

Resilient Transition Participant Guide

Purpose

This module is designed to support a successful transition experience for military personnel and their families by introducing the “less obvious” topics, such as the differences in the culture of civilian and military life and employment, personal and family considerations, and resources available during and after transition. These issues may have a significant impact on the transition process and need to be considered in the Individual Transition Plan (ITP).

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this discussion, participants will be able to:

- Identify transition concerns
- Compare the cultural differences between the military and civilian life, in both the personal and employment sectors
- Identify strategies to mitigate stress for SM and their family members
- Locate and identify reliable resources available during and after transition

Why do we do resiliency training during transition?

You have received resiliency training throughout your military careers...and could probably teach a workshop on it! So, why are we doing resiliency training—again--during your transition workshop?

What changes do you expect to experience during transition? If you have a family, what changes might they experience? Have you thought about what new stress might result from all the changes and how you will handle it?

Realistically, many changes will occur during transition and the stressors may be different than what you experienced during your military service. The military “safety net” will be disappearing, and if you have a family, they will likely be affected by the changes. Applying your resiliency training to transition will support you in a successful transition into the civilian sector.

Before we talk about being resilient during transition, let’s start by defining resiliency for this transition workshop as each Service has its own definition and approach. For this transition workshop, we define resiliency as the process of adapting well in the face of change, adversity, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, health issues, and workplace or financial stressors. It is the ability to “bounce back” from difficult experiences.

Resilience is not a trait that some people have and others don’t—it involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone. (Source: American Psychological Association)

What are your transition concerns? Do others have the same concern?

It is normal for you to have concerns about life after the military while going through the transition process. There are two kinds of transition: planned and unplanned. Planned can be retirement or a separation that was made through a conscious, thoughtful, decision-making process; unplanned may be due to medical or involuntary separation. An unplanned separation can be more stressful since you may not have had time to mentally process or plan for your transition. Regardless of the type of separation, there are many unknowns as to what to expect.

Transition Concerns

To start thinking and planning for transition, consider some of the concerns you have about transition and write ONE of your concerns in the space provided.

My greatest concern about transition is:

Review the list of common concerns provided --

Was your concern listed?

Do shared concerns relieve some of the pressure?

Remember, sharing concerns can help you realize you are not alone with your concerns and is one way to decrease stress. Conversely, since everyone's transition is unique, do not worry if you had a concern that was not shared by others. It may be one that IS shared by others, but has not been considered yet.

Would it help you to know that there are resources available to assist you with your transition? You do not need to face your concerns alone. In the last section of this guide, you will find information on the various personnel, agencies, and organizations available to help you both during and after your transition out of the military.

Military vs. Civilian Culture--is there a difference?

When you entered the military, part of your early training was learning about the military culture and rules. In the same way, when you enter the civilian workplace or enter an institution of higher education, you will need to adapt to a new set of cultural expectations. Although cultural rules and expectations are rarely mentioned in the employee handbook or during college orientation, knowing what to expect in civilian employment and higher education and finding a culture that is a good "fit" for you will increase your chances of success in your next endeavor.

Differences in Civilian and Military Culture chart

- Review the list below and describe what the differences will be in each topic area.
- Are there any other topics not listed? If so, add them to the chart in the empty spaces below.
- Realize that there will also be some similarities in military and civilian cultures.

TOPICS	MILITARY	CIVILIAN
Attire		
Pay		
Housing		
Starting Over		
Bonding		
Mission		
Rank/Respect		
Language-Written		
Language-Verbal		

Service to Country		

Reflection:

- *Which changes do you see as being the most difficult to make? Why?*
- *From the list of topics, which one do you think will be the easiest to adapt to and will cause the least stress? Why?*

Even with preparation, expect some aspects of your transition to produce stress.

Before you can fit into the company or college culture, you need to research and understand what it is. Below are some ways you can learn more about the culture of a company or school:

- Study the company/school website and social media pages
- After starting the new position, observe and listen—What is the pace of the work? Do employees socialize before starting work in the morning? Do they tend to eat lunch together in the break room or alone in their cubicles? Observe the dress code in practice (as opposed to the employee handbook). Do they call each other "sir" and "ma'am" or do they use first names? Does everyone arrive at about the same time or are arrival and departure times more flexible?
- If attending school, research the demographics of the student population on the school's website. How many veterans are on campus? Do most students live on campus, or is it a commuter school where most students live off campus? What is the average age of the student body?
- Ask—If you're not sure about the proper behavior, ask your supervisor/advisor, your contact in Human Resources/Veteran Services, or other employees/students. If a

mentor is available, take advantage of having someone to give you professional advice and help you adapt to your new surroundings.

Your goal as a prospective or new employee/student is to “fit in” and “stand out”—fit in by following the cultural norms of the company/school and stand out by having the experience, education, and credentials required; doing your job/academic work well; and getting along with others.

What do you do about stress? Or what should you do?

During your time in the military, you have been trained to deal with stressful situations and stress in general. Below is a list of some common ways to reduce stress. What other techniques have you used during your military career? Add your preferred methods and any additional suggestions generated during the class discussion in the space provided below.

Ways to Relieve Stress

- **Eat Well, Drink Water** - Would you put water in a gas tank and expect it to run? No. Just like your car, your body needs the right fuel to run. Maintaining a healthy diet and drinking plenty of water is key to staying healthy. Skipping meals, excessive alcohol intake, and overuse of energy drinks can interfere with your body’s ability to function well and cope with stress.
- **Get rest** - Sleep is important to help your body repair itself. Experts recommend seven to nine hours of sleep per night.
- **Exercise** - It releases endorphins, clears your head, and releases muscle tension.
- **Maintain a schedule** - Build time for work, play, family time, and spiritual needs. Get up, get dressed, go to work, and then go home and take care of the rest of your life.
- **Break tasks down into small pieces** – Just as you can’t eat a 10 lb. hamburger in one bite, large tasks should be broken down into manageable pieces and shared or delegated, if possible.
- **Ask for help/Accept help**– Reach out to mentors, friends, other transitioning SM, and service-related organizations to talk about your transition and seek advice. Allow others to help you in your transition.
- **Acknowledge and accept your feelings** – Accept this process with the understanding it can be challenging and stressful; acknowledging this will provide some relief.
- **Surround yourself with positivity** – Positive people spread positivity! Being around those who are positive makes you more likely to view a situation in that manner.
- **Take breaks** - One of the most effective stress management techniques is to simply take a break.
- **Listen to music** – Listening to slow-paced instrumental (classical) music can induce relaxation by helping to lower your blood pressure.
- **Breathing/meditation** – Forcing yourself to slow down and concentrate on your breathing will help slow down your heartrate which will make you feel more peaceful and relaxed.

- **Laugh** – Laughing brings more oxygen into your body/organs and relaxes your muscles.
- **Volunteer** – Take the focus off your situation by helping others.
- **Fun with family/friends** – Free concerts, hiking/biking, game nights, watching movies, camping, talking, and community activities with others can be inexpensive ways to decompress.
- **Communicate** – Open, effective communication with co-workers, friends, and especially family members is essential. They may also be feeling the effects of change; sharing transition information as well as your thoughts and feelings can reduce misunderstandings and tension.

This list is just the beginning of how you can mitigate stress. Are there any other ways in which you reduce stress? Take a moment to write them here.

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Do you think the stress management strategies you have used in the past will work for reducing stress caused by transition? Let's discuss one more strategy that will work well in transition.

How many of you have a plan A, plan B, plan C, and the inevitable plan F when it comes to planning? Military members and their families are taught to plan and have multiple contingency plans. Your training in the military has focused on planning and preparation--in other words--controlling the situation and outcome. During transition, there will be situations that you cannot control, and trying to impose your will on something out of your control creates unnecessary stress and tension. This is where having multiple plans in place will be helpful.

Resilience involves being flexible and maintaining balance in your life as you deal with stressful circumstances. Even with the most careful planning, circumstances rarely turn out exactly the way we expect, and having the ability to adapt is an important tool. Being open to new experiences, adopting a growth mindset, and embracing the challenge of new beginnings are the keys to remaining resilient. We will call this last way to relieve stress...**BE FLEXIBLE.**

Flexibility for Service members and their families will be critical to a successful transition.

Is communication really that important?

The key to a successful transition is to communicate with family, friends, coworkers, and mentors and allow others to contribute to the process.

Communication is Key!

- Share concerns, expectations, fears, and opportunities with friends, family, peers, and mentors (See Resources for additional information.).
- Engage family members in the planning process and include them in transition activities.
- Look for signs and symptoms of stress.
- If you and your family members are not comfortable discussing issues with each other, reach out to professionals who can answer questions and relieve concerns.
- Conversations among family members should be constructive and inclusive, not venting; venting should be reserved for friends or a counselor--someone who is not emotionally invested.

Value of Mentors

A key component of transition is the willingness to ask for and accept help from others. This can be achieved by obtaining a mentor to offer advice and support during transition. Most Service members have experienced mentoring during their military service and can name at least one person who has been influential in their personal or professional life. However, they may not realize the benefits of having a mentor as they transition into civilian life. Ideally, their mentor should be someone who has navigated the military-to-civilian transition experience and is willing to share what they learned during the process.

Do you have a mentor in the military--someone who has offered advice and suggestions to you during your time in the military? Do you have a mentor who is helping you with your transition? Would a mentor be just as helpful as you transition?

A mentor is a trusted counselor, teacher, or an influential senior sponsor. When choosing a mentor, it is recommended you choose someone you view as a role model. Good mentors display the following characteristics:

- Give life direction, but don't push
- Assist in setting goals and priorities and keeping on task
- Educate about life and their own experiences
- Available as a resource and a sounding board
- Give specific, constructive criticism to improve behavior, but never attack character or personality
- Remain caring and supportive and encouraging even in difficult situations
- Demonstrate success in their lives and are well respected in their organizations and in the community

You may already have a mentor relationship established. Or, you may be seeking to find a mentor. While there is no “right” way to obtain a mentor, it is suggested you consider asking past supervisors or peers who have already transitioned out of the military or are further along in the process. Veteran and Military Service Organizations often have members who are willing to mentor others. The VA Directory of Veterans and Military Service Organizations at <https://VA.gov/vso/> provides a list of organizations and will allow you to find resources convenient to your location after transition.

Social media (especially LinkedIn) can be used to find industry-specific mentors by connecting you with former military members who are working in a career field of interest. Start by including a brief note with the invitation to connect that explains your situation and why you would like to connect. Show interest by following their work, liking their posts, sharing their updates, commenting on their blogs, and if appropriate, referring clients or other connections to them. Also, most social media platforms have specific groups dedicated to military members and veterans. Join and participate to build relationships with other members.

Regardless of how you find a mentor, be someone who is enjoyable to mentor. Be open, respectful, flexible, and eager to learn. Most of all, be committed to adapting as you gain information so you can transition successfully.

Resources

When asking for help and accepting help, consider the following resources that are available both during and after transition for you and your family members.

Pre-Transition Resources

- **Family Support Centers**
 - Navy: Fleet and Family Support Centers
https://cnic.navy.mil/ffr/family_readiness/fleet_and_family_support_program.html
 - Air Force: Airman and Family Readiness Centers
www.afpc.af.mil/Separation/Transition-Assistance-Program/
 - Army: Soldier For Life
<https://soldierforlife.army.mil>
 - Army Community Service
www.armymwr.com
 - Marine Corps: Marine Corps Community Services
www.usmc-mccs.org
 - Coast Guard: Office of Work-Life Programs
www.dcms.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Assistant-Commandant-for-Human-Resources-CG-1/Health-Safety-and-Work-Life-CG-11/Office-of-Work-Life-CG-111/

Post-Transition Resources

- **Resilient Transition Participant Guide**
 - <https://go.usa.gov/xQGf3>
- **Joint Knowledge Online (JKO):** Online Resilient Transition course to review information
 - <https://go.usa.gov/xQGf3>
 - Standalone curriculum only—does not provide a certificate of completion
- **Peer Support**
 - A peer support call and outreach center available 24/7 to all service members (including the National Guard and Reserves) and their families through chat, email, phone, and text.
 - Services include emotional support, resources and referrals, and problem-solving strategies for every day stressors such as career, relationships, and financial problems.
- **Military OneSource**
 - Eligibility ends 365 days after retirement or separation
 - This site provides confidential assistance online and over the phone on a variety of issues to include: military crisis line; financial counseling; and non-medical (face-to-face, online, telephone) and specialty consultations (education, health and wellness coaching, spouse relocation)
 - <http://www.MilitaryOneSource.mil/>
 - Toll-Free: 800-342-9647
 - <https://www.facebook.com/military.1source>
 - <https://twitter.com/military1source>
 - <http://www.youtube.com/military1source>
 - <https://www.pinterest.com/military1source>
- **In Transition Program**
 - The In Transition Program is a voluntary program offered through the Defense Centers of Excellence (DCOE) for Psychological Health
 - Provides behavior health care support to SM and veterans as they move between health care systems and/or providers and works to maintain continuity of care across transition
 - Toll Free: 800-424-7877
 - <http://intransition.dcoe.mil>
 - <https://www.facebook.com/PHCoE>

- **Military Crisis Line**
 - Provides Veterans in crisis with qualified VA responders; provides the signs to look for and how to locate the nearest veteran facility.
 - SM who do not have post-transition transportation or housing arrangements will receive a warm handover to the VA. This is a requirement so the VA can provide services for the SM and prevent homelessness in our veteran population.
 - Call: 800-273-8255, Press 1
 - Text: 838255
 - Chat: <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net>

- **Department of Veteran Affairs (VA)**
 - VA's eBenefits website allows you to apply for and use benefits
 - <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov>

- **VA Directory of Veterans and Military Service Organizations for 2017**
 - Published as an informational service by the Office of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs
 - <https://va.gov/vso/>

- **VA Medical Treatment Facilities**
 - There are over 1700 VA medical facilities available to Veterans which provide necessary medical services.
 - <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/treatment-facilities>

- **National Resource Directory (NRD)**
 - More than 17,000 organized and vetted resources for service members, veterans. and families
 - NRD provides information on a variety of topics including benefits and compensation, education and training, family and military caregiver support, health, homeless assistance, housing, and other services and resources.
 - <https://nrd.gov>
 - <https://www.facebook.com/NationalResourceDirectory>
 - <https://twitter.com/NRDgov>
 - <https://www.linkedin.com/in/nationalresourcedirectory/>

- **American Job Center (AJC)**
 - A Department of Labor local resource to assist with unemployment benefits, employment and training, job search assistance, and at some locations, financial counseling provided by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.
 - <https://www.careeronestop.org>
 - <https://www.facebook.com/CareerOneStop.org/>
 - <https://twitter.com/Career1Stop>
 - <https://linkedin.com/company/careeronestop/>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/user/CareerOneStop>
 - <https://www.pinterest.com/CareerOneStop/>

Resilient Transition Reminders

- Understand and acknowledge your concerns.
- Know the differences between military and civilian cultures.
- Stress is a normal part of the transition process-- manage it or it will manage you.
- Your family is transitioning and needs to be considered.
- Mentors are a valuable resource during and after transition.
- There are abundant resources available to support both you and your family throughout the transition process and beyond.