

ASK THE QUESTION

# HAVE YOU EVER SERVED IN THE MILITARY?

*One question can make a big difference.*

## Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Services

### SUPPORT THOSE WHO SERVE BY:

*Building critical rapport with a reluctant military-veteran client.  
Understanding the impact of military stressors on mental health and substance use.  
Helping a family understand the emotional effects of deployment on the whole family.*

### WHY ASK THE QUESTION?

Mental health and substance use disorder services providers encounter veterans, service members, and military family members, but they don't always know it. Veterans do not always identify themselves. They can be proud and stoic, and tend to be more comfortable helping others than asking for help themselves – even when they need it. Military experience can impact an individual's mental health, habits, and relationships. Appropriate diagnosis and treatment depends on understanding a client's history – and can even make a life-or-death difference. *The best way to ensure service members and veterans get the best possible care is to ASK!*

**Providers, as part of your client intake/ initial assessment,  
ASK THE QUESTION:**

**“Have you or a family member ever served in the military?”**

**WHEN THE ANSWER IS “YES,”** you may consider thanking them for their service. You may also then be able to increase your understanding of their challenges and facilitate accurate diagnosis, treatment planning, and referrals by asking further questions. This will also help you to:

- Build rapport and demonstrate interest and cultural competency
- Link to any needed military and veteran resources and referrals, including VA and non-VA programs.
- Identify any mental health concerns that will eventually need further diagnostic work and will impact treatment planning and goals
- Assess for any past and present service-related stressors
- Explore deployment and reintegration challenges
- Identify individual and family strengths, supports, and resources
- Address perceived barriers to seeking support and services

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**Following are some questions that could be asked in the context of gathering information for more effective referrals and services. Pay attention to non-verbal cues, and show respect, curiosity, and empathy. Also be aware that responsiveness and effective follow-up are critical to building trust and rapport.**

- When did you/your family member serve? What service era? Which Branch?
- In what ways may the support/services you're here for today be connected to your/your family member's military service?
- What was your/your family member's job while serving?
- What is your/your family member's discharge type/status?
- Did you/your family member experience deployment?
- If Yes, where did you/your family member deploy?
- If deployment history, did you/your family member experience enemy fire or witness casualties?\*
- Did you/your family member lose a close friend in combat? \*
- Were you/your family member wounded, injured, or hospitalized?
- Have you/your family member had a recent deployment and/or are you/your family member facing a deployment or military duty away from home?
- Do you/your family member have a service-connected disability or condition?
- Were you/your family member exposed to excessive noise, chemicals/gases/pesticides, explosions, or other hazardous substances?\*
- Have you/your family member been diagnosed with or see yourself as experiencing PTS (Post-Traumatic Stress) or TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury)?\*
- Have you/your family member ever experienced Military Sexual Trauma?\*
- Have you/your family member ever experienced problems with anxiety/depression/anger management/substance use? \*
- Have you/your family member ever had thoughts of killing yourself or harming others?
- Are you/your family member enrolled at or connected to the VA or other veteran resources or organizations for support or services?
- Are you/your family member connected to any other behavioral health, spiritual or social support resources in the community?
- What types of support are needed but not yet met?
- What reservations did you/your family member have about coming in to seek assistance? Is there anything that might be a barrier to further seeking assistance?

*\* If Yes, see **PTS/MST/TBI/SUD Screening Tools and Referral Information** sheet*

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