



**YOU
ARE
NOT
ALONE.**

Coping with Current Events in Afghanistan: Help for Veterans and former RCMP members, their Families, and Friends

Acknowledgements

This resource has been adapted *from the National Centre for PTSD's* (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs) resource 'Coping with Current Events in Afghanistan'.

This resource aims to provide supportive suggestions to Veterans, former RCMP members, and their Families and Friends in response to recent events in Afghanistan. It offers information related to common reactions many may be experiencing at the moment, as well as coping tips and available resources for mental health and well-being support.

* Common Reactions Among Veterans

As a Veteran or former RCMP member, you may be experiencing a range of emotions in reaction to the events unfolding in Afghanistan.

If you served in Afghanistan, it may be especially challenging to think about the safety of Afghan Nationals who provided invaluable assistance during your time in the country, or to learn that your former Area of Responsibility (AOR) has now been taken by the Taliban. You may be questioning the meaning of your service and whether it was worth the sacrifices you and your fellow service members made, as well as the long-term impacts on the people of Afghanistan. You may also be experiencing moral dilemmas and distress about the experiences you had during your service. As well, Afghan Canadians may be experiencing immense difficulties during this time.

It is normal to feel distress in response to negative events. It is also common to experience any of the following reactions that can change from day to day:

- Frustration, anger, or betrayal
- Worry, distress, or concern
- Helplessness
- Fear
- Sadness or grief
- Panic or anxiety
- Isolation or loneliness
- Moral dilemmas or moral distress
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Increased alcohol or substance use, and/or relapse
- Avoidance of all reminders, including media and social media
- Pre-occupation with information related to Afghanistan
- Avoidance of social situations
- Memories of military or deployment experiences
- Flashbacks
- Increase in symptoms of anxiety, depression, PTSD, and/or other mental health conditions

You may also feel like you need to expect or prepare for the worst. For example, you may:

- Become overly protective, vigilant, and/or guarded
- Become preoccupied by danger
- Become preoccupied with mentally preparing for what might happen in the future

Remember, these are normal reactions to negative events, especially events that are personal. It can be helpful to let yourself feel those feelings rather than try to avoid them. Often, these feelings will naturally run their course. If they continue without easing up or if you feel overwhelmed by them, refer to the coping tips and available resource below for additional support.

* Common Reactions among Veteran and RCMP Families and Friends

As a Family member or Friend of a service member who died as a result of service in Afghanistan, this time may be especially challenging. The grieving process endures and can be lengthy, and moments like this can re-trigger and complicate your journey. You may be experiencing increased feelings of sadness, grief, anxiety, or anger.

As a Family member or Friend of a service member who has returned home from their service in Afghanistan, you may be witnessing the difficulty and pain that your loved one is experiencing right now. Although it is important to be aware of the impacts of recent events on your loved one, it is also important to recognize that these events can have a direct impact on you.

You may experience the range of reactions listed above.

In addition, you may experience:

- Increased stress levels
- Apathy as you take time to process
- Physical symptoms (increased pain, headaches, stomach issues, inflammation, etc.)



- Changes in your Family member or Friend that cause them to become overly protective, preoccupied by danger, and/or isolated or disengaged
- Changes to your life that shift your usual roles, responsibilities, and ability to participate in activities
- Tension or strain in your relationship, Family, and/or friendship
- Burnout or compassion fatigue as a result of supporting your Family member or Friend

It is normal to feel distress in response to negative events, and it is common to feel stressed or burnt out when supporting someone who is feeling distressed. Often, these feelings will naturally run their course. If they continue without easing up or if you feel overwhelmed by them, refer to the coping tips and available resources below for additional support.

* Coping Tips

For Veterans and former RCMP members

- **Consider the ways that your service made a difference**
At this moment, you may question whether your service or your sacrifices were worth it. Consider the ways that your service made a difference and had an impact on the lives of Afghan Nationals, as well as your own life.
- **Connect with your Friends and other Veterans or former RCMP members**
Talking to other service members or Veterans who may be experiencing similar reactions and difficulties can help you process your feelings and thoughts better.



* Coping Tips

For Veterans, former RCMP members, and their Families and Friends

- **Talk with your trusted Friends and Family**
Spend time with people who give you a sense of security, calm, or happiness, or those who best understand what you are going through.
- **Don't coach or give advice. Just be there and listen.**
Every person's reactions are very personal. Stay in your comfort zone and encourage your loved one to seek professional support for things that are outside of that zone.
- **Limit media and social media exposure**
Limit your exposure to media and social media coverage if it is overwhelming you and increasing your distress.
- **Engage in meaningful activities**
Try to engage in meaningful activities, even if they are small, simple actions. Doing things that are rewarding or meaningful can make you feel better. Such activities won't change the past or the things you can't control, but they can help you focus on the present and reduce distress.
- **Practice good self care**
Look for positive coping strategies that help you manage your emotions. Listening to music, exercising, practicing breathing routines, spending time in nature or with animals, journaling, or reading inspirational text are some simple ways to help manage overwhelming or distressing emotions.
- **Stick to your routines**
It can be helpful to stick to a schedule for when you sleep, eat, work, and do other day-to-day activities.
- **Seek out mental health support**
Seeking professional mental health support is not a sign of weakness. There are many qualified people ready to help you through this difficult time. Please refer to the list below for some available mental health and well-being supports.

* Available Resources and Supports

- **Veterans Affairs Canada Assistance Service**
Call 1-800-268-7708
The VAC Assistance Service is for Canadian Armed Forces Veterans, former RCMP members, and their Families and caregivers. You can reach them 24/7 by phone. They can provide you with confidential, immediate, free mental health counselling. They can also provide a referral to a longer-term counsellor.
- **Canadian Armed Forces Member Assistance Program**
Call 1-800-268-7708
The Member Assistance Program is for Canadian Armed Forces Members and their Families. You can reach them 24/7 by phone. They offer confidential, voluntary, short-term counselling. They can also provide a referral to a longer-term counsellor.
- **Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services Family Information Line**
Call 1-800-866-4546
The Family Information Line is for Canadian Armed Forces Members, Veterans, and their Families. You can reach them 24/7 by phone for a confidential, immediate, free counselling support, crisis management, information, and referrals.
- **Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services Crisis Text Line for Kids**
Text CAFKIDS to 686868 or Call 1-800-668-6868
The Crisis Text Line for Kids is for children, youth, and young adults from military Families. You can reach them 24/7 by text or phone. They offer confidential, immediate, free mental health counselling.
- **Hope for Wellness Help Line**
Call 1-855-242-3310
The Hope for Wellness Help Line is for all Indigenous Peoples across Canada. You can reach them 24/7 by phone. They offer confidential, immediate, free counselling support.
- **Canada Suicide Prevention Service**
Call 1-833-456-4566
For residents of Quebec, call 1-866-277-3553
The Canadian Suicide Prevention Service is for all Canadians. You can reach them 24/7 by phone. They offer confidential, immediate, free counselling support.