

Managing Stress Related to the Coronavirus Pandemic

Resources to Support Military Sexual Trauma Survivors

The effects of the coronavirus pandemic are stressful for everyone, but they may be particularly difficult for Veterans who have experienced **military sexual trauma (MST)** or other forms of trauma. VA uses the term MST for sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurs during military service. Anyone can experience MST, and it can continue to affect a person's mental and physical health, even many years after the incident.

TIPS FOR COPING

Here are some things that may help MST survivors cope during this time:

- While observing physical distancing guidelines, **maintain regular contact** with family members, friends, and other sources of emotional support.
- **Continue appointments with health care providers** and let them know if you need additional assistance or services. If you aren't already receiving treatment related to your experiences of MST and want to begin, speak with your health care provider or contact the MST Coordinator at your local [local VA facility](#).
- **Work on letting go of what you can't control.** There are some things we simply cannot change, particularly right now, so focus on what it is reasonable and possible for you to accomplish. Stay in the moment.
- **Be kind to yourself.** Remind yourself that things are hard right now and you are doing the best you can. Ask yourself what activities give your life joy and meaning, and spend time doing them if possible, or do something related to the activities you enjoy.
- Notice how news stories affect you, and try to **limit your exposure to stressful media.** Focus on viewing and reading stories that give you hope and avoid dwelling on the rest.
- **Practice breathing exercises or meditation and learn new coping skills** using the many [free mental health apps for Veterans](#).
- **Think about stress management strategies that have worked for you in the past** as you overcame other challenges. Draw on those strategies regularly now. Remind yourself that you are resilient!

SOURCES OF SUPPORT

These resources can help you learn more about MST, develop new coping strategies, and stay safe:

- VA's [MST website](#)
- [National Center for PTSD – COVID-19: Resources for Managing Stress](#)
- [Make the Connection](#): View videos of Veterans sharing their stories of recovering from MST.
- [Veterans Crisis Line](#): Call 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, text to 838255, or chat online to receive confidential crisis intervention and support.
- [RAINN \(Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network\)](#): Call 1-800-656-4673 (HOPE) for resources that provide support after sexual assault.
- [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#): Call 1-800-799-7233, text LOVEIS to 22522, or chat online for free and confidential support for Veterans experiencing intimate partner violence.
- [MST Coordinators](#): Every VA medical facility has an MST Coordinator to help Veterans access MST-related care.

MAINTAINING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH WITH VA

It's important to know you're not alone, and we're here for you.

VA provides free care for Veterans who are experiencing mental or physical health conditions related to MST. You do not need to have reported the experience at the time it occurred or have any other documentation that it occurred. You do not need to have a VA disability rating, and you may be able to receive free MST-related care even if you are not eligible for other VA care. To learn more, speak with your VA health care provider, contact your local VA medical center and ask to speak to the MST Coordinator, or visit mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp.

KEEP YOUR MENTAL HEALTH APPOINTMENTS

Learn ways to remotely connect with VA providers:

- VA offers both [video and phone telemental health](#) options that do not require you to go to your closest facility in person, should you have difficulty getting there or need to follow physical distancing guidelines in your community.
- [Schedule or reschedule your appointment online](#). If you are requesting a new mental health appointment, please call your [local VA](#) to arrange an appointment. If you need same-day access to mental health services, call your [local VA](#) to be connected to care.

STAY INFORMED, STAY CONNECTED

Stay engaged with VA information as it becomes available so you can continue to maintain your mental health:

- [VA's Novel Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) webpage](#) has the most current information, and [VA's Coronavirus FAQs](#) page provides answers to many important questions.
- You can communicate with your care team, track your health information, and access your VA health records from your computer or mobile device with [My HealthVet](#).
- The [VA Office of Connected Care's Veterans webpage](#) provides information, FAQs, and videos to help Veterans use and launch VA Video Connect in their web browsers or download it from the Apple App store or Google Play for mobile devices.
- [VA Video Connect](#) provides secure video visits with your VA care team from anywhere.
- [Mental health apps for Veterans](#) help Veterans manage feelings of stress and anxiety and also remain in contact with their VA care providers.



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