

# Trauma-Informed Recruitment Guidance for Research Coordinators at CMCVAMC

*To accompany VCAB's Trauma-Informed Recruitment Video and Toolkit*

This tip sheet was designed by members of the Veterans Community Advisory Board (VCAB) to assist research coordinators and project managers like you with increasing their rapport and cultural safety during recruitment of Veterans for research. In the event you encounter the issues we describe below, here we supply some tips to help recruitment go smoothly and to prepare you to respond appropriately. We anticipate the settings where you will have conversations with Veterans to be while delivering Informed Consent, study in-take, during in-person interviews or similar. Bear in mind not all Veterans have experienced trauma, please refrain from making assumptions about Veterans and their behavior.

***If you are working with a Veteran who is in distress, please escort them to the CMCVAMC Urgent Care Clinic during the hours of 8AM-11:30AM and 1PM-3PM. At all other times, please escort the Veteran to the CMCVAMC Emergency Room where a Mental Health provider on duty will assist you.***

The brief techniques below are designed to help the Veteran feel comfortable during a research recruitment conversation, especially if they become tearful or have been triggered. Just because the Veteran's trauma has been activated does not mean you cannot continue with recruitment.

We ***strongly*** recommend you watch the following VA video depicting scenarios that highlight how to respond to triggered patients in a clinical setting. ([PTSD Awareness in Health Care Settings](#)) Once you view the video, you will have a clearer understanding of how to work with Veterans during the recruitment process.

Before you start a conversation with a Veteran, make sure you are calm. Don't focus on their trauma, focus on their strengths. Ask yourself, *"What strengths does the Veteran have?"*

- Remain calm yourself; Try to de-escalate; Listen
- Understand that the Veteran may be tired or irritable because of sleep problems, or feeling stressed because they are looking out for danger
- Be aware of your body language; Don't use touch; Just be open and appropriate

The contents of this flyer do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the US Government.

**CHERP**  
CENTER FOR HEALTH EQUITY  
RESEARCH AND PROMOTION

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

- Don't take Veteran responses personally; There may be a trauma reminder in the environment
- Veterans dealing with trauma may have trouble concentrating or remembering things. You may have to repeat yourself during a recruitment interview or informed consent, or write the information down
- Ask a triggered Veteran whether they want to continue with recruitment

In addition, we have learned that **Mindfulness**— defined as being in the moment, without distractions from other issues and concerns, or accepting or listening to what a person is feeling or thinking *without judgment* – is also a helpful approach during a recruitment dialogue with a Veteran. Mindfulness is a tool to refocus a conversation with a triggered Veteran patient;

- Remain calm yourself
- Ask the Veteran to take some deep breaths
- Ask the Veteran how they are feeling or what they are thinking; Refrain from categorizing or describing the Veteran's feeling or thoughts
- Encourage the Veteran to let their thoughts simply pass by and to not to think about yesterday or tomorrow, and to not think so much about stressors
- Ask whether the Veteran wants to continue with recruitment

Further, **Stress Reduction, Relaxation and Guided Imagery**, defined as assisting a patient with lowering their stress level or anxiety through visual references, may also be a helpful technique during a recruitment conversation with a Veteran.

- Remain calm yourself
- Ask the Veteran to think of a place where they felt safe and comfortable, a favorite place to go to feel at ease
- Try to de-escalate; listen
- Encourage the Veteran to let go of hard feelings
- Ask whether the exercise helped, are they feeling more comfortable
- Ask whether the Veteran wants to continue with recruitment

Moreover, we recommend the following additional tips:

- Be sensitive: let the Veteran know that if a question makes them uncomfortable, they don't have to answer.

The contents of this flyer do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the US Government.

**CHERP**  
CENTER FOR HEALTH EQUITY  
RESEARCH AND PROMOTION

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

- Avoid being abrupt, or rude with a Veteran.
- Veterans may give Research Coordinators short, one-word responses at first, but through building trust and building rapport Veterans can become very talkative and open.
- Keep the conversation neutral, stay focused on the reason the Veteran is a good recruit for research; help the Veteran feel wanted.

**For more information about Trauma:**

[VA National Center for PTSD: Trauma Triggers](#)

[Short Videos for VA Staff - PTSD: National Center for PTSD \(va.gov\)](#)

[SAMHSA \(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration\) - Guidance](#)

Produced: 12/1/2021 CHERP VCAB

The contents of this flyer do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the US Government.

**CHERP**  
CENTER FOR HEALTH EQUITY  
RESEARCH AND PROMOTION

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs