

# MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA: SELF-CARE FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

Use this resource to learn about self-care and setting boundaries.





## IN THIS RESOURCE, YOU WILL FIND...

Some quick ideas for self-care .....	3
Information on boundaries and tips to communicate them .....	5
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When a loved one experiences military sexual trauma, this can have a major impact on friends and Family members.

It is important to take care of YOU, too – **self-care is not selfish.**

In fact, taking care of yourself can help you stay healthy so you can be there for others.

# WHAT SELF-CARE STRATEGIES CAN WORK FOR YOU?

Self-care does not need to be a major change or take a lot of time. Evidence shows small things can make the biggest difference. Here are some quick ideas from Family members on what they found helpful. These ideas can help you to get you started on taking care of you:<sup>1</sup>



## PERSONAL

- Create or stick to routines
- Spend 10 minutes each day organizing, tidying or decluttering
- Carve out time for yourself each day



## SOCIAL

- Make a list of people in your support system
- Spend time with people who boost your spirits
- Join a peer support group



## SPIRITUAL

- Practise meditation or mindfulness
- Join a faith group
- Spend time in nature



## PHYSICAL

- Eat regular meals
- Drink water
- Do some light exercise



## EMOTIONAL

- Write down 1–2 things you're grateful for each day
- Do something that brings joy or energizes you
- Create music playlists that reflect an emotion you want to feel

**Remember:** What works for someone else may not be the right thing for you. Try different strategies to see what works for you and your circumstances.





# WHAT WILL YOU TRY?

Use this space to write down some self-care strategies that work for you.

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## THE MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM

The Mental Health Continuum ([bit.ly/mental-health-continuum](https://bit.ly/mental-health-continuum)) is a useful way to understand your mental health and well-being.<sup>2</sup> It can also help you spot early signs that it's time to take extra care of yourself or reach out to a professional for support.



## BOUNDARIES ARE AN IMPORTANT SELF-CARE TOOL

**Boundaries are your personal limits** — what you will or will not do or conversations you are or are not comfortable having. You need to set your own boundaries. These can change over time and will vary from person to person.

Setting boundaries can be tough, especially at first. You may feel scared, worried, uncomfortable, guilty, sad or even ashamed.

**Boundaries can help you:**<sup>1,3,4</sup>

- Better manage your energy levels
- Experience less resentment and strengthen relationships
- Recognize that you're doing what you can to support your loved one
- Maintain your mental health and avoid burnout

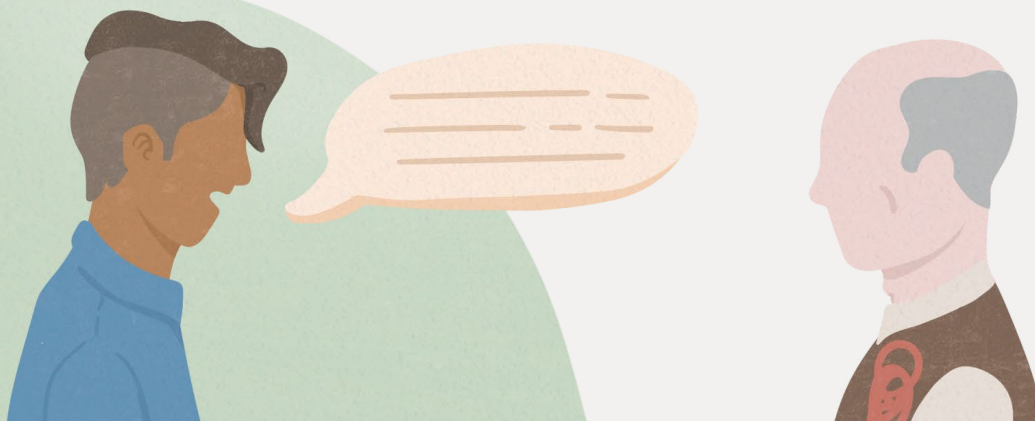
If you're feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, frustrated or resentful, it may be time to set some boundaries about the type of support you can provide.

Check out our conversation guide resource ([atlasveterans.ca/mst-family-conversation-guide](https://atlasveterans.ca/mst-family-conversation-guide)) for more information on different types of support roles.



# TRY THESE GOOD PRACTICES FOR COMMUNICATING A BOUNDARY:<sup>3,4</sup>

- 1 BE CLEAR**  
Be straightforward, watch your tone and avoid complex language or jargon.
- 2 SAY WHAT YOU MEAN**  
Know what you need and state it.
- 3 DON'T FEEL THE NEED TO EXPLAIN YOURSELF**  
Sometimes providing an explanation can be helpful. However, "No." is a complete sentence. You don't need to justify or make excuses for your needs.
- 4 REASSURE THEM**  
Let them know you need to take care of yourself so you can keep being there for them.
- 5 BE CONSISTENT IN UPHOLDING THE BOUNDARY**  
and restate it if you need to.
- 6 ACCEPT THAT CHANGE TAKES TIME (FOR YOU AND THEM)**  
It takes time to learn how to enforce and respect boundaries.



# CHECK OUT THESE RESOURCES TO FIND MORE INFORMATION OR SUPPORT



**Sexual Misconduct Support and Resources Centre (SMSRC):** The SMSRC can be a helpful first step in exploring your self-care needs and options as a Family member. Call toll-free (North America): 1-844-750-1648 or find resources on their webpage: [bit.ly/smsrc-support](https://bit.ly/smsrc-support).



**Sexual misconduct support resources search tool:** Browse a list of resources that can support you based on your location: [bit.ly/smsrc-search-tool](https://bit.ly/smsrc-search-tool).



**Peer support program directory:** Find peer support services and organizations near you using an interactive map or list view: [atlasveterans.ca/peer-support-directory](https://atlasveterans.ca/peer-support-directory).

## CONTRIBUTOR LIST AND SUGGESTED CITATION



Scan the QR code or visit [atlasveterans.ca/mst-family-contributorship](https://atlasveterans.ca/mst-family-contributorship).

## REFERENCES

1. Tull, M. Coping with PTSD [Internet]. Very Well Mind; 2023 Dec 6 [cited 2024 Jan 20]. Available from: [verywell-mind.com/coping-with-ptsd-2797536](https://www.verywellmind.com/coping-with-ptsd-2797536)
2. Department of National Defence. The mental health continuum model (MHCM) [Internet]. Government of Canada: Department of National Defence; [date unknown] [cited 2024 Jan 19]. Available from: [canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/health-support/road-to-mental-readiness/mental-health-continuum-model.html](https://canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/health-support/road-to-mental-readiness/mental-health-continuum-model.html)
3. Tawwab NG. Set boundaries, find peace: A guide to reclaiming yourself. Penguin; 2021.
4. Kollo A. Finding freedom and esteem through boundary-setting [Blog]; 2022 [cited 2024 Jan 19]. Available from: [alexkollo.com/blog/finding-freedom-and-esteem-through-boundary-setting](https://alexkollo.com/blog/finding-freedom-and-esteem-through-boundary-setting)



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