning** [safeharbor.navylive.dodlive.mil/transition/adaptive-athletics/](http://safeharbor.navylive.dodlive.mil/transition/adaptive-athletics/) Adaptive athletic reconditioning – athletic activities that are modified to meet the abilities of injured or ill individuals – are essential to the recuperation of wounded warriors. All enrollees in Navy Wounded Warrior – Safe Harbor are encouraged to make athletics a key component of their recovery and rehabilitation plans.
- **Disabled Sports USA (DSUSA)** <http://www.disabledsportsusa.org/> provides adaptive sports opportunities for people with disabilities to develop independence, confidence and fitness through sports. DSUSA also has multiple state and regional sites.
- **Wounded Warriors, Physical Health and Wellness** [www.woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/physical-health-wellness/](http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/physical-health-wellness/) Physical Health & Wellness (PH&W) programs are designed to reduce stress, combat depression, and promote an overall healthy and active lifestyle by encouraging participation in fun, educational activities. Physical Health & Wellness has something to offer warriors in every stage of recovery.

## TBI/PTSD Resources

- **The Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE)** [www.dcoe.mil](http://www.dcoe.mil) maintains a 24/7 outreach center staffed by health resource consultants who provide psychological health and TBI information, resources and referrals for service members, Veterans and their families as well. They also have resources on the website.
- **National Center for PTSD** <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/> provides information for service members, veterans, and their families about combat stress/PTSD.

- **Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center** <http://dvbic.dcoe.mil/audience/service-members-veterans> serves active duty military, their beneficiaries, and Veterans with traumatic brain injuries through state-of-the-art clinical care, innovative clinical research initiatives and educational programs, and support for force health protection services.

## Appendix A: Social Engagement Conversation Guide

Are you isolating yourself? The Conversation Guide below can help you think about how your wound, illness, or injury might have affected your social engagement. The questions ask if you engage in social activities more often, the same amount, or less often than before your wound, illness, or injury. Review the questions below on your own, with your caregiver, or with your health care provider. This is only the beginning of a conversation about preventing social isolation.

---

*Please circle the answer that fits you best.*

**1. I go see movies with others.**

More than before                                      About the same amount                                      Less than before

**2. I go on dates with my significant other or if single, someone new.**

More than before                                      About the same amount                                      Less than before

**3. I go to concerts or other live shows.**

More than before                                      About the same amount                                      Less than before

**4. I talk on the phone or use social media to connect with family, friends, and relatives.**

More than before                                      About the same amount                                      Less than before

**5. I go see local sporting events.**

More than before                                      About the same amount                                      Less than before

**6. I make an effort to meet new people.**

More than before                                      About the same amount                                      Less than before

**7. I attend faith-based services or social functions.**

More than before                                      About the same amount                                      Less than before

**8. I volunteer in my community.**

More than before                                      About the same amount                                      Less than before

**9. I play board games or video games with family or friends.**

More than before                      About the same amount                      Less than before

**10. I have guests over to my house for a dinner or party.**

More than before                      About the same amount                      Less than before

**11. I participate in casual sports games or group physical activity.**

More than before                      About the same amount                      Less than before

**12. I am intimate with my significant other.**

More than before                      About the same amount                      Less than before

**13. I go out to eat with my family and friends.**

More than before                      About the same amount                      Less than before

**14. I spend time outdoors.**

More than before                      About the same amount                      Less than before

**15. I reach out to close friends to hang out and catch up.**

More than before                      About the same amount                      Less than before

*Please write in any other activities you like such as going to the gym, museums, historical sites, playing music, travel, or participating in holiday traditions.*

**16. I \_\_\_\_\_**

More than before                      About the same amount                      Less than before

**17. I \_\_\_\_\_**

More than before                      About the same amount                      Less than before

**18. I \_\_\_\_\_**

More than before                      About the same amount                      Less than before

**19. I \_\_\_\_\_**

More than before                      About the same amount                      Less than before

Appendix B: Plan of Action Worksheet for Service Members

**Plan of Action Worksheet (to be used with Social Engagement Conversation Guide)**

Start Date: \_\_\_\_\_

SMART Goals	Obstacles	Strategies/Next Steps	Progress Notes (include dates)					
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