



VETS HELPING VETS SINCE 1974

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER: STATEMENTS FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

If you know a veteran who is seeking VA compensation for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), you may be able to help by writing a letter in support of the claim.

*Tell about the changes
you've observed.*

Whether you're a friend, relative, military buddy, co-worker, supervisor, teacher, coach, or spiritual leader, you're likely to have an idea of how the veteran's life has been affected by military service.

Traumatic experiences in the military can bring about profound changes. It's not unusual for a man or woman to enter the service as one person and emerge as someone markedly different. PTSD can turn a friendly, outgoing person into a withdrawn loner. It can turn a calm, easygoing person into a powder keg. It can turn an active person into someone who's afraid to leave the house. It can turn a productive worker into a problem employee. It can turn a devoted husband or wife into a spouse who's moody and distant, or even abusive. It can turn a devoted parent into an absent father or mother.

If you've known the veteran before and after military service, you're in a position to describe the changes you've seen. Even if you've only known the veteran since his or her military service ended, you can still help. A letter describing what you've observed can go a long way toward educating the VA about the severity of the veteran's PTSD symptoms.

If possible, describe the veteran's PTSD symptoms in detail, **giving specific examples**. Does the veteran panic when a helicopter flies overhead or a firecracker goes off? Is the veteran constantly on guard, checking to make certain that all the doors and windows in the family home are locked? At a restaurant, does the veteran insist on taking a seat facing the exit, to make sure there's an escape route? Does the veteran often wake up from nightmares, shaking and crying out in terror?

Let the facts speak for themselves. Write down what you've seen and heard, as completely and accurately as you can. There's no need to exaggerate, and no need to worry about telling the whole truth. Without the veteran's specific written permission, only the VA, the veteran, and the veteran's representative or attorney will be able to read what you write.

If possible, type your letter on a computer; otherwise, please make certain your handwriting is legible. Give the veteran's full name. Indicate your relationship to the veteran.

State how long you've known the veteran, and how often you've seen him or her. (The more often you've seen the veteran, the more weight your opinion is likely to carry. Of course, it can also be significant if you're now seeing the veteran less often than you did before his or her service, particularly if PTSD is the reason.)

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End your letter with this declaration:

I certify under penalty of perjury that the foregoing statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sign and date the letter, and include your full name and address.

You've eye-witnessed the harm that PTSD has caused. You now have an opportunity to help the veteran return to a stable and productive life. We hope you'll take advantage of it. Writing a letter can make a difference in the life of someone you care about.

Disclaimer

This memorandum provides general information only. It does not constitute legal advice, nor does it substitute for the advice of an expert representative or attorney who knows the particulars of your case. Any use you make of the information in this memorandum is at your own risk. We have made every effort to provide reliable, up-to-date information, but we do not guarantee its accuracy. The information in this memorandum is current as of December 2012.

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Because our legal staff is small and our resources are limited, Swords to Plowshares can represent only a small number of veterans who seek our assistance with VA claims. Please do not appoint Swords to Plowshares to represent you before the VA without our express consent.