

Conifer Counseling Informational Article

Returning Veterans: Where to start?

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Over and over we hear about how the returning Veteran is suffering from trauma, physical disabilities, anxiety, and so on. There is an abundance of information supporting the fact that Veterans face a higher incidence of divorce, drug use, and suicide. This has prompted significant focus on access to mental health for Veterans. When we think of these issues, what comes to mind? It is easy to jump to PTSD, anxiety, and other mental illness. So, at first, it was agreed

We Start There!

Let's back up a second, though. While these are significant issues which we absolutely need to address, it is becoming more apparent in my work and in the world of research that this may not be the place to start.

"When I was in, it was easy. I had two jobs: Do as I was told and stay undead"

"Civilians are crazy"

"Nobody makes any sense"

"When I was told what to do, we did it... at that moment. My civilian co-workers don't do that"

"They think I am bossy when I am just trying to get everyone together and working. When I was in, I gave orders all the time and we got it done."

"My family is so hard to talk to because they don't get it"

"I offend people and don't know why"

These statements represent what I frequently hear in counseling sessions with Veterans. This is not someone talking about flashbacks, hyper-vigilance, nightmares, fear of going outside, or depression. One, if not more, of those symptoms are usually present, but those are actually not always the issues for which these Veterans are seeking help. Whether these symptoms are managed or not, it is the struggle they described in the above statements with which they need help with most. What they are describing is a struggle with:

Successful Reintegration.

Among other things, this is the ability to resume prior social roles, connect and become part of their community, engage in leisure activities, and find meaning or purpose in civilian life.

