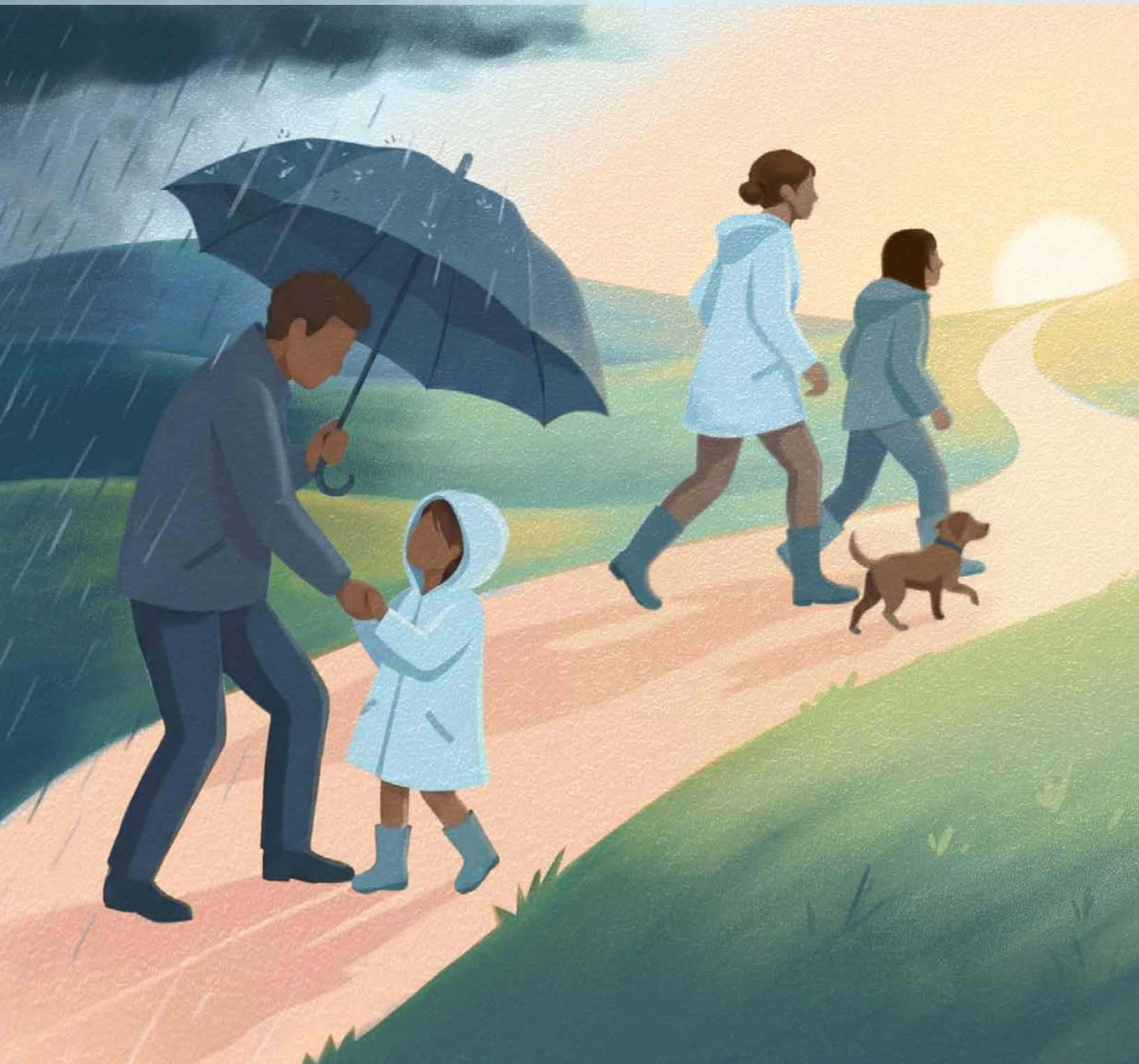




ATLAS
INSTITUTE
FOR VETERANS AND FAMILIES

A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES OF ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE VETERANS OPERATIONAL STRESS INJURIES



This resource was prepared by the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families. The Atlas Institute would like to thank the following individuals for their contributions to this resource. Please note the names listed include only those who have explicitly consented to being acknowledged as a contributor.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Advisor

Nigel Blake, Glenda F., Tanis Giczi, H. Kelly,
RCMP Cpl (Ret'd) Sarah Lefurgey, S/Sgt. Boyd
Merrill, Dr. J Don Richardson, Shawna Stewart

Approval

Robin Dziekan, Cara Kane, Laryssa Lamrock,
MaryAnn Notarianni, Hailley White

Conceptualization

Nigel Blake, Robin Dziekan, Glenda F., Tanis
Giczi, H. Kelly, Laryssa Lamrock,
RCMP Cpl (Ret'd) Sarah Lefurgey, Boyd Merrill,
Hailley White

Editing

Lori-Anne Knarr, Krystle Kung, Hailley White

Methodology

Robin Dziekan, Laryssa Lamrock, Hailley White

Production

Ghislain Girard

Project administration

Robin Dziekan, Laryssa Lamrock, Hailley White

Research and analytics

Hailley White

Supervision

Meriem Benlamri, Cara Kane, Ashlee Mulligan,
MaryAnn Notarianni

Visualization

Nigel Blake, Robin Dziekan, Glenda F., Tanis
Giczi, H. Kelly, Laryssa Lamrock,
RCMP Cpl (Ret'd) Sarah Lefurgey, S/Sgt. Boyd
Merrill, Hailley White

Writing

Hailley White

SUGGESTED CITATION

Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families. A guide for Families of Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans: Operational stress injuries. Ottawa, ON; 2026.

Available from: atlasveterans.ca/rcmp-osi-families-guide

Interested in learning more about the Atlas Institute's approach to recognizing contributions to this resource? Check out our contributorship model for more information:

atlasveterans.ca/contributorship



IN THIS RESOURCE, YOU WILL FIND...

Introduction	4
What are operational stress injuries?	5
How might an RCMP member develop an OSI?	6
Can Family members be affected by a Veteran's OSI?	7
How might an OSI show up in daily life?	7
Is it an OSI or a common reaction to a traumatic event?	9
Impacts of an OSI	10
Impacts on your daily life and functioning	11
Impacts on your Family.....	12
Impacts from vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and caregiver burden	14
Getting assistance for yourself	16
Recognizing when you need help	16
Services for RCMP Veteran Families	18
Caring for yourself and building resilience.....	20
Caring for yourself.....	21
Everyday practices for mental health.....	22
Creating your wellness action plan	24
Inspirational words to come back to	26
References.....	27



This resource is one part of a suite co-developed by and for RCMP Veterans and Families. Visit our website to access the other resources:
atlasveterans.ca/rcmp



INTRODUCTION

This resource is for Family members of Veterans of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). We made this guide to help Families of RCMP Veterans recognize the signs of an operational stress injury (OSI) and better understand how OSIs can impact daily life and well-being. In this document, you'll also find practical guidance for accessing professional support, building personal resilience and navigating the path toward improved well-being.

There is hope and it's possible to make progress in your own well-being while being affected by a Veteran's OSI – we made this guide to help you get there.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **Your experience matters.** Family members are impacted by a Veteran's experience with an OSI.
2. **You deserve to get help.** There are services specifically for RCMP Veteran Families that can connect you to the support you need.
3. **You are not alone.** There are other Families of RCMP Veterans who can relate to your experiences.
4. An OSI can arise from injuries, mental health challenges and exposure to potentially psychologically traumatic events and stressors that RCMP members encounter during their career.
5. There are many kinds of OSIs. What they all have in common is the prolonged experience of symptoms after an injury or traumatic event.
6. An OSI can affect an RCMP Veteran and their Family in many ways, across several aspects of daily life and functioning.
7. Family members can experience vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and caregiver burden.
8. There are tools and strategies that you can use in your daily life to help take care of yourself with compassion.



WHAT ARE OPERATIONAL STRESS INJURIES?

In the RCMP, an operational stress injury (OSI) includes a range of mental health challenges and conditions that can develop from experiences a member may have while performing their duties^{1,2}.

AN OSI:

- Is not a diagnosis, though it can **include** diagnosed conditions like posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or major depressive disorder
- Is any prolonged mental health condition resulting from operational stressors experienced while performing duties in the RCMP
- Includes mental health symptoms and experiences that may not meet the criteria for a diagnosis, but that still cause distress and interfere with daily functioning
- Can be treated with professional help
- Can be managed with tools, strategies and personal connections that support well-being

HOW MIGHT AN RCMP MEMBER DEVELOP AN OSI?

RCMP members are exposed to various stressors because of their occupation². This includes exposure to potentially psychologically traumatic events during operations or while responding to calls. These experiences and stressors can lead to mental, emotional and physical challenges and symptoms that may develop into mental health conditions. Here are some experiences that might contribute to an OSI^{2,3}:



Exposure to potentially psychologically traumatic events^{4,5}

While responding to calls, RCMP members may be directly or indirectly exposed to actual or threatened death, serious injury, accidents, assault or violence. Frequent exposure to these distressing experiences puts them at greater risk for developing mental health challenges, especially with little time or space to process these experiences between calls.



Vicarious trauma

RCMP members may also be exposed to trauma and affected by the experiences they hear about while interviewing victims. Being exposed to the details of others' trauma can also contribute to PTSD.



Burnout

Injuries, exposure to traumatic events, heavy workload and a lack of institutional support can lead to prolonged stress that may cause other physical or mental health challenges.



Grief or loss

RCMP members can experience grief or loss because of the traumatic events that they have witnessed during calls or because of the injury or death of a colleague.



Moral injury⁶

An RCMP member can experience a moral injury if they are asked to perform, witness or fail to prevent acts which conflict with their own deeply held moral beliefs and values.



Institutional betrayal

This can come from experiences in which a person doesn't receive the support they can reasonably expect from a trusted organization. This can include a lack of appropriate support after an injury, stigmatizing treatment, being retaliated against or the organization failing to respond to or prevent harmful actions⁷.

CAN FAMILY MEMBERS BE AFFECTED BY A VETERAN'S OSI?

Yes, Family members can be affected by a Veteran's OSI. Family members can experience mental health problems and conditions because of their own life experiences and because of how they are impacted by living with, caring for or having a relationship with a Veteran with an OSI. Here are some ways a Veteran's OSI can impact Family members:



- **Vicarious trauma** means being emotionally or physically affected by someone else's painful or traumatic experiences, which can affect Family members when they hear about an RCMP member's experiences during traumatic calls.
- **Compassion fatigue** is a sense of helplessness, feeling emotionally drained, overwhelmed or numb because of the stress of supporting and caring for a Veteran. This can happen after one experience or build up over time.
- **Caregiver burden** includes the negative effects on well-being that come from caring for someone because of the demands placed on your time, energy and resources as a caregiver.

HOW MIGHT AN OSI SHOW UP IN DAILY LIFE?

OSIs can include a range of symptoms, experiences and possibly a diagnosed condition. The following are some challenges and conditions that a person with an OSI might experience^{2,8}. Family members can also experience these because of events in their own life or from being affected by a Veteran's OSI:

Anxiety involves excessive fear or worry that becomes difficult to control and interferes with daily life.

- ✓ Excessive fear or worry
- ✓ Restlessness or feeling "on edge"
- ✓ Rapid heartbeat, muscle tension and sweating



Depression is characterized by persistent sadness or loss of interest in someone's usual activities which can affect their thinking, behaviour and everyday functioning.

- ✓ Persistent low mood or hopelessness
- ✓ Loss of interest in activities
- ✓ Changes in sleep or appetite
- ✓ Thoughts of ending your life



HOW MIGHT AN OSI SHOW UP IN DAILY LIFE? *(continued)*



Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, causing ongoing distress that lasts beyond the immediate aftermath.

- ✓ Reliving the trauma in intrusive memories or nightmares
- ✓ Avoidance of reminders of the trauma
- ✓ Hypervigilance (e.g. irritability, jumpiness, difficulty sleeping)
- ✓ Using substances to manage symptoms



Sleep disorders disrupt normal sleep patterns and can affect a person's ability to fall asleep, stay asleep or feel well-rested.

- ✓ Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- ✓ Fatigue during the day
- ✓ Poor concentration or irritability



Addictive behaviours involve engaging in behaviours that feel good in the moment despite the negative consequences (e.g. gambling, gaming, shopping).

- ✓ Inability to reduce or stop the behaviour
- ✓ Preoccupation with the activity
- ✓ Interference with work or daily life



Substance use challenges involve the problematic use of drugs or alcohol.

- ✓ Cravings or strong urges to use the substance
- ✓ Loss of control over use
- ✓ Continuing to use despite negative consequences



High-risk behaviours that can negatively affect well-being or safety.

- ✓ Thrill-seeking without regard for personal safety
- ✓ Speeding or reckless driving
- ✓ Unsafe sexual behaviour



Anger issues involve difficulty managing or expressing anger in a healthy way, which can lead to intense or inappropriate anger responses.

- ✓ Irritability or explosive outbursts
- ✓ Difficulty calming down
- ✓ Physical tension or agitation during anger

IS IT AN OSI OR A COMMON REACTION TO A TRAUMATIC EVENT?

How do you know if what you or a Veteran are experiencing is “typical” for someone who has gone through a traumatic event or if it’s possibly an OSI?

- It’s expected that someone who has experienced a traumatic event will be affected by the experience in some way. Each person may react differently, though there are some reactions that can be more common. Typically, a person who has experienced a traumatic event will feel better with time and can continue to function.
- Not everyone begins to feel better or feels they can cope. If a person’s reactions to a traumatic event persists, cause them distress, or prevent them from living like they used to, then they may be experiencing an OSI.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU OR A VETERAN ARE EXPERIENCING IS AN OSI?

You may experience the following **common reactions to traumatic events**⁹ at first:

- ✓ Emotional changes like feeling numb, overwhelmed or disconnected from others
- ✓ Shifts in your moods or feeling angry, sad or fearful
- ✓ Feeling on edge, agitated or easily startled
- ✓ Feeling exhausted
- ✓ Changes in your sleep, like having nightmares, sleeping more or having difficulty falling asleep

It may be a sign that you **have or are developing an OSI if you also experience**:

- ✓ Persistent effects from the event
- ✓ Distress that prevents you from living the way you used to
- ✓ Finding it harder to engage in everyday life
- ✓ Changes to your outlook on life or the way you see and understand the world
- ✓ Relying on more or different coping strategies to get through the day, but it still feels like you’re only “getting by”

EVERYONE’S EXPERIENCE IS UNIQUE

For some, the symptoms may gradually build up. For others, there may be an immediate onset after an event. It’s important to note that **for any OSI, the symptoms are persistent or prolonged**.

If you are having difficulty coping, it is important to get informed about OSIs and where you can get professional help.

Remember: There is hope, for you and for the Veterans in your life. **It is never too late to get help.** There are many ways to get help from trained professionals or peer supports, so you can find the right path forward for you and your Family.

You can find more information in the [Getting assistance for yourself](#) section.

IMPACTS OF AN OSI

An operational stress injury can impact many aspects of life, influencing mental and physical health, relationships, social interactions, community involvement and even career functioning. While Veterans experience the direct impacts of a stress injury, Family members can be affected in their own right.



The lists in this section were made by talking to Family members like you. These are the real experiences of RCMP Veteran Families. It's not meant to be a list of everything that's going wrong, but to recognize how an OSI can impact your life and to validate the experiences you might be having. You're not alone.

As you read through this list, you may find it helpful to use the boxes beside each point to check off which ones you relate to. You can also use this list to talk about your experiences with a mental health professional.





IMPACTS ON YOUR DAILY LIFE AND FUNCTIONING

An OSI can make everyday life feel harder. You may notice changes in your daily life when a Veteran that you're close to has an OSI. Here are some ways a Veteran's OSI can impact your daily life:



Changes in responsibilities: You may have taken on additional roles within the home or Family to make up for changes in the Veteran's functioning, such as doing more of the parenting tasks or household chores.



Adopting a caregiver role: You may have taken on a caregiving role to support the Veteran in their recovery or daily life, which takes up more of your energy and time.



Everyday activities: It may feel like it's difficult to manage daily activities like planning meals, getting groceries or cleaning your home because you're doing a lot of it by yourself while also caring for the Veteran.



Self-care: You may have less time and energy to care for yourself because of changes to your roles and responsibilities within the Family. This can leave you feeling drained.



Sleep disruptions: Your sleep may be impacted by increased stress. You may be woken up if the Veteran experiences nightmares or sleep disruptions.



Changes in relationships: You may not have as much time to connect with other Family members, friends and important people in your life. You may experience social isolation because of stigma from others or because it feels like other people can't relate to your experiences.



Changes in career: You might have less energy to dedicate to your career or you may have needed to make changes at work to account for the increased demands of your home life.



Symptoms of vicarious trauma or burnout: You might yourself experience the symptoms of mental health challenges related to caring for someone with an OSI or from hearing about traumatic events. You might have a harder time relaxing, feel hopeless or experience changes in your perspective on life.



IMPACTS ON YOUR FAMILY

The whole Family can be affected by a Veteran's OSI as you try to understand and adapt to the changes you notice in the Veteran. Here are some ways Families can be impacted:



Change in dynamics: You may notice shifts in Family roles and responsibilities as everyone adapts to the impacts of the Veteran's injury. This might include others in the Family taking on more household tasks or having more or different responsibilities.



Communication challenges: It can be difficult for Veterans to talk about their injury and some symptoms like hypervigilance or anxiety can also make conversations harder, leaving you feeling confused or uninformed.



For more information to help you talk about OSIs in RCMP Veteran Families, visit our topic page: atlasveterans.ca/rcmp



Emotional changes: You may feel drained or numb when you can't talk openly with the Veteran about their injury or how it's impacting you. You may experience stress, sadness, anger or withdrawal as you try to cope. Children may feel uncertain or like they're responsible for the changes they notice in their Veteran parent(s).



Behaviour changes: You may have felt like you needed to "walk on eggshells" by avoiding certain topics or acting differently to prevent triggering the Veteran. Children may act out, try to be "perfect" or try to take on adult responsibilities.



Increased stress: Taking on new roles and responsibilities while caring for yourself can increase your stress. You may have fewer opportunities to relax while trying to do more with less time and resources, leading to feeling overwhelmed.



For information on recognizing and addressing unhealthy relationships and intimate partner violence, check out this guide: atlasveterans.ca/ipv-unhealthy-relationships





Changes in relationships: You may notice shifts in your relationship with your Veteran loved one after the injury as changes in dynamics and communication make connection harder. Without open communication, misunderstandings can grow and affect how close you feel.



Housing security and financial impacts: Injury-related limitations can affect career stability and make securing housing more difficult for Veterans and Families. If Families live separately to manage symptoms, you may lose access to certain benefits, creating added financial strain.



Social isolation: You may withdraw from social activities because OSI symptoms make certain environments challenging or because you want to protect the Veteran from stigma, stress or questions. Over time, it can feel exhausting to explain your situation to others.



Adaptation and resilience: However, Families can develop new skills and strengths while navigating the challenges of an OSI. This growth can increase your resilience and confidence in managing future stress.





IMPACTS FROM VICARIOUS TRAUMA, COMPASSION FATIGUE AND CAREGIVER BURDEN

Families can also experience challenges related to the roles they take on to support a Veteran, or be affected by stories of trauma. Here are some ways a Family member may be affected by supporting a Veteran with an OSI:



Emotional changes: You may experience helplessness, confusion, stress or exhaustion because of the toll that caregiving takes on you. Your emotional well-being can also be impacted from hearing about your RCMP Veteran Family member's traumatic experiences during calls.



Changes in worldview or values: Your views about the world may change after hearing about traumatic events. If you experience compassion fatigue, you may feel less empathy for others because all of your own resources have been used up.





Loss of identity: The constant demands of caregiving may make you feel like you have no identity outside of caring for your Veteran Family member, especially if it takes away from your time to look after yourself, engage in activities you enjoy or connect with others.



Changes in relationships: You may feel resentment or anger towards the Veteran for the burden of caregiving. Your own experiences with the mental health challenges may make it harder to connect with others in general.



Grief: You may experience grief over changes in your relationship and life before the injury. Caregivers may also grieve the loss of their own identity.



THERE IS HOPE.

Many RCMP Veteran Family members find that with the right support, their symptoms improve and they are able to move forward with hope.

GETTING ASSISTANCE FOR YOURSELF

If you are experiencing symptoms or have been diagnosed with a mental health condition related to an OSI, getting help from a trained professional is an important step in your progress and recovery.



RECOGNIZING WHEN YOU NEED HELP

Here are signs that you may be in crisis and should get help right now:

- You have a plan to hurt yourself or someone else.
- You are planning to attempt suicide.
- You have tried to seriously hurt yourself or end your life.



If you are in distress, call or text the Suicide Crisis Helpline at **9-8-8**. If this is an emergency, dial **9-1-1** (in Nunavut, contact your local RCMP detachment or 1-867-979-1111).

Other signs that you may need support include:

- Feeling hopeless or overwhelmed, as though things will never improve or there are no options left.
- Feeling isolated or withdrawn even when you are around others or believing that no one understands what you're going through.
- Having thoughts of death, self-harm or suicide or feeling that others would be better off without you.
- Experiencing significant distress that is interfering with everyday life.
- Feeling tense, high-strung, nervous or easily startled, even in safe situations.
- Avoidance behaviours, including staying away from people, places or activities that remind you of difficult or traumatic experiences.
- Emotional numbness or detachment, such as feeling disconnected from yourself or others, or having difficulty experiencing positive emotions.
- Persistent low energy or fatigue that doesn't improve with rest.
- Nightmares, disrupted sleep or difficulty falling or staying asleep.
- Struggling with everyday tasks or noticing that regular life feels more overwhelming or demanding than it used to.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

1. **You and your Family deserve to get help.**
2. You don't need to wait for a crisis to get help.
3. It's important to seek help as soon as you realize you need it.
4. You are not taking help away from someone else by getting help for yourself.
5. It's okay to seek help for yourself even if the Veteran is not receiving help themselves.
6. It's okay to seek help for the impacts of caregiving for your Veteran Family member.



SERVICES FOR EVERYONE

- **Primary care provider (e.g. Family doctor or nurse practitioner):** While not specific to Veterans or RCMP, a great place to seek support can be from your primary care provider. You can also use emergency services like the ones listed on the previous page. Consider booking an appointment with your primary care provider to talk about your mental health – they can get you started with support, assessments and referrals.
- **Community mental health services:** You may have access to organizations in your area that provide services, programs and support to people in the local community who are living with mental health challenges. They can sometimes provide referrals to more specialized services if needed.





SERVICES FOR RCMP VETERAN FAMILIES

ORGANIZATIONS THAT OFFER SERVICES DIRECTLY

Crisis numbers (available 24-7)

- **Suicide Crisis Helpline** can be reached by calling or texting **9-8-8**.
- **The Hope for Wellness Helpline** can be reached at **1-855-242-3310**. Culturally competent counsellors offer immediate help to Indigenous Peoples across Canada.
- **The Veterans Affairs Canada Assistance Service** can be reached at **1-800-268-7708**. Provides free, short-term psychological support with a mental health professional. The service is available to former RCMP members, their Families and caregivers.

Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC)

- Offers some programs to former members on behalf of the RCMP such as disability pension awards and health benefit programs for a service-related injury.
- VAC can be reached online at veterans.gc.ca or by calling **1-866-522-2122** from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., local time. Calling this number will connect you with a person who can answer questions about services available for RCMP Veterans and Families, how to set up a My VAC Account or how to apply for a disability pension.
- Many VAC services require a My VAC Account to access them. The My VAC Account is how you apply for benefits and services, track your application and view a summary of your benefits. Both RCMP Veterans and their Family members can register for a My VAC Account online starting on this webpage: bit.ly/my-vac-account

Royal Canadian Legion

- The Royal Canadian Legion offers many services to support Veterans and their Families, which includes RCMP Veterans and Families.
- Services include peer support, financial assistance and direct assistance with the disability claims process through VAC.
- legion.ca | **1-888-556-6222**



SERVICES FOR RCMP VETERAN FAMILIES *(continued)*

Wounded Warriors Canada

- Offers programs to trauma-exposed professionals and their Families, including RCMP Veterans and their Families.
- Services include programs focusing on trauma resiliency, spousal resiliency, couples navigating PTSD, and Family programs, among others.
- woundedwarriors.ca

REFERRAL MAY BE NEEDED

OSI clinics

- OSI clinics provide in-person and virtual assessment and treatment to address mental health issues related to service. Their services are available to former members of the RCMP and their Families.
- There are OSI clinics across Canada. Although none of the clinics are located in rural or remote areas, many are able to provide virtual assessment and treatment so Veterans can receive care anywhere in Canada as long as they have Internet access.
- To access the services, you need a referral from a medical practitioner or a VAC case manager. Or you can send a request to be referred to a clinic through your My VAC Account.



For more information about how to get help as an RCMP Veteran or Family member, visit our topic page: atlasveterans.ca/rcmp

To find more services:

atlasveterans.ca/directory-of-services

You can also explore Atlas's peer support directory:

atlasveterans.ca/peer-support-directory





CARING FOR YOURSELF AND BUILDING RESILIENCE

Seeking professional help, such as working with a counsellor, psychotherapist, psychologist or psychiatrist, is often an important part of progress and recovery from a mental health challenge or condition. These professionals can help you understand your symptoms, develop effective coping strategies and support your healing over time. In addition, connecting with other RCMP Veteran Families or peers who understand what you and your Family have been through can provide a sense of belonging, validation and reassurance that **you are not alone in your recovery journey**.

Alongside these supports, there are **practical steps** you can take to ease what you're feeling now and build resilience for the future.



WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience is the ability to adapt, recover and grow in the face of stress or significant challenges. It doesn't mean avoiding difficulty or never feeling overwhelmed. Rather, resilience is the capacity to navigate those experiences while maintaining or gradually returning to a sense of well-being.

CARING FOR YOURSELF



MAKE TIME TO CARE FOR YOURSELF

- **Practise setting and maintaining boundaries so you can protect your energy and prioritize your needs.** It is okay to reschedule plans or tell others that you can't help them right now because you need to take care of yourself first.

PRACTISE SELF-COMPASSION

- **Speak to yourself with the same kindness that you would offer a loved one.** Notice when your inner voice becomes critical or harsh and gently shift it toward understanding and encouragement.
- **Accept that challenges are part of being human.** Struggling does not mean you are weak – it simply means you are carrying something heavy.
- **Be patient with yourself.** Healing takes time. Progress may come slowly, but every step matters.

USE STRATEGIES FOR COMING OUT OF AN ACTIVATED STATE

- **Start by noticing what activation feels like in your body.** This may include a racing heart, sweating, irritability or anger, racing thoughts or a sudden spike in anxiety.
- **Practise grounding and breathing exercises to help calm your nervous system.** Slow belly breathing, box breathing or naming five things you can see, hear and touch are effective ways to regain a sense of control.
- **Anchor yourself in the present moment.** Say out loud the date, where you are, what you can observe around you. This can help your brain shift out of threat mode.
- **Reach out to a supportive person,** like a friend, Family member, peer or a professional who can help you feel steadier and more connected.
- **Treat yourself gently through the “emotional jet lag.”** After your body comes down from activation, you may feel drained, foggy or irritable. Resting, eating or doing something soothing can help you feel better.



CARING FOR YOURSELF *(continued)*



FIND SAFE, SUPPORTIVE SPACES AND PEOPLE

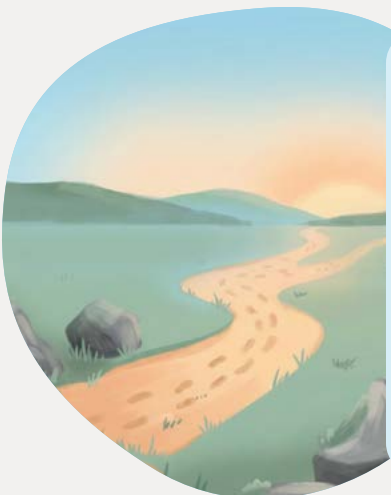
- **Connect with people who feel safe, calm and present.** These are individuals who listen without judgment and respect your pace.
- **You don't need to share everything at once.** Take time to observe how someone responds to small disclosures before sharing more personal experiences.

EVALUATE YOUR COPING STRATEGIES

- **Coping strategies help you get through difficult experiences, but not all of them support long-term well-being.** Sometimes we hold on to strategies because they work in the moment even if they create challenges over time.
- **Gradually add or replace strategies that may no longer be helpful with ones that support your well-being.**



EVERYDAY PRACTICES FOR MENTAL HEALTH

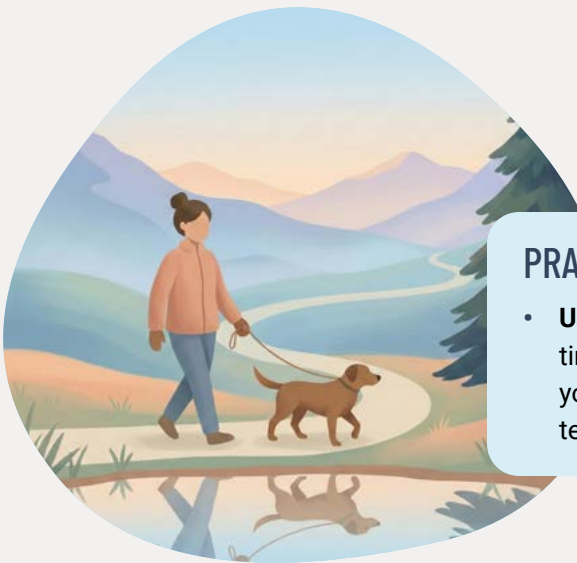
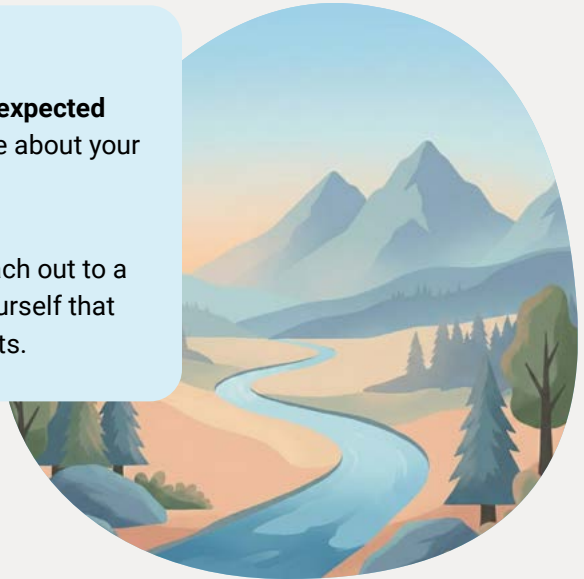


REMEMBER THAT IT'S A JOURNEY, NOT A RACE

- **It will take time to learn new ways of coping and living.** Give yourself permission to move at a pace that feels sustainable.
- **You won't always notice your progress in the moment or day-to-day.** Take time to reflect on where you started, which can help you recognize how much you've grown even when the steps forward feel small.
- **Consistent effort matters more than having "perfect days."** Focus on doing one supportive thing each day – over time, these small actions add up to meaningful change.

UNDERSTAND THAT PROGRESS ISN'T LINEAR

- **Recognize that setbacks are not failure, but a normal and expected part of healing.** Each setback offers a chance to learn more about your triggers, your needs and which coping strategies work best for you.
- **Build a plan for what to do when setbacks happen** (e.g. reach out to a support person or use grounding exercises) and remind yourself that progress is measured over weeks and months, not moments.

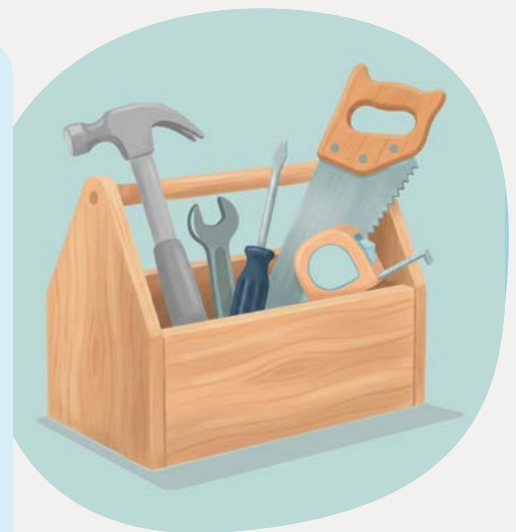


PRACTISE MENTAL HYGIENE

- **Use daily habits** (e.g. exercise, mindfulness practices, spending time in nature, setting boundaries) to help preserve and improve your psychological well-being in the same way brushing your teeth protects your physical well-being.

GATHER TOOLS FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH TOOLBOX

- **Use this guide and other resources to develop a personal toolbox of supportive strategies.** You won't need every tool all the time and different situations will call for different approaches. The more options you have, the more adaptive and resilient you can be.
- **Consider creating separate sets of tools:** one for emergencies (e.g. crisis lines, contact numbers for supportive connects and grounding exercises), one for setbacks (e.g. journal prompts, reminders of past successes, breathing techniques), and one for everyday life (e.g. routines, hobbies, mindfulness exercises).



CREATING YOUR WELLNESS ACTION PLAN



LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES

- **Consider what new experiences or opportunities you might engage with that could be important building blocks in your life as you reclaim your individual identity.** Is there a hobby or sport you've always wanted to try?

PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITIES

- **Look for opportunities to connect with groups and communities that have nothing to do with the RCMP and search for groups that reflect your personal interests, hobbies, passions or values.** These spaces can help you rediscover aspects of yourself outside your Veteran Family member's professional identity.
- **You might also explore new ways of contributing to your broad community such as volunteering, joining local organizations or committees, mentoring or participating in community events.**



LEARN ABOUT POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

- **Posttraumatic growth refers to positive psychological changes** that can emerge from working through traumatic experience, not because the trauma was beneficial but because you have adapted, learned and discovered new strengths in its aftermath¹⁰.
- **Growth can occur alongside the difficult impacts of trauma.** You do not need to "feel good" or be fully healed to experience moments of insight, resilience or personal transformation.
- **These changes can involve shifts in self-perception, renewed appreciation for life, deeper or more authentic relationships and greater self-awareness.** You may also discover strengths you didn't know you had or find new directions and possibilities.

A WELLNESS ACTION PLAN CHECKLIST

You can use the following checklist as a guide for your next steps.

- ☐ Read through the information about how Family members are affected by a Veteran's OSI
- ☐ Check off the experiences you relate to in the Impacts of an OSI section
- ☐ Use the list of services to find a professional that can support you and book your first appointment
- ☐ Consider bringing the list of impacts to an appointment to help you talk about your experiences
- ☐ Try out a strategy from the Caring for yourself and building resilience section
- ☐ Participate in an activity connected to your interests or hobbies
- ☐ Reach out to a safe or trusted friend, Family member or peer



INSPIRATIONAL WORDS TO COME BACK TO

Complete these sentences to make them yours.

Even on hard days,
_____ matters.

I am not giving up on _____
because _____ .

When _____ shows up,
I will remember: it's the injury, not you.

Cut or tear along the dotted line to keep this page as a handy reference

REFERENCES

1. Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment. Glossary of terms [Internet]. 2023 [cited 2026 Jan 28]. Available from: cipsrt-icrtsp.ca/en/resources/glossary-of-terms#943
2. Rudnick A, Shaheen A, Lefurgey S, Nolan D. Operational stress injury. Encyclopedia. 2023;3(4):1332-1344. doi:10.3390/encyclopedia3040095
3. Antony J, Brar R, Khan PA, Ghassemi M, Nincic V, Sharpe JP, Straus SE, Tricco AC. Interventions for the prevention and management of occupational stress injury in first responders: a rapid overview of reviews. Systematic Reviews. 2020 May 31;9(1):121. doi:10.1186/s13643-020-01367-w
4. Andrews KL, Jamshidi L, Shields RE, Nisbet J, Carleton RN. Exposures to potentially psychologically traumatic events among Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy. 2024;17(8):1736-1750. doi:10.1037/tra0001725
5. Carleton RN, Afifi TO, Taillieu T, Turner S, Krakauer R, Anderson GS, et al. Exposures to potentially traumatic events among public safety personnel in Canada. Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science / Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement. 2019;51(1):37-52. doi:10.1037/cbs0000115
6. Rodrigues S, Mercier JM, Nannarone M, McCall A, Farrell S, Sedge P, et al. Experiences of moral injury in Canadian public safety personnel [Internet]. Ottawa, ON: Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families; 2022. Available from: atlasveterans.ca/moral-injury-psp-research-report
7. Bikos LJ. "When they hand you your uniform, they forget to say, 'Hand me your soul'": Incidents and impacts of institutional betrayal in Canadian police services. Social Problems. 2024;71(4):1100-1117. doi:10.1093/socpro/spac062
8. Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services. Operational stress injury support (OSISS) [Internet]. [cited 2026 Jan 28]. Available from: [cfmws.ca/support-services/health-wellness/mental-health/operational-stress-injury-social-support-\(osiss\)](https://cfmws.ca/support-services/health-wellness/mental-health/operational-stress-injury-social-support-(osiss))
9. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US). Understanding the impact of trauma. Trauma-informed care in behavioral health services. Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) series, no. 57. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US); 2014. p. 59-89.
10. Dell'Osso L, Lorenzi P, Nardi B, Carmassi C, Carpita B. Post traumatic growth (PTG) in the frame of traumatic experiences. Clinical Neuropsychiatry. 2022 Dec;19(6):390-393. doi:10.36131/cnforitieditore20220606



**ATLAS
INSTITUTE**
FOR VETERANS AND FAMILIES

atlasveterans.ca

Funded by Veterans Affairs Canada
Financé par Anciens Combattants Canada



Disclaimer: Views and opinions expressed are solely those of the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families and may not reflect the views and opinions of the Government of Canada.