



Combat Stress – Who are we?

- Combat Stress is the UK's leading charity for veterans' mental health
- We **focus** on veterans with complex mental health needs that have arisen because of traumatic experiences while serving in the military.
- Our staff work closely with each other and the veteran to make a treatment plan which fits the veteran's individual needs.
- Our **aim** is to treat veterans' symptoms and improve their quality of life. We want to help veterans tackle their past and take on their future.
- We are "**veteran-centric**": all staff are trained to understand military life and the mental health difficulties that veterans can face after leaving the military.
- We work in partnership with our National Veterans Voice group to develop our services
- We only offer **treatment that works** i.e. is evidence-based. We use research to help us continually improve the effectiveness of our services and ensure that veterans receive high-quality treatment.

- We are "**trauma-informed**": we use what we know about how traumatic experiences and stress affect veterans, and what helps them to recover, to plan our services, policy and practices.
- We are '**interdisciplinary**': our clinical teams include nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, occupational therapists, veteran peer support and family support workers.

Our Service Model: The Veteran Journey

1. Referral

The first step for you to access our services is to contact our 24-hour Helpline 0800 138 1619. You will speak to an advisor who will ask you questions about your military service, areas of your life which you need help with, particularly your mental health, but also occupation, physical health, housing and finances or relationships. They will also explore what you want or expect from treatment and will ask you to complete some short questionnaires about your symptoms. This information will then be shared with our clinical team.

We have Veteran Buddies available who can talk to you about any questions or concerns you might have and support you through this process.

We also receive referrals from professionals within NHS mental health services, other charities, GPs and the Ministry of Defence mental health services.

2. Assessment

Our team of mental health specialists will review your referral. If we think we can offer services that might be suitable for you, we will ask you to attend an assessment with a member of the team to discuss your issues.

We try to obtain as much information as we can during an assessment so that we can match your needs with the most suitable treatment as quickly as possible.

If the assessment indicates that you have particularly complex or severe mental health difficulties, we may meet with you for a second assessment to ensure that we fully understand your needs and can offer you the best treatment.

Sometimes there might be other services that are better suited to help you. Our teams will work with that service to help you access the treatment you need.

3. Treatment Pathway

After assessment your treatment pathway might include:

- **Building Resilience and Manage Better** treatments give you tools to enable you to manage your mental health better and improve your quality of life. For example, you might learn ways to reduce how much you drink, to help you feel less anxious or low in mood and find ways to stop trauma memories interrupting daily life, or manage nightmares affecting your sleep.
- **Managing the Consequences of Trauma** treatments might help you to feel better about yourself particularly if you struggle with

guilt or shame about your past. Other help includes support to understand and manage overwhelming emotions, such as anger or fear, or to help if you feel 'cut-off' from your emotions. You can also get help to manage relationships better.

- **Trauma-Focused Therapy** is one-to-one specialist treatment which involves talking about traumatic experiences in a way that you can cope with, to reduce your symptoms. You may find it easier to 're-visit' traumatic memories using art therapy, an approach that is more about creativity in artwork, and less focused on talking.
- **Looking to the Future** support is to help you find ways to spend your time on activities that are important to you, including relationships, leisure, work, life situations and your community.
- **Veteran Buddies** can help you if you are struggling to start or keep going with treatment or want to consider a different type of help.
- **Peer Support Service:** led by veterans for veterans, it offers you the opportunity to talk and share experiences with other veterans who have been through our services. It's the first UK-wide service of its kind. You will have the chance to come along to small group meetings or meet our regional peer support co-ordinators individually.
- **Family Support Services** will help you and your family in your journey with Combat Stress.

Who can we treat?

We offer treatment to veterans of the UK Armed Forces, non-operational reservists and former members of the Merchant Navy. They will be domiciled in the UK and registered with a UK GP and have complex trauma-related or stress-related mental health issues resulting from military service, such as:

- PTSD
- Complex-PTSD (this is PTSD plus some specific other difficulties)
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Difficulties in using too much alcohol or using substances
- Challenges in transitioning from military to civilian life
- Emotional distress and shame due to having witnessed trauma that goes against their beliefs and values (moral injury)
- Physical wellbeing difficulties in addition to complex mental health problems.

Who are we not able to treat?

Veterans who currently:

- Have difficulties that severely affect their relationships with others
- Are experiencing severe psychotic symptoms
- Are at high risk, whether it be self-harm, feeling suicidal or at risk of causing harm to others
- Are experiencing a mental or physical health crisis
- Experience mental health problems mainly due to trauma or adverse life events that did not happen during their military service e.g. childhood trauma.

Service Locations

- Our treatment will be delivered out of our five treatment hubs (Scotland, Northern Ireland, South, Central and North England).
- Our 24-hour Helpline 0800 138 1619 remains available to all veterans and their families for confidential mental health advice and support.

Online Treatment

- Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic we have adapted and continued to provide our existing treatment services over the phone and online. We are able to deliver almost all of our treatments online: Building Resilience, Managing the Consequences of Trauma, Trauma-Focused Therapy and Look to the Future, as well as our Veteran Buddy, Peer Support and Family Support Services.
- We are keen to resume residential and outpatient services in person, but only when it is safe. At the outbreak of COVID-19, we developed comprehensive self-help resources about how to cope with the challenges which veterans, their families and the organisations around them might face. These are available on our website <https://selfhelp.combatstress.org.uk/>