



# VETSUCCESS on CAMPUS

## ~ Transitioning Military to Civilian ~

**After the heroes welcome... now what?** There is an urgent need for optimistic and constructive life planning to help overcome the challenges our troops face when returning home. If there is a lack of purpose and no life planning when our Veterans return home, it sets the stage for a potential downward spiral of problems including apathy, unemployment, broken relationships, family problems, addiction, depression, Post Traumatic Stress, and even Suicide.

### Understanding some of the common transition difficulties:

- Change in status - it can be challenging going from military to civilian life
  - Veterans are accustomed to dealing with high responsibility in a structured environment
  - People do what they are supposed to do, when they are supposed to do it, or others may get hurt
  - Civilian life is not as structured compared to military
  - There is a loss of camaraderie
- Lack of a sense of purpose
  - Though challenging, military deployments are associated with a great deal of adrenalin and excitement
  - Veterans face life and death decisions and the health and welfare of others is in their hands
  - Things at home may seem dull and unimportant, others problems may seem trivial.
  - Feeling down about not having so much responsibility and upset by a perceived lack of respect from others
- Depression
  - Due to lack of purpose noted above
  - Due to changes in brain chemistry
  - Feeling misunderstood
  - Fear of disclosure about feeling depressed (people will think I am weak, lazy, a freak)
- Fear of stigma- don't want to be labeled as "the crazy Veteran"
- Hyperarousal resulting from adrenalin rushes, military training / combat experience, and trauma
  - Sleep Difficulties
  - Irritability
  - Concentration problems
  - Discomfort in crowded, tight places and with people behind them (e.g. lecture halls, grocery store)
- Interpersonal Difficulties
  - Difficulty reintegrating with family and peers (feeling different and being told they are different)
  - Roles changes at home
  - Their non-military peers now have different life experiences and likely different priorities
  - Veteran students are older than their civilian counterparts with more responsibilities outside of school
  - Others may want to hear "battle stories" -- this is an inappropriate inquiry and can be uncomfortable for the service member
- Avoidance
  - Difficulty explaining what they went through during deployment and in returning home
  - Trust issues
  - Become more introverted – tend to stay away from other people, not sure who is safe
  - Certain things trigger anxiety
- Stress due to possible future deployments, friends deploying (being left behind), ongoing conflicts
- Growing number of female Veterans and the unique challenges they may face
- Unemployment
  - Accepting entry level positions can be difficult since they often performed important duties in the military
  - Many Veterans find it difficult to translate their military experience to civilian employers
  - They begin to feel they cannot support themselves or their families
  - In our society, work is an important aspect of our identity and our sense of productivity
  - Veterans who remain unemployed are more susceptible to depression, other mental health difficulties, financial strain, relationship difficulties, and homelessness

**If you are experiencing some of the difficulties above, please use the resources available to you:**

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**Paul Santilli** - Vet Center  
401-739-0167

**Erin Butler** – VA Medical Center  
401-273-7100 x 6401

**Suicide Hotline**  
800-273-TALK