



# SELF-HELP EXERCISE: SAFETY AND TRUST

## INTRODUCTION

- ★ Have your beliefs about how safe you are and how safe the world is around you changed since your deployment?
- ★ Do you find you have more difficulty trusting other people, including people you've known well and used to trust?

### Why do beliefs about safety change?

Your beliefs about safety may have changed because you had experiences that were unpredictable and unsafe in theatre. Certain experiences (especially combat and witnessing death) can make the world seem dangerous, unpredictable, and threatening.

### Why do beliefs about trust change?

When someone who you depend on violates your trust, feelings of deep resentment and anger develop, making it very hard to trust others again. Experiences of betrayal, in particular, can lead you to see the world and everyone in it as basically untrustworthy.



### How does this affect me?

If you see the world as dangerous and unpredictable, it will be easy to find examples of bad things happening out of the blue. This can make it easy to lose sight of the fact that, although bad things do happen, the chances of them actually happening to you or the people you care about are quite low. If you view people as untrustworthy, it can be hard not to notice examples of people being selfish or dishonest. This makes it easy to forget that most people you choose to be around are trustworthy most of the time.

### How can altered beliefs about safety and trust cause problems?

If you only see the negatives in your life, you'll lose your ability to trust others and to trust that you are safe. You can also lose appreciation of the fact that you will know how to respond if and when you actually do encounter an unsafe situation. There is no need to be constantly prepared for this possibility. Living in a constant state of distrust can lead to isolation and unhealthy and unhelpful behaviors.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO



### Reevaluate your perspective.

Look at it strategically. Recognize that your beliefs about safety and trust may have changed because of real dangers and betrayals that occurred during a deployment. The chances of something terrible happening to you or someone betraying your trust are no greater now than they were before your service.



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### **Try on a new perspective.**

Consider trying the idea or belief that bad things do happen, but not all the time, and not even most of the time. Holding the belief that your immediate surroundings are generally safe, fair, and predictable – along with the understanding that bad things happen, but rarely – is a much more accurate and helpful way to view the world.

### **Experiment**

You have nothing to lose and much to gain by experimenting with new attitudes and beliefs about trust and safety. It is like the Nike commercial says, you really have to just do it. In this case, “doing it” means trying new ways of thinking.

## **PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**



If you can establish a more balanced way of viewing things, it will be easier to manage and cope with various life challenges, especially the challenges you now face as a result of various combat and operational experiences and losses.



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