

OCT/NOV/DEC 2023

FROM THE HOMEFRONT

A Quarterly Newsletter to Keep Families Connected



What Can Your Veterans Benefits Do For You?

Wednesday, October 4th at 7PM.



KITCHEN SPOONS



& COMBAT BOOTS

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WELCOME, Autumn and the Holiday Season is finally here!

These three months seem to fly by with all the fun family activities like apple picking, pumpkin carving, Friday night football games under the lights, and enjoying Mother Nature's greatest artwork, foliage. The New England states seem to do it the best! Then before you know it, Thanksgiving is here, you're seeing family members and eat way too much. Which then leads us into the shopping season of December. Providing one last opportunity for people to come together with family and celebrate being together. With that, we should stop and remember those who can't be with us for the holiday season. Either through loss, deployments, or other life events that keep our loved ones away.

"The holiday season is a perfect time to reflect on our blessings and seek out ways to make life better for those around us." – Terri Marshall

Always remember that the Military & Family Readiness Team is here to support you and your loved ones. When in doubt, please reach out to the 24/7 Vermont Military & Family Support Center at 888-607-8773



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Thriving the Holidays

The holidays are a time to take part in old family traditions and make new ones.

Here are some suggestions to help make it a special time of year in your own special way.

Create New Traditions

Put on your thinking caps and create some fun new healthy traditions. Start a silly ritual and invite new people to join you. Even the smallest moment can make a wonderful memory.

Participate

Look for opportunities to get involved in some holiday happenings and to bring everyone together. Attend parties, bake, get crafty, wrap creatively, do local activities, decorate, do a movie night, play games, cook something different, journey to a different town, or gift giving to someone who would least expect it.

Time Management

It is okay to say "no" to the chores that can wait. Cut some corners; you can always finish them later. The whole idea is to create less stress so that you can enjoy the season.

Focus

Make a point to celebrate the good things in life. Contact your friends/family and remind them of how much you appreciate and value their support. Volunteering is a great way to give back to others in your community.

Ask for Support

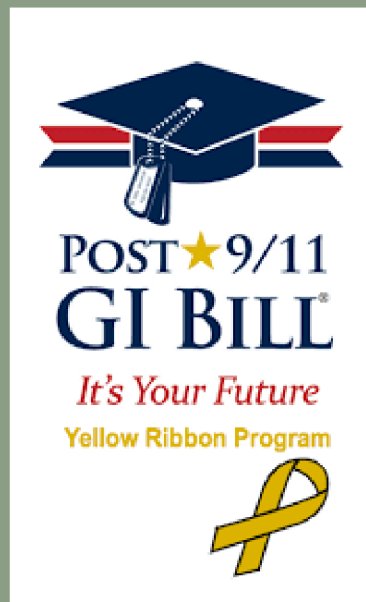
If you need help, talk to a friend, a loved one, a licensed counselor, a pastor, or a life coach. Talking about and expressing how you feel and what triggers certain feelings can impart new ways of coping and keeping your holiday blues at bay.



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Have you used your GI Bill yet? If not, do you know how to check to see how much time you have available? In case you don't know, visit www.va.gov/education/gi-bill/post-9-11/ch-33-benefit and create an account (if you don't already have one). This action will tell you the accurate amount of time that you will have. Please do not go to MilConnect as it is not updated as often, and it is not always accurate.

For those who are interested in going to college, you can also investigate Yellow Ribbon schools (Average cost to attend college in the U.S. is expensive and fortunately the Yellow Ribbon Program gives student veterans the opportunity to attend expensive schools at little or no cost by covering expenses not covered by the post-9/11 GI Bill.)
www.va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/post-9-11/yellow-ribbon-program.

For interest in scholarship options, reach out to your Education Service Officer to discuss qualifications.



Greetings, my name is Brian Stoudnour; I am the new Vermont Military OneSource State Consultant. You may recognize my name or face as for the last seven years I was the VTNG Child & Youth Coordinator. I am excited to have transitioned to Military OneSource allowing me to continue supporting Vermont's military community. With the holidays rapidly approaching take a moment and have a read.

Creating New Holiday Traditions When Your Service Member Is Away

There are things you can do to help make the holiday special for yourself and those you love, whether your service member is far from home or deployed. Sharing old traditions and creating new ones can keep the holidays fun and meaningful, and help you stay connected.

You are an important influence in your service member's life. Sharing traditions or creating new ones during this time of year shows that you are thinking about and supporting your loved ones. This is meaningful, as they—and you—may be feeling a lot of emotions, whether they express it or not.

With video get-togethers more common nowadays, your service member and other loved ones are probably comfortable with online visits. Think about scheduling one or more virtual get-togethers this season. Add in some holiday fun to make them even more memorable.

Whatever your holiday plans, make sure you and your service member set realistic expectations ahead of time. Are you expecting to talk over the holidays? Do you want to send presents? Discuss what you want, and make sure it's doable based on your loved one's location and operational situation. And don't forget the postal deadlines. Read the full article at www.militaryonesource.mil/relationships/support-community/creating-new-holiday-traditions/

For additional resources visit www.militaryonesource.com or call 800-342-9647. Military OneSource is here for you 24/7!



family
is
EVERYTHING

UNDERSTANDING VA PRIORITY GROUPS

Hello everyone. I'm Gene Hitchcock, VA Liaison for the VT Veterans Outreach Program. As the VA Liaison, my primary responsibility is finding ways for our program and the VA to work together to provide the very best support for Vermont's Veterans and military service members. In this role, one of the most common questions asked is, "How does my VA Priority Group affect my health care benefits?" Here are some key points that are shared to answer this question:

Veterans who sign up for VA healthcare are assigned to a Priority Group, which are related to a Veteran's level of need. The greater the need, the more care and benefits the VA can provide. When assigning a Priority Group, the VA considers a Veteran's military service history, disability rating, income level, whether the veteran qualifies for Medicaid and other benefits the veteran is receiving (i.e., VA pension).

Priority Groups range from 1-8, with 1 being the highest priority. For example, Veterans with service-connected disabilities are assigned to the highest priority, while Veterans with higher incomes and no service-connected disabilities are assigned the lowest priority. Depending on Priority Group and income, Veterans may have copays for the services they receive and for some, eligibility for reimbursement of travel costs to VA appointments may be impacted. Below are the basic criteria for Priority Group assignment.

PRIORITY GROUP 1

Service-connected disabilities rated 50% or higher: Determined by VA to be unemployable due to service-connected conditions.

PRIORITY GROUP 2

Service-connected disabilities rated 30% - 40%.

PRIORITY GROUP 3

Former POW: Awarded Purple Heart: Discharged for a disability: Service-connected disabilities rated 10% - 20%: Awarded special eligibility classification under Title 38, U.S.C., § 1151 (benefits for individuals disabled by treatment or vocational rehabilitation): Awarded Medal of Honor.

PRIORITY GROUP 4

Receiving Aid and Attendance or housebound benefits: Determined by VA to be catastrophically disabled.

PRIORITY GROUP 5

No service-connected disability, 0% non-compensable service-connected disability rating (annual income below VA's and geographically adjusted income limits): Receiving VA pension benefits: Eligible for Medicaid programs.

PRIORITY GROUP 6

0% service-connected disability rating: Exposed to Ionizing radiation during atmospheric testing or during the occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Project 112/SHAD participants: Served in Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975: Served in Persian Gulf between Aug. 2, 1990 and Nov. 11, 1998: Served on active duty at Camp Lejeune for not fewer than 30 days beginning Aug. 1, 1953 and ending Dec. 31, 1987: Combat veterans who were discharged on or after Jan. 28, 2003, are eligible for enhanced benefits for 5 years after discharge.

PRIORITY GROUP 7

Gross household income below certain limits, who agree to pay copays.

PRIORITY GROUP 8

Gross household income above certain limits, who agree to pay copays.



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KEY VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Contact your Commander or Family Readiness for details!

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HELLO AIR FAMILIES,

Things have been more active than ever for Family Readiness this year.

We have stood up many programs, created partnerships with organizations like the USO that brought us Top Gun: Maverick in August and so many more amazing things to come! This year's Family Day, in December, will be another one of those events. If you have enjoyed the new programming and direction of Family Readiness, we would LOVE your help in making these events even better for our airmen. Reach out and learn more about the Key Volunteer program on base!



PRUNED BY THE MASTER Gardener

Every branch
in me that
does not bear
fruit he takes
away, and
every branch
that does bear
fruit he
prunes, that it
may bear more
fruit.

John 15:2 (ESV)

I enjoy going to our local farmer's market on Friday nights and walking around and talking to the vendors and buying local farmers' products. When we used to garden, my wife did a great job of pruning the branches. She understood the importance of pruning so that the plant produced better fruit. This is a great poem about pruning and fruit in one's life.

Dead Branches

By Terry Jordan

Feb 2016

<https://hellopoetry.com/words/pruning/>

I dislike Spring pruning
All those dead branches that must be stripped
To bear good fruit, so necessary
I'm no Master Gardener
I've made mistakes before, confused
Choosing which ones to cut away
Which ones I should let stay
Make no mistake
With proper pruning the Springtime sun
Magnificently promises
Seemingly spent branches
Flowing silently, secretly with new sap
New buds, fresh leaves and blossoms
And delectable new fruit
Fruit so succulent
Better because of the pruning
May I cut away the dead branches of my life
And may I not mind the pruning
Waiting for the Master Gardener's promise



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SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS FINANCIALLY



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With the holidays quickly approaching, it's important to start planning now for a financially stress-free season. Going into debt for the holidays should never be an option. Luckily, you still have a few months to prepare.

To begin, it's crucial to understand where your money is currently being spent. Creating a spending plan can help with this task. Many banks and credit unions offer free resources to help you create a budget, so start by checking with them.

Once you've determined where your money is going, it's time to make a holiday spending list. This year may look different than past years, so consider what your family will be doing during the holidays. Make a list of everyone you plan to buy gifts for, including any new additions. Additionally, take note of any extra expenses such as gift wrapping, postage, and holiday food and drinks.

After you've made a list of what you want to spend money on, it's important to find that money within your budget. Experts suggest spending no more than 1-2% of your yearly salary on holiday expenses. If you find that there is little to no extra money in your budget, consider getting creative with your gifts. Handmade gifts or giving the gift of your time can be just as special and appreciated.

Remember to keep track of your holiday spending and begin saving in a holiday account starting in January. With proper planning, you can enjoy a debt-free holiday season.



Using non-judgmental language is key to stomping out negativity surrounding mental health. Teaching our kiddos and selves to do the same is an important step. This fun and easy activity will assist us to be more mindful of the words used in our daily speech.

Think Before You Speak

Help your kid learn how to be more conscious about every day “slang” words or phrases related to mental health.

Before you speak:

THINK

T - Is it True?

H - Is it Helpful?

I - Is it Inspiring?

N - Is it Necessary?

K - Is it Kind?

Fill in the phrase	How would this make those with a mental disorder feel?	How can I re-phrase this?
1) Psycho	Really bad, self-conscious, disrespected, maybe there is something wrong with me, do I belong in a mental hospital	Out of character, quirky, unusual, agitated, fickle, uneasy
2)		
3)		



ACTIVITY STEPS

1. Brainstorm common words or phrases that you've heard your friends and family say.
2. Write them down in a chart, even if you're not sure if they are associated with mental health.
3. Describe how using this word might affect people who have mental disorders. Will this make them feel bad?
4. Think about how each word or phrase can be rephrased and write it down.
5. Talk to your family and friends. How do they feel about these words and phrases? Is this something they think about?

Being more conscious about the words we use will help people experiencing mental disorders feel more accepted.

You can find this activity and many more by visiting the “4-H Healthy Living Guide” at <https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/d328228b-2431-48f6-863d-2362bbec3e24/downloads/4H%20Healthy%20Living%20Guide.pdf?ver=1689773913266>

We always appreciate the support that our civilian employers give to our Guard and Reserve members throughout the year as they must still get the job done while their employees are away serving in uniform. We encourage all service members to nominate their supervisors for the ESGR Patriot Award. This is a great way to say “thanks” to your boss, no matter how they supported the. This award is framed and elegant, and we do our best to present this award in person. Spouses may also request the award if their bosses have supported them while their loved one was away. Go to www.esgr.mil to request this first-level award.

The 2024 Secretary of Defense Freedom Award nomination season runs from 1 Oct 2023 to 31 Dec 2023. This is the highest award that can be presented to a civilian employer. See www.freedomaward.mil for details, **BUT** contact the VT ESGR office at (802) 338-4187 **FIRST** before submitting a nomination, especially if you’ve never requested the base award, the Patriot Award.

This past May, VT ESGR joined NH ESGR to host several Vermont employers as they went on a “BossLift” and flew on a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter out of Concord, NH. We plan to do another BossLift in 2024.



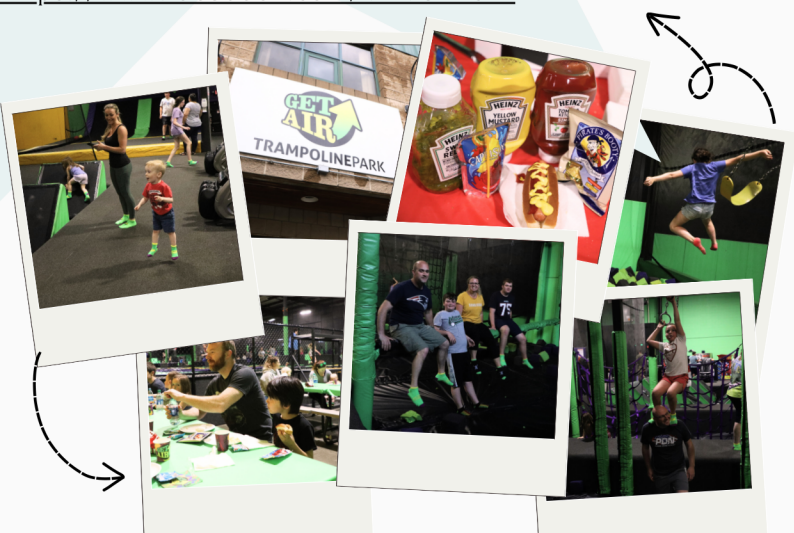
As always, contact VT ESGR with questions by phone at (802)338-4187, by email at linda.fowler10.ctr@army.mil, or by searching VT "Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve" on Facebook.



Are you familiar with Military Kids Vermont (MKVT)? MKVT is a working group that strives to connect military kids to communities and to each other by providing positive opportunities for youth through the collaboration of community partners and existing community resources. Here is a list of some of the FREE activities that have been offered for military youth, military families, and veterans:

- MONTH OF THE MILITARY CHILD (APRIL) ACTIVITIES
- APRIL SCHOOL BREAK CAMP
- TRAMPOLINE PARK FAMILY NIGHT
- APPLE PICKING/BLUEBERRY PICKING
- ICE SKATING

To find out when the next free activity will be held, follow Military Kids Vermont on Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/MKVermont>



KITCHEN SPOONS



& COMBAT BOOTS

Kickoff return with our most popular webinar: What Can Your Veterans Benefits Do For You? on Wednesday, October 4th at 7PM. To find out other future webinar topics, follow us on Facebook: @kitchenspoonsandcombatboots



Scan the QR Code to pre-register.
 Zoom is not authorized on government/military devices. Please use a personal device to access.

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