



## Update on support options for NZDF's Afghanistan veterans

If you served in Afghanistan and are watching events unfolding there is support available if you are feeling mixed emotions about your service. We are proud of your service and the service that all our Afghanistan veterans gave. You made a difference to the lives of an entire generation of people.

### You are not alone

You may question the meaning of your service or you may feel more moral distress about experiences you had during your service.

**You may be feeling frustration, sadness, grief, anger, or betrayal, and you may be questioning your service.**

It's normal to feel this way. This is not the time for blame. This is a time to connect. Talk with your friends and families, reach out to buddies, connect with your network, or seek support. Below is a list of common reactions and further down are some coping strategies.

### Common reactions

In reaction to events in Afghanistan, you may:

- Feel frustrated, sad, helpless, grief or distressed
- Feel angry or betrayed
- Experience an increase in mental health symptoms like symptoms of PTSD or depression
- Sleep poorly, or drink more
- Try to avoid all reminders or media or shy away from social situations
- Have more service and homecoming memories
- You may feel like you need to expect and/or prepare for the worst. For example, you may:
  - Become overly protective, vigilant, and guarded
  - Become preoccupied by danger
  - Feel a need to avoid being shocked by, or unprepared for, what may happen in the future.

Feeling distress is a normal reaction to negative events, especially ones that feel 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, the suggestions below can be helpful.

# Strategies for managing ongoing distress

At this moment, it may seem like all is lost, like your service or your sacrifices were for nothing. Consider the ways that your service made a difference, the impact it had on others' lives or on your own life. Remember that now is just one moment in time and that things will continue to change.

It can be helpful to focus on the present and to engage in the activities that are most meaningful and valuable to you. Is there something you can do today that is important to you? This can be as an individual, a family member, a parent, or a member of your community. Something that is meaningful to you in regard to your work or your spirituality? Such activities won't change the past or the things you can't control, but they can help life feel meaningful and reduce distress, despite the things you cannot change.

It can also help to consider your thinking. Ask yourself if your thoughts are helpful to you right now. Are there ways you can change your thinking to be more accurate and less distressing? For example, are you using extreme thinking where you see the situation as all bad or all good? If so, try and think in less extreme terms. For example, rather than thinking "my service in Afghanistan was useless" consider instead "I helped keep Afghanistan safe."

Finally, consider more general coping strategies that you may want to try including:

- **Engage in positive activities.** Try to engage in positive, healthy, or meaningful activities, even if they are small, simple actions. Doing things that are rewarding, meaningful, or enjoyable, even if you don't feel like it, can make you feel better.
- **Stay connected.** Spend time with people who give you a sense of security, calm, or happiness, or those who best understand what you are going through.
- **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.
- **Limit media exposure.** Limit how much news you take in if media coverage is increasing your distress. If you develop your own ways of adapting to ongoing events and situations, you may gain a stronger sense of being able to deal with challenges, a greater sense of meaning or purpose, and an ability to mentor and support others in similar situations.

## Support options

Our top priority is to ensure that you have all the support that you are entitled to. Veterans can contact us to learn about the support that might be available to them.

If you would like support immediately, you can text 1737 (<https://tel:1737>) [📞](#) to begin a conversation with a counsellor.

Other support can be provided by:

- Veterans' Affairs, 0800 483 8372 (tel:08004838372)
- NZDF4U, 0800 693 348 (tel:0800693348)
- Lifeline Aotearoa, 0800 543 354 (tel:0800543354)
- Samaritans, 0800 726 666 (tel:0800726666)
- RSA's district support managers (<https://www.rsa.org.nz/support/team>) [📞](#).

## New Zealand Defence Force involvement in Afghanistan

For the past 20 years, the New Zealand Defence Force worked alongside partners in Afghanistan and made a significant contribution to the lives of the people of Afghanistan.

Those who served in Afghanistan will know first-hand the role NZDF played in assisting the people of Afghanistan,

particularly Bamyan. Whether through security, infrastructure, agriculture, renewable energy, health or education, you changed the lives of many people — especially women and children.

More than 3,500 NZDF personnel served in Afghanistan and 10 were killed.

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Date

**17 August 2021**

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Tags

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