



## How To Be A Bridge



### Mindset

1. “I can’t heal – only the Spirit of God can bring about transformation. My job is to help create an environment that will give God’s Spirit optimal access to the sufferer’s spirit. I am a Bridge, bringing the wounded warrior to the Healer who can do the deep work that needs to be done.”
2. Realize they are not the same person they were before they went into combat; don’t expect them to be.
3. Realize that, if they were a Christian before deployment, many of their beliefs may have been shaken or abandoned. Don’t be surprised by this, or condemning, or corrective. Be understanding and help them slowly rebuild their faith in the “new reality” they live in. [Reconcile beliefs with experience.]
4. Realize that this is a long-term process – they won’t get “fixed” overnight (probably). They need to be patient, and so do we as Bridges.
5. The PTSD sufferer continues to be in a battle – only this time *he or she* is the disputed territory. The kingdom of Satan wants to overwhelm and defeat this wounded warrior, while the kingdom of God wants to pull him or her to victory, stability and strength. You are fighting on God’s side – do so tirelessly, tenaciously, diligently. It’s not real estate or political ideology that’s at stake in this battle, it’s an eternal soul.

### Conversation/Interaction

1. Don’t try to portray yourself as an expert in PTSD – or put the pressure on yourself to appear as one. You aren’t addressing the problem from a “clinical” perspective. You are simply on the scene as a representative of God’s kingdom, there to offer love, care, support, acceptance and a faithful, listening ear – and a conduit through whom God can work.
2. If you’ve never been in combat, be very careful about saying, “I understand what you’ve been through.”
3. Take every opportunity to raise their expectation for help and healing to God, rather than to man. Help them expect supernatural help.
4. They may “test” you – try to offend you, keep you at arm’s length, even get angry with you, perhaps to demonstrate to themselves that no one really cares, so they can allow themselves to passively sink into despair. Don’t be put off by this! Ask God to give you His unconditional love for them, and keep coming back to them.
5. Remember the wisdom of Proverbs 12:18, “There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” Ask God to guide and govern you as you speak, and make your words contribute to God’s healing influence.
6. Be a friend; do “friend-stuff” with them.
7. Get them to talk with you about their traumatic combat experiences. Let them “relive” those experiences in a safe environment. Be prepared for shocking reports. Ask God to help you not to react, but to absorb it with compassion and understanding.
8. Except when you are specifically asking them to share about their combat trauma, keep them in the present. If they start getting agitated or anxious about things, they may have been triggered by something and are back in combat in their mind. Change the subject, change your location, talk about what you’re going to do together later in the day – remind them to breathe.
9. Use humor every chance you get. Laughter and humor can be very therapeutic, a great tension-reducer.
10. Build trust with the PTSD sufferer. Never betray a confidence; never lie to them; always follow-through on what you say you will do. Be someone they can count on no matter what.
11. Look for opportunities to be affirming. Notice when they reach goals. Remind them of their progress. Turn the spotlight on them when you catch them doing something right.

12. Gently challenge distorted thinking and extreme views (“I was a total failure in Iraq.” “No one trusts me.” “My family hates me.”). Reflect their words back to them and help them recognize their thinking errors. Do so with humility and compassion.
13. Avoid the classic “Dumb Questions,” such as “Are you glad to be home?” “Is your wife/parents/kids glad you’re home?” “Did you kill anybody?” “Was it tough?” “Were you scared to be in a war?”
14. Offer to act as an arbitrator to help the returning veteran and his/her family re-establish roles and responsibilities.

### **Action**

1. Take the initiative; reach out; be active, not passive; be tenacious, patient, longsuffering.
2. Central in your strategy is the unwavering conviction that God is the Healer – not you. So: consistent, extensive prayer needs to be the foundation of your approach.
3. Help/encourage/facilitate him or her to engage in Christian fellowship with a healthy body of believers (church, small group, informal).
4. Help/encourage/facilitate him or her to feed on God’s word on a regular (daily) basis.
5. Help/encourage/facilitate him or her to talk openly and honestly with God in prayer every day. [Q.T.] Help them understand that there’s nothing he/she can say that will alienate God or surprise Him.
6. Help/encourage/facilitate him or her to engage in service to others who are hurting. [Share Isaiah 58:6-12 with him or her.]
7. Look for opportunities to show appreciation and honor to the veteran for his/her sacrifices – both personally and publicly.
8. Be sensitive to places you take a PTSD sufferer to. They may get triggered by crowded places, confrontational places (sports venues, bars), places that are noisy and dark.
9. Be aware of physical needs they may have that you (and others) could help meet; yard work, meals, house repair, auto repair, transportation, childcare, help with budgeting and finance, legal problems, dealing with medical professionals, employment, etc.
10. Encourage them to seek counseling with a Christian Counselor who understands PTSD – but *not* as a substitute for your care and friendship. Assure them that you’ll always be there for them, but that a professional might be able to offer them a different perspective and additional help that comes from a depth of research and experience.

### **Corporate Strategy**

1. What can a church do for their returning veterans and their families? (Ritual?)
2. What can a church do for their soldiers and their families before, during and after deployment?
3. What can a church do to reach out to veterans in their community who aren’t associated with their (or any) church?

### **Military Ministry**

PO Box 120124  
Newport News, VA 23612-0124  
(800) 444-6006

[www.militaryministry.org](http://www.militaryministry.org) ~ [www.ptsdhealing.org](http://www.ptsdhealing.org)

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