



### Dealing with Others

Service members who have been injured or disabled may find that they need to learn new skills or new ways of dealing with others to get what they need or to avoid undesirable reactions. Some situations that a service member may have to deal with include:

- Handling unwanted attention effectively.
- Asking for help and making requests in a direct and open way.
- Developing new relationships.



### Handling Unwanted Attention

Visible injuries such as burns and amputations, or an injury requiring a wheelchair to get around, will attract attention. It's important to know how to handle stares or curiosity about your injury, and what to do when someone makes fun of you or your injury.



### When Someone Stares

- **Accept it as part of human nature.** Humans are hard-wired to pay attention to anything out of the ordinary, so your injuries may naturally draw attention. Remember that most people will stare out of curiosity, compassion, or concern—not rudeness.
- **Retain control over the situation.** Don't give power over your life to others. You can't control their staring but you CAN control your reaction to their staring.

- **Use the STEPS tool.**<sup>1</sup>

Whenever you are out in public, you can influence the way people respond to you by projecting confidence. When people see that you are self-assured and friendly, they will begin to focus on **you** rather than the visible signs of your injuries. Practice the following steps until they become natural and automatic.

- S = Self-talk** (make it positive)—“I accept myself and I'm comfortable with other people.”
- T = Tone of voice**—Friendly, warm, enthusiastic.
- E = Eye contact**—Look people in the eye.
- P = Posture**—Head raised, shoulders back.
- S = Smile**—Confident but approachable.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Quayle, Barbara Kammerer, M.A. *Be Your BEST*. The Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors. [http://www.phoenix-society.org/downloads/best/ryr\\_handouts.pdf](http://www.phoenix-society.org/downloads/best/ryr_handouts.pdf)



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### When Someone is Curious About Your Injury

When people ask about your injury, be ready with a prepared answer. This will reduce any feelings of embarrassment or anger you might have, and will make the situation less awkward<sup>1</sup>.

Here is a three-part approach:

1. A statement reflecting how, when, or where you were injured.

*Example: "I was injured in an explosion in Baghdad."*

2. A statement reflecting how you are doing now.

*Example: "I'm doing better now."  
Or: "I have one more surgery but I'm doing better."*

3. A statement reflecting that you appreciate the other person's concern and that closes the topic.

*Example: "Thanks for asking." Or: "Thank you for your concern."*  
Rehearse your entire response until it feels natural and friendly (not hostile).

*Example: "I was injured in an explosion in Baghdad. I was in the hospital for a couple of months, but I'm doing better now. Thanks for asking."* If a person asks for more information you don't want to provide, be ready with a prepared answer.

*Example: "That's all I care to say about it today. I'm sure you understand."*



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.teamtechnology.co.uk/assertiveness/how-to-be-more-assertive-part5.html>



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### When Someone Makes Fun of Your Injury

If someone makes fun of your disability, it's natural for you to want to defend yourself or attack. But usually this only fuels the fire and encourages more rude remarks. So even though it might go against your nature, at least initially, try to respond in a way that both stops your heckler and maintains your self-respect. As you get good at this you may actually come to enjoy it.

- **When possible IGNORE put-downs.** Yeah – this can be a tough one to do, especially for someone trained to take control of adversarial situations. But if you respond to a heckler with aggression or defensiveness, chances are you'll just escalate an already unpleasant encounter. He probably wants a "rise" out of you, so don't give it to him. Ignoring put-downs is actually the high road to take.
- **Use humor to diffuse the situation.** Come up with a humorous response to put-downs about your injury ahead of time and then practice it so that it's automatic.

*Example:* Robert sustained burns to his face and upper body during deployment.

**Put-down:** "Hey, Dude, don't look now but someone stole your face."

**Response:** "Yeah, I guess I got too much sun on that beach in Iraq last year."



Robert's humorous line diffused the situation, while winning the respect of onlookers.

- **Use negative assertion<sup>2</sup>** to diffuse the situation. This involves acknowledging the truthful part of the put-down while turning it into a positive statement.

*Example:* Robert sustained burns to his face and upper body during deployment.

**Put-down:** "Hey, Dude, it must be pretty hard to eat ice cream with that face."

**Response:** "You're not kidding. It was hard to eat for a long time after the explosion, but I'm getting better at it now."

Robert's negative assertion indicated that he was not intimidated by the put-down, while thoroughly diffusing a potentially difficult situation. You can prepare a negative assertion ahead of time and practice it.

2 <http://www.teamtechnology.co.uk/assertiveness/how-to-be-more-assertive-part5.html>



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### Asking for Help and Making Requests in a Direct and Open Way <sup>3</sup>

Your goal as an injured service member is to become as independent as possible. However, there are times when you will need to ask other people for help. It's important that you ask for help in a direct, assertive, and unembarrassed manner. And remember: most people enjoy contributing to other people's welfare. A direct request for help can actually be received as a gift.

Direct requests have three parts:

- 1) **State your needs:** "I need to get to the doctor's office tomorrow."
- 2) **Make the request:** "Would you be able to drive me?"
- 3) **Positively acknowledge the other person's response:** "Thank you. I really appreciate it." Or: "I totally understand. I'll see if Justin can do it."



**Exercise:** Make a list of things that you need help with because of your injury. Write out a script for a direct request for each item using the three-part request approach listed above. Then rehearse each request until it becomes automatic. The next time you need to ask for a favor, you will be able to do so in a direct, confident, and open manner.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.teamtechnology.co.uk/assertiveness/how-to-be-more-assertive-part5.html>



**It is important to ask for help.**



### Developing New Relationships

Having a broad base of social support is very important for all Service Members, and even more important for those who have injuries. Relationships with others will keep you from becoming withdrawn or isolated. You may meet many new potential friends during hospitalization, through support groups, recreational activities, and involvement in community activities. Here are some ways to build positive relationships with new acquaintances and strengthen existing relationships:

- Remember to use the **STEPS Tool**<sup>3</sup> when you are out in public or meeting new people:
- **Be a good listener.** Instead of planning what you are going to say while the other person is speaking, listen carefully to what they are saying. Every once in a while in the conversation try to put what they are saying in your own words and repeat it back to them. You can use phrases like, “What I hear you saying is...” Or: “You seem to be saying... is that right?” This allows the other person to feel understood.
- **Ask questions** that show you are interested in the whole person, not just their work or perhaps their deployment experience. Everyone has a unique personal story to tell: let them know you’re genuinely curious to hear it. If you follow these three guidelines, you’ll let people know that you are comfortable with your injury and that you’d like to get to know them. This will put others at ease and make the task of getting to know each other go more smoothly.



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