

Returning Veterans in college: steps you can take to help yourself

Take time to reestablish your current relationships and develop new ones.

Relationships tend to change as a result of time spent apart and the experiences each of you has had. Work to get to know your partner and/or friends in new ways. You may wish to join the Veterans organizations on campus to connect with other vets who can help to ease the transition.

Be patient with yourself

You are going through a major adjustment and may be experiencing the aftermath of extreme stress. It may take awhile to get back to your former level of functioning. Your recovery and reentry will be smoother if you can be gentle with yourself. Limit your schedule to what is reasonable rather than trying to overload and possibly getting overwhelmed.

Take care of yourself

Get enough sleep, exercise regularly and make sure your diet includes plenty of protein, vegetables and fruit. These steps will help you increase your ability to manage stress. A free guided relaxation and meditation CD is available for GHC students at the Student Support Center.

Learn to feel and understand your emotions

You may have had to armor yourself against your emotions in order to survive in combat situations. On return, you may feel either numb or flooded with emotions. You can learn to allow yourself to safely feel them and express them in effective ways. Talking with a counselor can help you to get started with this process.

Take an organized approach to school

Try to schedule a manageable course load and set reasonable goals for yourself. Go to class and take good notes. Establishing a daily schedule can help you to stay organized. If you encounter any problems, speak to someone at the Student Support Center or TRIO who can help you resolve problems before they can derail you.

Monitor your use of alcohol and other drugs

If you are having difficulty adjusting to civilian life, drugs and alcohol may seem like a way to ease the transition. In reality, the use of alcohol and drugs increases the likelihood of depression, insomnia, relationship problems, academic difficulties, among other things.

It may be helpful to avoid exposure to war-related news and movies

War-related content may trigger strong feelings that are difficult to manage. It may be helpful to take a break from it.

Grieve losses

If you lost friends or comrades it is helpful to allow yourself to grieve the loss. Some components of the grieving process include allowing yourself to experience the emotions, drawing on the support of others, and finding some way to honor the person's memory or say goodbye. This can be done through a ceremony, by writing a letter, or doing something in the person's honor, to name a few.