



Transcript: PTSD First Response Refresher

The following is a transcript of the Audio File Refresher intended to be used by officers en route to a call, or by dispatch who can relay information on an as-needed basis. The text in bold is the content included in the "short version" of the audio file.

Start of Transcript

The following is a description of the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder and relevant de-escalation techniques developed by the National Center for PTSD for use by first responders on route to calls involving military Veterans.

PTSD is the brain's mechanism for registering life-threatening events and activating a fight or flight response. In a crisis, Veterans with PTSD symptoms believe that their personal safety is compromised, even if it is not. Responding officers should repeatedly remind the person that they share the common goal of keeping everyone safe in the situation. Watch for opportunities to show respect, such as thanking them for their service to our country.

Knowing that Veterans have higher rates of PTSD, be prepared to check for symptoms. If you see one symptom, know that others may be present. Symptoms like extreme lack of sleep, may undermine an individual's ability to deal with crisis.

Watch for signs of over-arousal. Officers may observe quick escalation to anger, irritability, or agitation, and the individual will likely be extremely vigilant to any potential threats or dangers. When you observe these symptoms, remember the primary concern for the Veteran is maintaining safety. Remind them that you share this goal. **Remember also that a military Veteran is likely your equal or superior with regard to training on police tactics, interrogation, and use of deadly force.** It is highly likely that a Veteran will see everything that officers do, and very possible that they will misinterpret your actions in a negative manner. For these reasons, **consider constantly explaining to the Veteran what you and other officers are doing, and remind them that the goal of the actions is to maintain safety.** For instance, before backup arrives, you may say "I wanted to let you know that you are about to see another officer arrive. She is here just to help us make sure the situation stays safe for everyone."

PTSD is also characterized by repeated reminders of trauma. These symptoms escalate in times of crisis. **Watch for signs that the person is being bothered by unwelcome and distressing thoughts.** They may be agitated or "triggered" by something that reminds them of a previous trauma. For example, some Veterans who saw combat in heavily populated areas do not like being in crowds of people. **Ask them, "Is there something here bothering you right now?" If they answer with something that you can remove from the situation, offer to do so,** such as taking a short walk away from a crowd.

In extreme and relatively rare situations, reminders of a trauma can take the form of flashbacks in which the person feels as though they are actually back at the time and place of the trauma. **If a person cannot tell you the correct approximate date and time, then they may be experiencing a flashback.** One simple technique that may prove helpful with distressing thoughts or flashbacks is called "grounding". **The goal here is to make them focus on things in the real environment, rather than the thoughts or flashbacks in their mind.**

Start the technique by telling the person that you're going to be asking some simple questions. Clarify that your intention is to make sure they are doing ok and that everyone is safe. Next, **ask the person to, "Name something you can see right here, right now." If they can respond appropriately, ask "Name something you can hear right now," followed if appropriate by, "Tell me something that you are touching right now." If they cannot or do not respond at first, gently ask again, or abandon the technique for now. If they respond to the first few questions but you remain concerned, you can increase the difficulty by asking, "Now tell me two new things that you see right now," and so on. Most often, the first few questions will bring the person back to focus on the task at hand. If this proves useful for an individual, be ready to use it multiple times during a conversation.**

Keep in mind the strengths shared by many Veterans, including:

1. Shared desire for public and personal safety
2. Training and experience controlling themselves in difficult situations
3. Adherence to rules, structure, and command
4. Camaraderie with other Veterans

Watch for opportunities to capitalize on these strengths, working with the Veteran to maximize the safety of officers and Veterans alike.

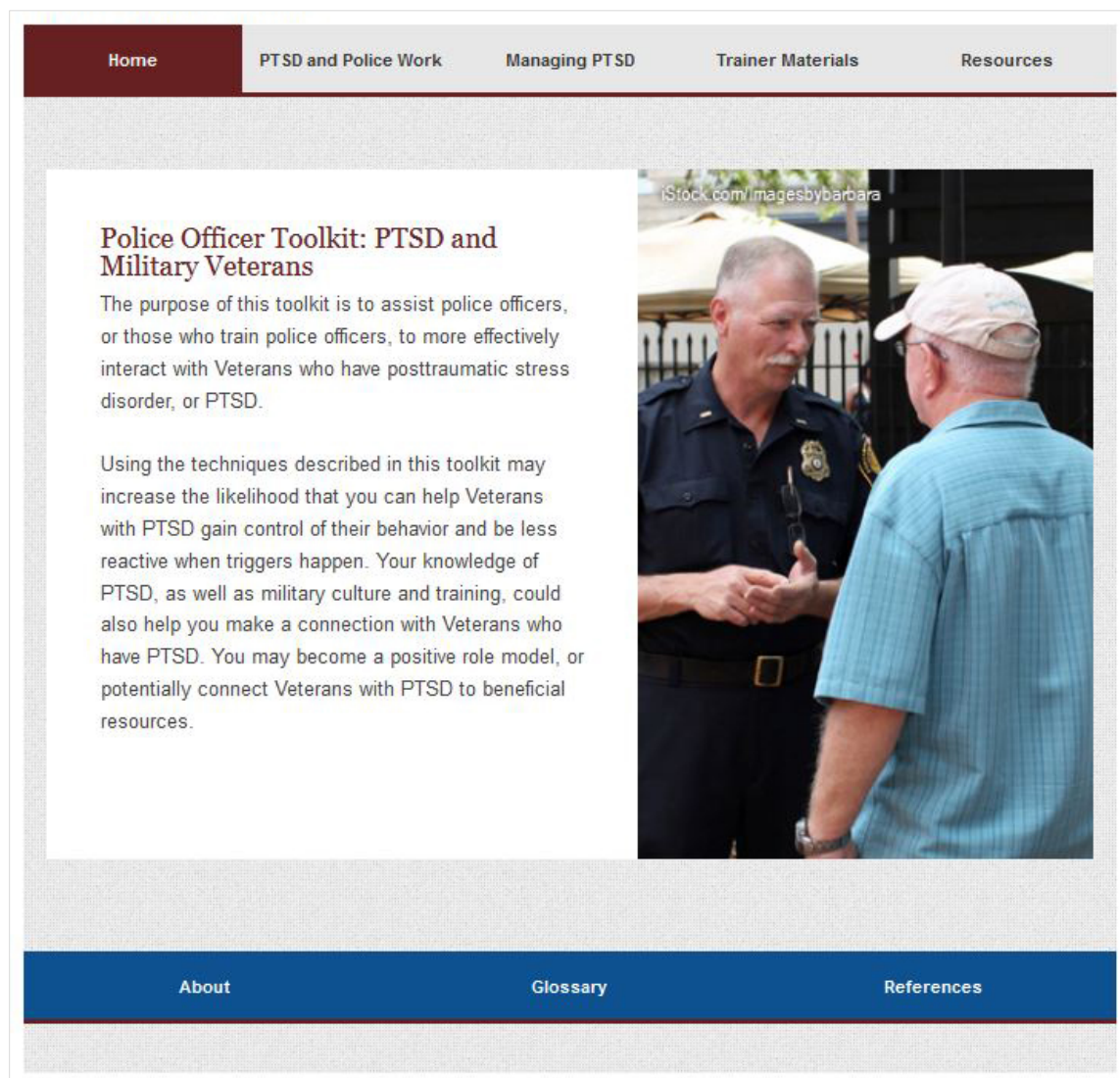
End of Transcript

Want More Information or Training?

Information for Law Enforcement: The Police Officer Toolkit was launched in 2016 by the National Center for PTSD and is designed specifically to help law enforcement professionals to recognize the signs and symptoms of PTSD, as well as teach them tools to help de-escalate situations in which PTSD may play a role. Copies of this transcript are available in the Police Toolkit, as is information about how to request additional training on this topic through your agency.

General Information about PTSD: The National Center for PTSD website has additional information about the symptoms of and treatments for PTSD, including help on finding a treatment provider:

www.ptsd.va.gov



The screenshot shows a website page with a dark red navigation bar at the top containing the following links: Home, PTSD and Police Work, Managing PTSD, Trainer Materials, and Resources. The main content area has a light gray background. On the left, there is a white box with the title "Police Officer Toolkit: PTSD and Military Veterans". Below the title, the text reads: "The purpose of this toolkit is to assist police officers, or those who train police officers, to more effectively interact with Veterans who have posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD." Below this, another paragraph states: "Using the techniques described in this toolkit may increase the likelihood that you can help Veterans with PTSD gain control of their behavior and be less reactive when triggers happen. Your knowledge of PTSD, as well as military culture and training, could also help you make a connection with Veterans who have PTSD. You may become a positive role model, or potentially connect Veterans with PTSD to beneficial resources." To the right of the text is a photograph of a police officer in a dark uniform talking to a man in a light blue shirt and a white cap. At the bottom of the page, there is a dark blue footer bar with the links "About", "Glossary", and "References".