



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Champlain East
Mental health for all

Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale
Champlain Est
La santé mentale pour tous

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A military veteran has message for others in distress: “Never, never, never give up”

After he was medically discharged from the Canadian military in 1982, Steve Forrest grappled with mental health issues for years. He worked hard to regain his equilibrium and ultimately succeeded. Now a vocal advocate for improved care for military veterans, Forrest says his experience is proof that veterans can overcome mental health challenges and lead happy lives.

“I’ve encountered people who feel sad about life and feel like [their pain] is never going to end. Some of them feel their only option is to destroy themselves,” he says. “All I can say to veterans who are struggling is, ‘Never, never, never give up.’”

Forrest urges veterans in distress not to suffer in silence. Help is available.

Options for veterans in distress

An operational stress injury (OSI) is a continuing psychological problem resulting from operational duties performed while serving in the military or police force. About one in five veterans suffer from OSIs such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorders and mood disorders.

There are many symptoms of an OSI ranging from sleep disturbances, flashbacks, mood swings, and irritability to problems concentrating, communicating and connecting with others. Some veterans become hyper-vigilant or experience intense feelings of guilt related to their experiences. It is not unusual for veterans dealing with an OSI to lose interest in daily life.

You might feel helpless if someone you love is suffering from an OSI, but you can help. To start you could listen to your loved one talk about their experiences without passing judgment, expressing your own opinion or giving unsolicited advice. You could also help by helping your loved one build a support network. That might prove invaluable since many individuals with OSIs are withdrawn socially. Because stability is critical for veterans dealing with OSIs, you could help by being a steady, reliable presence in your loved one’s life.



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If your loved one's OSI is severe, you should encourage them to get professional help. Mental health experts use many effective treatments including cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), which teaches individuals how to replace negative thoughts with more rational and constructive ones, and group therapy. In those sessions, veterans suffering from OSIs come together to discuss the challenges they face.

Medication has also proven helpful to individuals dealing with an OSI. For example, prescription antidepressants can reduce the symptoms of OSI such as depression, anxiety and insomnia.

There are many options available for veterans in distress and Forrest is encouraging as many vets as possible to act before it's too late.

"Suicide has been and still is a problem with veterans," he says. "I'm on social media with a number of veterans' groups and I often see obituaries for young veterans — all individuals who have gone before their time. You need to make a choice and change your path even a little," he tells veterans. "You've really got to hang on."

Veterans in distress can start their road to recovery by reaching out to [Veterans Affairs Canada](#).

DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

Contact a community organization like the Canadian Mental Health Association to learn more about support and resources in your area.

The information provided is not a substitute for professional advice. If you need advice, please consult a qualified health care professional. For further information or if you want to access our services at CMHA, please call 1-800-493-8271 or visit our web site at www.cmha-east.on.ca