Pro Tips for Coaching webSTAIR: A Transdiagnostic Web-based Program

FOR VETERANS EXPOSED TO TRAUMA

DEVELOPED BY

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We thank the following who consulted on this product: Annapoorna Ayyagari, MSW, PhD; Michele Keller, LPC; Jessica Payton, PhD; Karen Corrigan, MSW, PhD; and Adam Jacobs

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The contents of this manual do not represent the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or the U.S. government.

This manual was supported by a clinical educator grant from the VA South Central Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC). This manual can be downloaded at https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn16/pro-tips-for-coaching-webstair.asp. For a hardcopy of the manual, please contact VISN16SCMIRECCEducation@va.gov.

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INTRODUCTION TO WEBSTAIR

webSTAIR is a Veteran-facing online version of Skills Training in Affective and Interpersonal Regulation (STAIR), which was developed for individuals who have experienced trauma. webSTAIR combines self-paced online training modules and virtual coaching sessions to support real-life skill application to improve emotion regulation, relationship functioning, and quality of life for Veterans who have experience a trauma.

webSTAIR is a low-intensity intervention intended to be provided to individuals who may benefit from self-directed care, such as lower-acuity Veterans or Veterans who are very motivated for self-directed care. The overall framework within which webSTAIR fits is a "stepped care" model, in which webSTAIR may serve as a prequel to higher-intensity therapies or an adjunctive treatment for Veterans who are already connected with mental health care.

Our goal is to provide a training model that will increase the reach of webSTAIR to Veterans with *mild-to-moderate* levels of trauma-related symptoms. Importantly, webSTAIR is not an appropriate intervention for Veterans with severe mental health problems, or with primary clinical concerns that would be best treated by a specific type of intervention (such as Exposure Response Prevention for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Panic Disorder).

WHO IS A GOOD FIT FOR WEBSTAIR

Any Veterans who have experienced a trauma in their lifetime may be a good clinical fit for webSTAIR. The program has been shown to substantially reduce symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, as well as improve emotion regulation and interpersonal functioning. A Veteran does not need to have a diagnosis of (PTSD to benefit from the program. Veterans who are currently experiencing symptoms (subclinical or otherwise) of PTSD or depression may benefit from webSTAIR. To use webSTAIR, Veterans should have a tablet or computer at home, along with high-speed internet access. If they do not, consider options from the VA to help Veterans acquire these resources. webSTAIR is optimally supported through regular coaching sessions, which can be provided by a VA clinician (from here on out referred to as 'coach'). It is clear from the literature that participants of technology-based programs benefit from coaching assistance for accountability and support, among other benefits.

MODELS OF WEBSTAIR

There are different ways by which webSTAIR can be integrated into practice. We have tested the Biweekly Coaching model (described below). The Self-guided (described below) has not been tested but may be a useful *light-touch* intervention to extend care to highly motivated Veterans.

Assessing Veteran Preferences

Understanding Veterans' preferences will likely increase buy-in and engagement in the program. We would encourage VA providers, who will serve as coaches, to assess *(1) how much contact does the Veteran need (frequency, e.g., weekly, biweekly)? and (2) how does the Veteran prefer meeting for webSTAIR coaching sessions* (MyHealtheVet secure messaging, VA Video Connect (VVC, phone)? Coaches are encouraged to be flexible to meet the needs of their Veterans. For example, a combination of scheduled VVC sessions and MyHealtheVet messaging may be appropriate or starting with VVC and reducing to the self-guided model if the Veteran is progressing nicely. Alternatively, Veterans may start with the Self-guided model and escalate to Biweekly Coaching if they are falling behind with the material.

Bimonthly Coaching

Veterans who are interested in the personal connection of synchronous coaching appointments or who might present with mild-to-moderate distress would likely benefit from the Bimonthly Coaching model, otherwise known as "Coach5," which has been tested in previous research. Coaches can schedule **30- to 60-minute** VVC sessions with **Veterans every other week** – expecting Veterans to complete roughly two modules between each session. Sessions provide accountability for Veterans to continue moving forward with the material and a chance to have questions answered or receive help applying learned material to their own lives. Coaching sessions cover content that a Veteran has already independently reviewed by completing the corresponding webSTAIR module. Veterans may also use the Self-guided model (and reach out to their coach via MyHealtheVet when needed) for technological assistance. Please see Example Coach5 Schedule below and Appendix A for a visual diagram.

Based on the Veteran and coach's schedule and flexibility, coaches could either schedule one appointment at a time with Veterans or schedule all appointments at the start.

<u>Example Coach5 Schedule</u>

Welcome Session. Review Welcome module; Veteran to complete Modules 1 and 2 before next meeting.

- Coach Call 1. Review Modules 1 and 2. Veteran to complete Modules 3 and 4 before next meeting.
- Coach Call 2. Review Modules 3 and 4. Veteran to complete Module 5 before next meeting.
- Coach Call 3. Review Module 5. Veteran to complete Modules 6 and 7 before next meeting.

- Coach Call 4. Review Modules 6 and 7. Veteran to complete Modules 8, 9, and 10 before next meeting.
- Coach Call 5. Review Modules 8, 9, and 10. 5

Process of Coaching

Effective coaching skills overlap significantly with foundational therapeutic skills (e.g., being a warm, empathic listener to establish strong rapport with Veterans). However, there are also unique aspects of coaching, highlighted below:

1. Coaching takes a "Veteran-led" approach, whereby the Veteran chooses what to focus on each session. We encourage coaches to start coaching with open-ended questions such as, "What did you find important in the recent material?" or "I saw you completed XYZ – how have you been using these skills in your life?" In ideal coaching sessions, the Veteran leads the conversation.
2. Even though it is Veteran-led, coaching is a more active approach than some therapeutic approaches. Coaches can offer suggestions, collaboratively problem-solve, and provide guided help. Coaching is a faster pace and, therefore, more directive than a full course of therapy.
3. When coaching, you may not know with certainty what content the Veteran would like to focus on; therefore, you may not always know what content you will be coaching before the session begins. Though you have a general idea of what is covered in each module, coaching requires the ability to respond flexibly to what Veterans want to discuss as it relates to applying the skills in their lives
4. You often cannot cover all the material in each module during your coaching calls. webSTAIR is designed so that Veterans learn all the content directly from the web program, and coaches provide support for skills application when Veterans are stuck. Trying to teach content during the coaching calls would be inconsistent with this model, though psychoeducation and clarification are important components when Veterans have difficulty understanding content. Strategize with Veterans around what is more challenging for them, and tailor your approach to that.

Self-guided Model

The Self-guided model may be a good fit for Veterans who do not want weekly/biweekly sessions or for whom sessions are difficult to arrange (e.g., difficulty with connectivity or securing a private space to connect), who present with mild distress, or who are *highly motivated to engage in self-directed care.*

We would recommend that coaches reach out to Veterans on a weekly basis to assess progress throughout the program, answering any questions, and encouraging completion of modules and practicing skills. This can be done in addition to scheduled coaching sessions and may be completed via phone call or secure messaging. This type of outreach will help with Veteran engagement in the webSTAIR program. Additionally, coaches can monitor progress through the Coach Dashboard, or ask Veterans to self-report progress in a message sent via MyHealtheVet or via voicemail.

For Veterans progressing nicely (i.e., completing one or more module per week), weekly messages might encourage continued engagement with the program and reinforce skill use. However, if Veterans are not using the program, weekly messages should be more directive or offer opportunity to connect with the coach via phone or video session for a structured coaching session. You can then assist with technological problems, material comprehension, motivation, or relevance and application to the Veterans' life. Once the Veterans are back on track, weekly messages might again be provided to support their engagement with the program.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN INTRODUCING VETERANS TO WEBSTAIR

- webSTAIR is *present-focused* – focuses on teaching coping skills for current symptoms without revisiting the past.
- Veterans complete 10 modules over 10-15 weeks, focusing on emotion management and relationship functioning.
- The web-based program (webSTAIR.org) is private and secure and allows Veterans to work at their own pace and practice skills independently.
- Coaching appointments are conducted via telehealth and, therefore, there is no need to come to a VA facility.
- Coaching is different than therapy. The focus of calls will be on skills learned during the online program and applying them to the Veterans' lives.

HOW TO ACCESS THE WEBSTAIR PROGRAM

For you to receive a webSTAIR log in, a brief training must be completed. Currently, there are two ways to complete webSTAIR training. A virtual training may be organized via local site leadership in partnership with the webSTAIR Program Office (primary contact, Adam Jacobs, Adam.Jacobs2@va.gov). Alternatively, a recording of the training may be accessed via Talent Management System (TMS); once completed, you can email your certificate to Adam Jacobs to receive log in information. The TMS training is brief (~four hours) and offers CEUs for completion; however, it does not offer a live consultation series following the training. Recorded consultation topics are available via TMS. Pilot research shows that live consultation leads to an increase in engagement from both coaches and Veterans; therefore, a live training and consultation series (organized by site leadership) may be a preferable method to obtain webSTAIR log in credentials.

Once webSTAIR credentials have been received, you can navigate to the program through the following url: www.webSTAIR.org. The program may be accessed either within or outside VA. It is best to access the program via Chrome, but it can be accessed from any web browser.

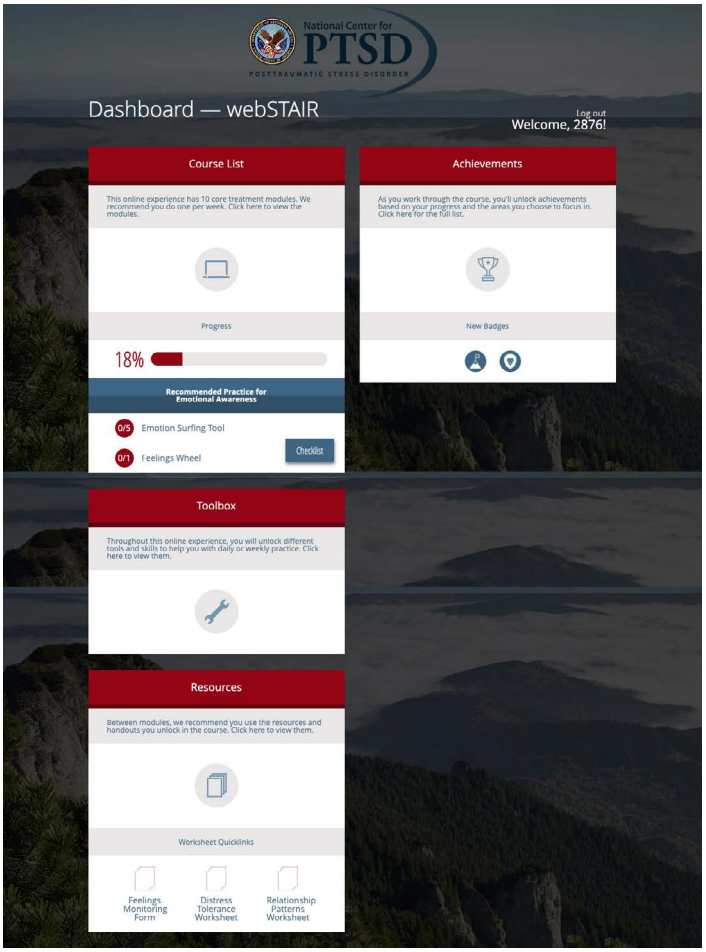
DASHBOARDS & PROGRAM FEATURES

When you log in to the webSTAIR program, you will be directed to the Clinician Dashboard (described below). All elements of the program that are available to Veterans will also be accessible by you. In other words, in addition to a Clinician Dashboard, coaches also have access to a "user account," so that you can navigate through the program as the Veteran does. This user program can be launched by scrolling to the bottom of the Clinician Dashboard page and selecting *"View STAIR Course Content."* All handouts, worksheets, and other skills can be printed or downloaded within the program; this is true for Veterans and coaches. We encourage you to navigate through the program ahead of your Veterans so that you are familiar with the content the Veteran will be reviewing and practicing.

CLINICIAN DASHBOARD

After you complete webSTAIR training, you will receive a Clinician ID and several Veteran IDs. More Veteran IDs can be requested at any time they are needed by contacting the webSTAIR program office. Once logged in, you are able to see which IDs are available to distribute to your Veterans, which IDs are "active" (i.e., have already been distributed), and which IDs have completed the program. No names or other private health information is visible through the Clinician Dashboard; Veteran IDs are random numbers that you will provide to your Veterans. You are only able to see a Veteran's activity within webSTAIR but not content that was entered by the Veteran. For example, if a Veteran completes a worksheet, you can see that a worksheet was completed but cannot see the content written on the worksheet. This is true for all content entered into the program by a Veteran, with the exception of aggregate self-assessment scores (described below), which are visible to both Veterans and their coaches. You may choose to use your Clinician Dashboard to learn more about how the Veteran is using webSTAIR and which skills/activities/handouts the Veteran has viewed, as well as gather a general sense of the Veteran's overall progress through webSTAIR.

VETERAN DASHBOARD



After logging in to webSTAIR, Veterans see their Dashboard with the *Course List, Recommended Practice, Achievements, Toolbox, Resources, and My Wellness Progress.* The modules Veterans complete are under the Course List. Skills and tools learned throughout the modules are collected in the *Toolbox*; and worksheets, handouts, and roleplay scenarios are collected in the *Resources* section. Progress monitoring is available after completing check-ins at least twice. Veterans are reinforced for engaging with the program through *Achievements* – badges added to their account for logging in, completing modules, and practicing skills. More information on each section follows.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Self-assessment is a built-in feature that helps Veterans and coaches monitor progress during the course. Veterans are introduced to self-assessment during the Welcome module, where they complete the 12-item measure for the first time. They are given automatic feedback from the program on their overall scores in the four areas of assessment: PTSD symptoms, emotion management, beliefs about self, and beliefs about others. Veterans are encouraged to discuss their scores and any other changes they are experiencing with you. They will be prompted to complete the self-assessment each time they launch a new module for the first time (modules 1-9) and a final time during module 10.

Again, each module starts with a brief **self-assessment** of PTSD symptoms, emotion management, beliefs about self, and beliefs about others. Starting with Module 1, Veterans receive feedback on how their symptoms have increased, decreased, or stayed the same over the last week. A summary of content, estimated completion time, recommended skills practice, key points for Veterans, and helpful hints from coaches who have previously used the program are included for each module.

MY WELLNESS PROGRESS

This program is meant to help Veterans feel better more often. At the beginning of each module, the program will ask them about their general well-being. It'll keep track of their answers so they can see their progress and how their practice is paying off. The program will prompt them when it's time to enter their sense of wellness. Additionally, feedback from the **self-assessments** completed at the start of each module is tracked here. There is a graph tracking progress on the dashboard after they complete Module 3.

RESOURCES

As Veterans unlock skills practice worksheets in each module, these will be added to their dashboard under *Resources*. If Veterans need to print blank worksheets, they can do so from here. Veterans don't need to re-enter the module to complete a worksheet entry unless they want to. *Resources* items are noted in **green** throughout the document.

CATEGORY	RESOURCE	MODULE	DESCRIPTION
WORKSHEETS	Feelings Monitoring Form	1	Asks Veterans to identify triggering situations and the feelings, intensity at start, duration, thoughts, behaviors, coping skills used; rate the effectiveness, and intensity of emotion after using coping skill(s)
	Distress Tolerance Worksheet	5	Assists Veterans in identifying coping skills to help tolerate distress necessary to reach goals
	Relationship Patterns Worksheet	6	Helps Veterans identify relationship behaviors and understand why they occur
HANDOUTS	Channels of Emotion	1	Teaches Veterans that, when an emotion hits, it can change how they think, how their body feels, and even how they behave
	Assertiveness Roleplay	8	Allows Veterans to practice assertiveness in difficult situations
	Relationship Patterns FAQ		
	Basic Personal Rights		
	Power Balances In Relationships		
	Respect Bookend Examples		
	Trauma-Related Power Barriers		
	Closeness Strategies		
	Compassion Balancing		
	Self-Compassion Benefits		

TOOLBOX

Throughout this program, Veterans will be learning about different strategies and techniques, including visualization exercises, meditations, ways to challenge thoughts, and many more! After they learn a new skill in a module, they can always find it again by going to their toolbox. Veterans don't have to re-enter a module to find it. *Toolbox* items are noted in **orange** throughout the document.

CATEGORY	RESOURCE	MODULE	DESCRIPTION
BODY CHANNEL	Focused Breathing	2	Provides a guided breathing audio recording available for download at 3, 5, or 10 minutes in length
	Soothe the Senses	2	Provides a calming reminder for each of the five senses that can be easily accessed. Completed card available to print.
	Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)	2	Provides guided PMR available for download. Moves through different body parts with option to skip any region.
	Feelings Wheel	1	Identifies six key emotions and emotions in the same families; provides examples of body sensations, thoughts, and core beliefs that might occur with each key emotion ((joy, anger, fear, sadness, sense of power, and safety)
	Intensity Scale	1	Helps Veterans anchor emotional intensity to familiar situations by developing their own personalized intensity scale

CATEGORY	RESOURCE	MODULE	DESCRIPTION
THOUGHT CHANNEL	Emotion Surfing	1	Helps Veterans practice noticing the channels of emotions (body, thought, behavior), emotional intensity, how it peaks, and how it diminishes
	Checking Your Beliefs	3	Identifies evidence for and evidence against common thoughts (selected from list in program) or can enter own thoughts
	Thought Shifting	3	Helps Veterans identify an initial situation, what helped to shift thoughts, alternative thoughts used, and how the situation was affected
	Positive Imagery	3	Allows Veterans to choose a calming image and describe sensory details (sight, smell, sound, other details) that they are encouraged to bring to mind when distressed.
	Positive Self Statements	3	Suggests common positive self-statements and encourages Veterans to use one of the examples or create their own personal mantra to practice. Their selected encouraging self-statement will appear on their dashboard after completion of the module.
	Self-Compassion Meditation	9	Encourages Veterans to have compassion for themselves as they are learning and implementing changes in their lives.

CATEGORY	RESOURCE	MODULE	DESCRIPTION
BEHAVIOR CHANNEL	Simple Break / Time Out	4	Helps Veterans learn to stop situations before they escalate, communicate their intentions to others, and engage in healthy coping during the break; they are encouraged to return to the situation when they and others are ready.
	Pleasurable Activities	4	Offers suggestions for pleasurable activities in different domains (e.g., creativity, being social, getting outdoors); Veterans create a printable list.
	Replace Problem Behaviors	4	For each of six common emotions, allows Veterans to identify opposite actions to engage in rather than problematic coping
	My Support & Self-Care Plan	Welcome & 4	Welcome module: Allows Veterans to list the names and phone numbers of people in their lives who want them to succeed and to whom they can reach out when distressed; Module 4: Allows Veterans to develop a specific self-care plan for when they are distressed. They choose one or more tools and identify thought, behavior, and body channel indicators that they need to implement the plan.

CATEGORY	RESOURCE	MODULE	DESCRIPTION
RELATIONSHIP SKILLS	"I" Messages		
	Assertiveness Practice		
	Respect Bookend Practice		
	Saying No	8	Allows Veterans to practice when and how to say no
	Asking For Help	8	Allows Veterans to practice different strategies of asking for help
	Closeness Practice	9	Allows Veterans to practice small talk

COURSE LIST

This is where Veterans go to see a list of all available modules. They'll be able to see which ones they've not started, which ones they've started but not completed, and which ones they've completed. Veterans can always revisit modules even if they're marked as complete. Recommended skills practice for each module is accessible via the checklist that becomes available as each module is completed. **Tools** and **Resources** (from tables above) are noted in the corresponding modules and recommended skills practice below.

GENERAL HELPFUL HINTS FROM VA PROVIDERS WHO HAVE USED WEBSTAIR

Coaching:

- Emphasize to Veterans that some webSTAIR content may be new to them, while some ideas will be more of a review or a refresher of things they've previously learned. The program and worksheets are helpful because they organize the material and encourage skills practice.
- Normalize that not all tools will work for all people, and Veterans will find some tools more helpful than others. Encourage Veterans to try them all, and help them problem-solve challenges so they can figure out what works best for them. None of these is a brand new technique, but the program helps consolidate.
- Encourage Veterans to try everything at least two to three times, and to experiment with different skills in different environments or situations, as this helps them identify which might be helpful in the future and when. Learning new things is inherently uncomfortable, but reassure them that they will get more skilled with practice.
- In general, most Veterans find the relationship modules more challenging than the emotion regulation modules. Coaching may look different for the different sections, with more emphasis on process in the latter modules.
- Encourage and praise regular worksheet completion, as this is where learning and skills practice really come together. If Veterans are willing, encourage them to verbally or digitally share their entries with you whenever possible.

Session Content/Therapy:

- It is difficult to cover all the content in the limited time; therefore, focus your efforts on making sure Veterans understand the skills. One way to do this is to ask Veterans what worked best for them, and then review the other skills that were presented as time permits, with a special emphasis on problem-solving around any challenges Veterans encountered in applying skills.

- If Veterans are new to treatment, these skills are new and exciting to try out. Other Veterans have encountered these skills elsewhere and may already be using them. Some find it validating to have a name and rationale for what they are already doing, or an opportunity to recognize and affirm their strengths.
- If Veterans are feeling stuck or unmotivated, try helping them connect to their values.
- Veterans also can recognize how far they have come over the course of the program. It can help to point out how much progress they have made.

WELCOME

In this module, Veterans will complete the first **self-assessment** and get an overview of what webSTAIR is and how they can best use this program. Veterans also gain an understanding of how trauma could be negatively impacting their lives. Veterans will complete the **My Support & Self Care Plan** (Tool from the Behavior Channel), identifying individuals in their lives who want them to succeed and entering names and contact numbers of those to whom they might reach out for distraction or support when distressed. Additionally, Veterans will identify **Treatment Goals** (Handout from Resources) from a list of possible goals (e.g., manage emotions better, improve relationships).

Key Points for Veterans and Helpful Hints from Champions

Coaching:

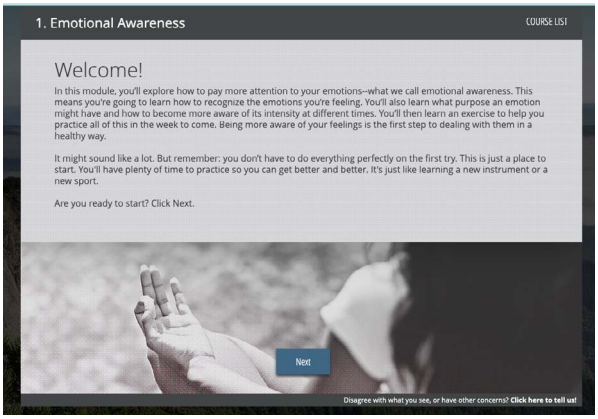
- Highlight the importance of including at least one entry in the My Support Plan – there is no need to focus on having a person for each category. Also, Veterans can change categories by typing in a new heading into the Contact Type column.
- Emphasize that no one has access or can read their entries; however, Veterans can choose to share portions of the program with others, if they wish (such as significant other, therapist, etc.).
- Encourage Veterans to save the Veteran's Crisis Line info in their phones - for their safety and potentially to help other Veterans in the future.
- Instruct Veterans to do the modules in order – even though it allows them to do them out of order. The material builds on itself, so it makes the most sense to go in order.

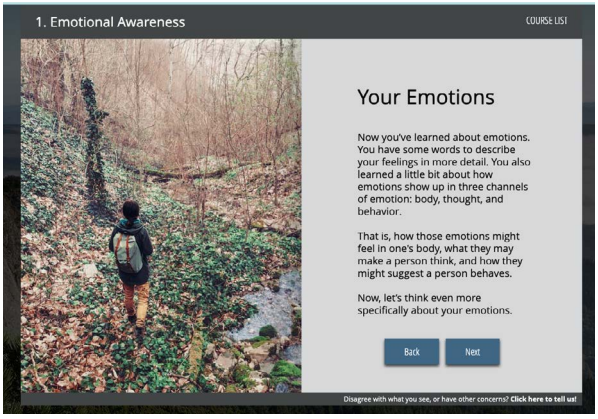
Session Content/Therapy:

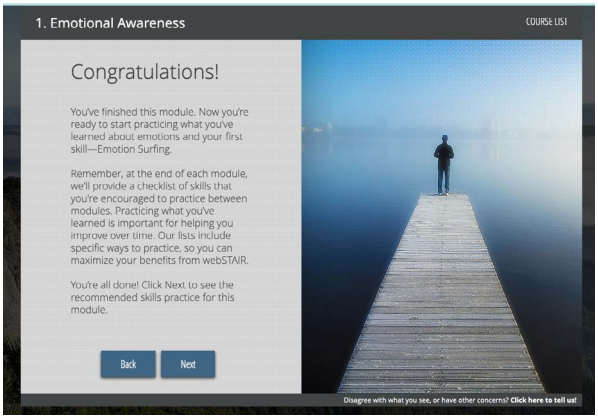
- Talk about the goals listed in webSTAIR, but also think about other goals that might apply and are personally relevant to the Veteran. Veterans can usually identify one or two things they want to work on.
- Briefly discussing current coping can be a great opportunity to generate "buy-in" for Veterans. Checking in about current healthy coping can highlight strengths that you can build upon together, while discussing coping Veterans identify as less healthy coping can generate "buy-in" for learning alternative strategies.

- When reviewing the self-assessment, frame it as an important way to check in with themselves and with you as coach about how they have been feeling and an opportunity to reflect on what things in their life might be impacting them in a positive or negative way.

MODULE 1: EMOTIONAL AWARENESS







In this module, Veterans explore how to pay more attention to their emotions--what is called emotional awareness. This means they're going to learn how to recognize the emotions they're feeling. Veterans start with a **self-assessment**; at the end of the module, Veterans can begin to review changes to their assessment scores from their dashboard. Veterans are introduced to the **Feelings Wheel** handout that identifies synonyms and how one might feel physically, think, and believe with each of six key emotions: joy, anger, fear, sadness, a sense of power, and safety. Veterans unlock the **Channels of Emotion** handout that teaches that, when an emotion hits, it can change the way they think, the way their body feels, and even how they behave. Veterans also learn what purpose an emotion might have and how to become more aware of its intensity at different times. The **Intensity Scale** handout helps Veterans anchor emotional intensity to familiar situations. Veterans will then learn about **Emotion Surfing**, a tool from the Thought Channel, to help them practice noticing the channels of emotions, emotional intensity, how it peaks, and how it diminishes. Being more aware of their feelings is the first step to dealing with them in a healthy way. Finally, Veterans access the **Feelings Monitoring Form**, a worksheet that asks Veterans to identify triggering situations and the feelings, intensity at start, duration, thoughts, behaviors, and coping skills used; and rate the effectiveness and intensity after coping skill that follow.

Recommended Skills Practice

- Practice the **Emotion Surfing** tool daily before the next module.
- Check out the **Feelings Wheel** resource once before the next module.

Key Points for Veterans and Helpful Hints from Champions

Coaching:

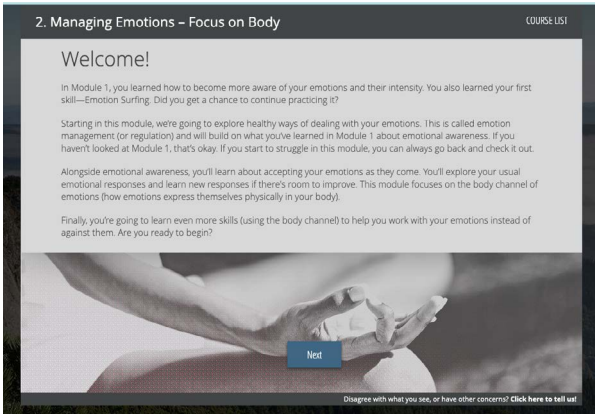
- For the Intensity Scale, pick one scenario, and consider what might make it more or less intense - rather than choosing different scenarios for different intensities.
- With the Feelings Monitoring Form, Veterans will try to describe their emotions in terms of their thoughts or behaviors (e.g., “I felt dumb,” “I punched a wall”); encourage them to reference the Feelings Wheel to find an emotion rather than a thought.
- On the Feelings Monitoring Form, Veterans will sometimes get stuck with the coping skills column or revert back to deep breathing. Sometimes it is helpful to complete an entry of the Feelings Monitoring Form together in session.
- Some Veterans will say, "My feeling isn't on the Feelings Wheel," or "I've never felt that emotion." Help them find a description close to, or related to, what they are feeling.
- All of us have these emotions; skills help us move down the intensity scale enough to decide how to react in a way that is consistent with our values rather than react from an overwhelmed state.

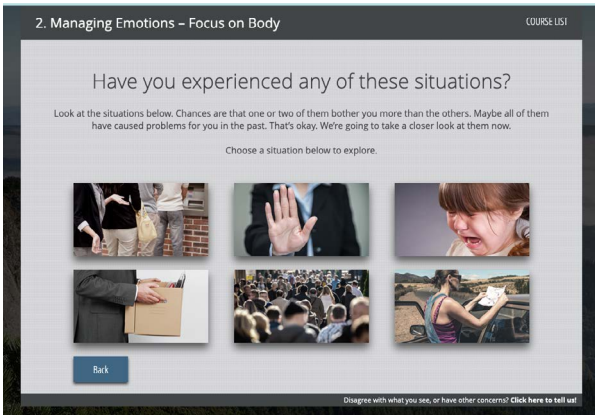
Session Content/Therapy:

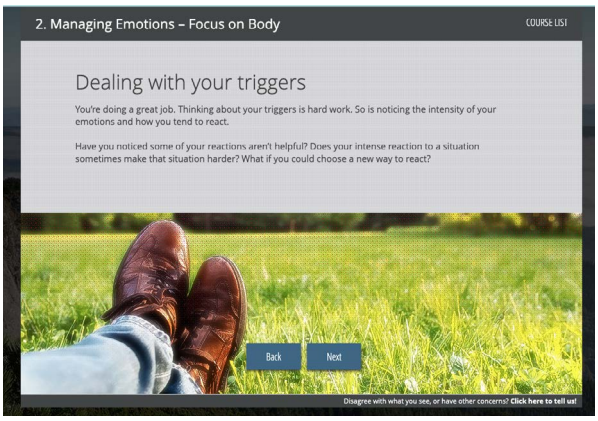
- Help Veterans notice which emotions are within their “comfort zone” or which emotions they are most familiar with (e.g., some Veterans are very “comfortable” with grief or depression, but when they feel happy they are waiting for the other shoe to drop). Veterans may notice they tend to be more judgmental about certain emotions—it can be helpful to ask which emotions they are “okay” with saying or noticing.
- Point out the function of emotions, and slow down and think about this – connect this to what emotions we are comfortable with. Think about a world without emotions – what would that be like?
- Highlight that the intensity scale can be a way to observe their feelings. Ask Veterans if they go from ”0-10” quickly and whether they wanted to stop the escalation before reaching a 10.
- Connect emotion surfing with “numbing” that a lot of Veterans do. It is not possible to just numb bad feelings; usually, the end result is a numbing of all. Use the Emotion Surfing analogy/concept with all types of emotions, not just “unacceptable” ones.
- Suggest to Veterans the **Feelings Monitoring Form** is like a worksheet. Module 1 introduces the category components. The remainder of the emotion regulation modules introduce tools to manage emotional intensity.

MODULE 2: MANAGING EMOTIONS – FOCUS ON BODY

In this module, Veterans explore healthy emotion management that builds on their growing awareness of their feelings. Veterans start with a **self-assessment** and receive feedback on how symptoms have shifted in the last week. Veterans explore their usual emotional responses to common triggers and practice some skills in the body channel of emotions to help them cope with their feelings. They learn **Focused Breathing**, an audio-guided mindful breathing exercise; **Soothe the Senses**, an exercise to identify soothing inputs for each of the five senses; and **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**, an exercise to systematically tense and relax groups of muscles to reduce unconscious tension.







Recommended Skills Practice

- Practice one skill from the **Body Channel Tools** daily before the next module.
- Complete a new entry in the **Feelings Monitoring Form** twice before the next module.

Key Points for Veterans and Helpful Hints from Champions

Coaching:

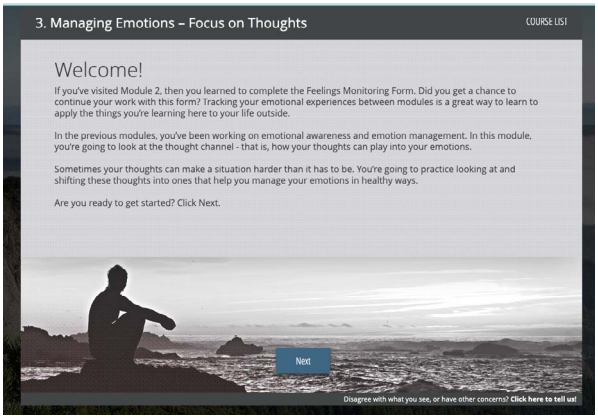
- Encourage Veterans to identify something from each sense for the Soothing Sense exercise. It can be helpful to identify ways they are already doing this (e.g., scented candle, carrying a photo of loved one in wallet) to increase understanding/buy-in.
- With breathing and PMR, it can be common for Veterans to feel overwhelmed, so suggest they can practice PMR in one focused area of the body (e.g., face for jaw tightness/grinding teeth, or hands/arms, etc.).
- Channels help to "chunk" the tools that you have learned in webSTAIR or in other settings (e.g., yoga breathing).
- You may want to practice focused breathing in session; make sure you can see on the video what Veterans are doing, and check they are not over-breathing, etc.

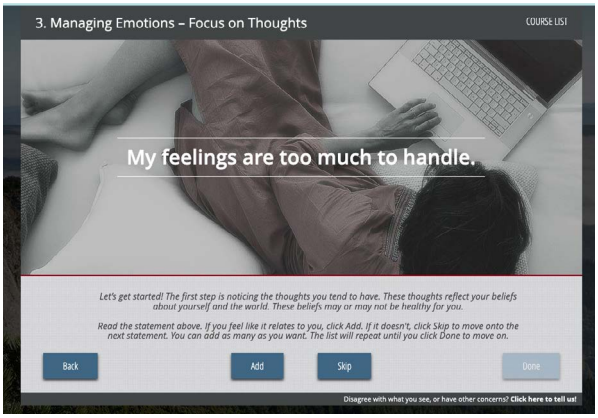
Session Content/Therapy:

- This is one way to calm our bodies, and the mind will follow. (e.g., walking through Walmart, take a moment to smell the coffee aisle, and then keep going). Everything is a matter of degrees – if you can do something to shift it down, then you have space to make it through the day. This is better than ignoring emotions until we are at a six or seven; then we blow. People with a hair trigger usually aren't noticing the bottom two thirds of the intensity scale.
- Veterans will find certain channels more engaging or appealing than others. Take this as a strength – select skills from their preferred channel as they are getting to know the other channels.
- Focused breathing and PMR can be threatening; some people get anxious about not being anxious. You may want to use other interventions first, – maybe bring in the counting or a picture of a wave. Start with these as a way to build up to being more comfortable with relaxation.

MODULE 3: MANAGING EMOTIONS – FOCUS ON THOUGHTS

In this module, Veterans explore the thought channel of emotion – how thoughts play into how they feel. Veterans start with a **self-assessment** and receive feedback on how symptoms have shifted over the last week. They have a chance to practice noticing their thoughts by identifying which from a list of common thoughts apply for them. They also learn some skills to adjust thought patterns that can make a situation more difficult than necessary. Veterans learn **Checking Your Beliefs**, a cognitive exercise identifying evidence for and against difficult thoughts; **Positive Self-Statements**, an exercise to identify a positive mantra; **Positive Imagery**, an exercise in which they choose a calming image and describe associated sensory details; and **Thought Shifting**, a tool with which Veterans practice intentionally shifting thoughts away from unhelpful beliefs or distress to another activity or thought. Finally, Veterans are encouraged to consider some adaptive Beliefs about Feelings (e.g., reminders that they can accept and feel their feelings without letting them control their actions).





Recommended Skills Practice

- Practice one skill from the **Thought Channel Tools** daily before next module.
- Complete a new entry in the **Feelings Monitoring Form** resource twice before the next module.

Key Points for Veterans and Helpful Hints from Champions

Coaching:

- Veterans tend to struggle with the cognitive tools taught in Module 3. Check in to assess understanding and application of these skills, especially Checking Beliefs and Thought Shifting.
- The Beliefs about Feelings tool is offered as one of five thought channel tools in the module itself. However, it is not found in the Veterans' toolbox, meaning that Veterans will need to re-enter the module to review the skill and that any practice will not be tracked. For Veterans who like this skill, it can be helpful to suggest that they take a picture of the screen so they can access it easily in future.
- Remind Veterans that pressing the "back button" will erase content on the Positive Imagery tool.
- Some Veterans might feel a bit suspicious of these tools and believe they are "Pollyannaish." Emphasize that these skills aren't about pretending everything is positive or simply substituting a negative thought for an affirmation but rather about evaluating what we say to ourselves and trying to bring in encouraging or motivating thoughts or images when we can. It can be helpful to normalize our human tendency to notice the negative, while emphasizing what powerful resources our minds can be when we put them to good use.
- Emphasize that thought channel skills, in particular, require a bit of practice and repetition before they feel natural or authentic. Many Veterans identify a "fake-it-till-you-make-it" approach as being helpful here.

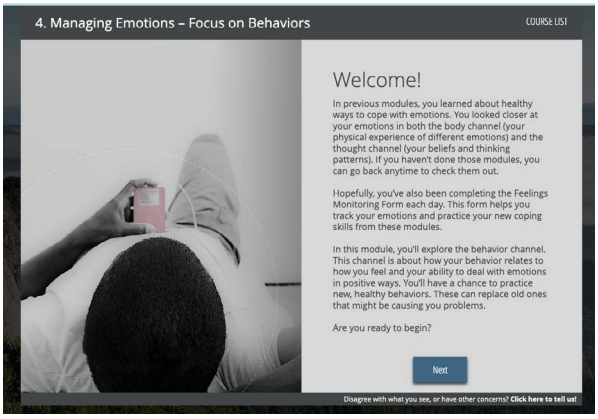
Session Content/Therapy:

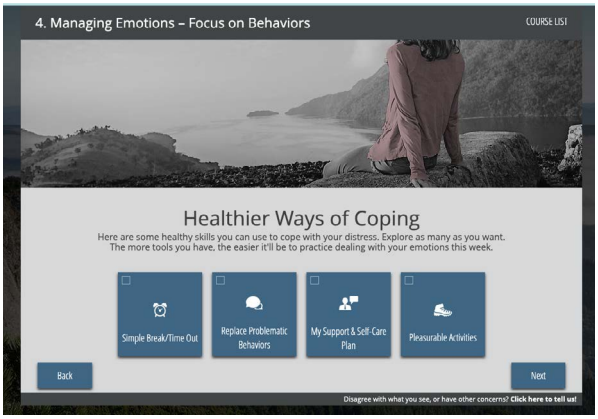
- Watch for Veterans trying to confirm a negative belief with the Checking Beliefs tool. Sticking to factual pieces of information (rather than opinions) is helpful.
- Sometimes Veterans struggle to identify a negative belief in the Checking Beliefs skill. Encourage them to choose one of the common beliefs listed, or see if there is a thought you noticed in your discussion that could be worthwhile (e.g., "I'm a failure because I didn't get the project done on time"). Steer Veterans away from starting with a trauma belief (i.e., "It's my fault the incident happened").
- If you've gone through several strategies to change beliefs, it can be helpful to discuss when to change a belief versus when to accept a belief.

- Positive self-statements are more powerful if they can be condensed into a couple of strong “mantras” the Veteran is already using (e.g., “I got this,” or “I’m trying”) and can repeat and practice. Be on the lookout for these in session. For Veterans who have difficulty generating such statements, it can be helpful to look back on what they told themselves or others to get through hard times in the military, as they can transfer this strength to their life now. Many Veterans find the “I got through tough times in the past, and I can do it again” suggestion helpful. Sometimes labelling these “encouraging” self-statements is helpful for some Veterans. Sometimes we tell ourselves “we can’t” for so long that we believe it.

MODULE 4: MANAGING EMOTIONS – FOCUS ON BEHAVIORS

In this module, Veterans explore the behavior channel of emotions. Veterans start with a **self-assessment** and receive feedback on how symptoms have shifted over the last week. Second, they identify current coping behaviors. They learn how behaviors influence emotions. Then Veterans learn how to use their behavior to manage emotions in a healthy way. Veterans learn **Simple Break/Time Out**, a tool teaching them to take a few deep breaths and think before reacting automatically to an urge with an unhelpful coping behavior or to deliberately step away rather than avoid situations; **Replace Problematic Behaviors**, a tool teaching Veterans to engage in opposite actions in response to emotions; and **Pleasurable Activities**, a tool that helps Veterans identify activities they enjoy to help lift mood and reduce distress. They also revisit **My Support & Self-Care Plan** from the Welcome Module and create a specific plan when distressed, choosing a tool to use and identifying thought, behavior, and body channel indicators they need to implement the plan.





Recommended Skills Practice

- Practice one skill from the ***Behavior Channel Tools*** daily before next module.
- Complete a new entry in the **Feelings Monitoring Form** resource twice before the next module.

Key Points for Veterans and Helpful Hints from Champions

Coaching:

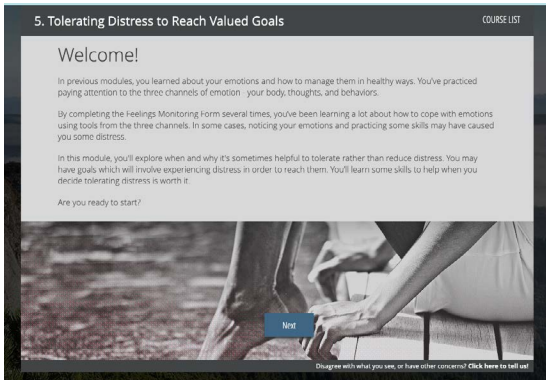
- Remind Veterans of the difference between Simple Break/Time Out and avoidance or pretending there is no problem. When using the tool appropriately, Veterans come back to the situation when they are in a better headspace. When avoiding, they don't re-approach until the issue is forced, or the same problem occurs, again.
- Acting the opposite seems ridiculous, but many Veterans say this can make a shift (e.g., walk dogs instead of going directly to bed). Offer ideas of how these tools can be used.
- When reviewing the self-care plan: How do you know you will need these tools? What tools are you going to use?

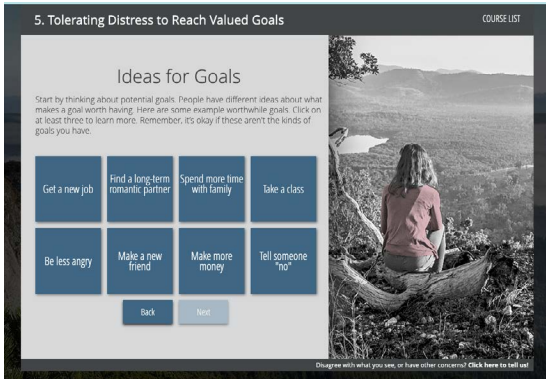
Session Content/Therapy:

- Ask them if they would be willing to consider pleasurable activities - something they haven't done in a while or something they have wanted to try for a while. It can be something very small. Often, we trade safety and security for risk and reward.
- All skills can be used to take care of ourselves, but these are explicitly about increasing positive emotions and building resilience. Sometimes Veterans do not think that doing a pleasurable activity, or taking a time out, is a skill like all the others. They help us bounce back in challenging times. -Also, these skills can be helpful and reviewed in the next module addressing distress tolerance.

MODULE 5: TOLERATING DISTRESS TO REACH VALUED GOALS

In this module, Veterans learn about when and why it's sometimes helpful to tolerate rather than reduce distress. Veterans start with a **self-assessment** and receive feedback on how symptoms have shifted over the last week. They see ideas for goals as well as learn and practice skills to help them tolerate distress so they can reach their goals. Psychoeducation is provided on the benefits of tolerating distress, how distress can make it hard to reach goals, and when it is important to tolerate distress versus okay not to. Veterans set a goal that is relevant, achievable, measurable, and timely, as well as identify pros and cons for tolerating distress to reach this goal. Results are logged in the **Distress Tolerance Worksheet**.





Recommended Skills Practice

- Practice preferred skills from each channel in the **Tools** section daily before next module.
- Create a new entry in the **Distress Tolerance Worksheet** resource twice before the next module.

Key Points for Veterans and Helpful Hints from Champions

Coaching:

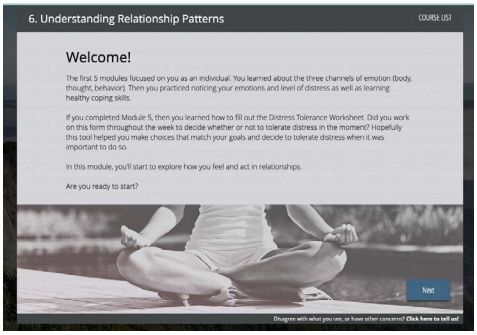
- Remind Veterans that pressing the "back button" will erase content on the Decisional balance to Tolerate Distress + Using Coping strategies activity.
- Help Veterans understand how tolerating distress is different than trying a dangerous activity or not avoiding one that is relatively safe.

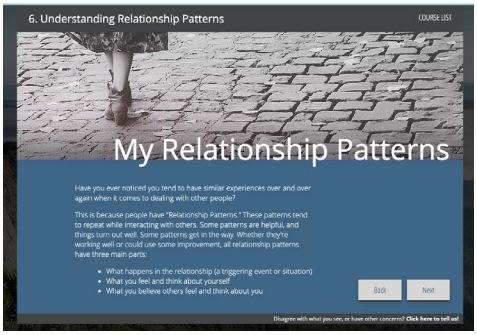
Session Content/Therapy:

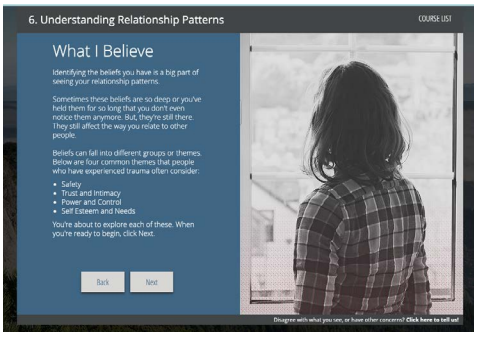
- This session frames goal setting while taking into account the emotional costs of the goal. Often we consider the practicalities but forget the emotional piece, which can lead to unforeseen barriers.
- Try to work through a couple of experiences with Veterans, highlighting that a lot of us have done goal-setting and considered pros and cons but don't often think about how much stress may be a part of achieving a goal. The military is very task-oriented rather than process-oriented – help Veterans make this shift away from "checking the box."
- Start with the cons rather than the pros (consistent with theories of motivational interviewing); this can make a big difference by first addressing the difficult aspects about pursing a goal – also talk about why they would do it (reasons for change).

MODULE 6: UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIP PATTERNS

In this module, Veterans shift from focusing on themselves as individuals to explore how they feel and act in relationships. Veterans start with a **self-assessment** and receive feedback on how symptoms have shifted over the last week. Veterans learn how relationship patterns are triggered by events, impact how they think and feel about themselves, and impact what they believe others think and feel about them. Veterans work through example scenarios to understand how relationship patterns function. Next, Veterans learn that trauma-related relationship beliefs and behaviors often involve concerns about (1) safety, (2) trust and intimacy, (3) power and control, and (4) self-esteem and needs. Finally, Veterans are introduced to the **Relationship Patterns Worksheet**.







Recommended Skills Practice

- Practice preferred skills from each channel in the **Tools** section daily before next module.
- Create a new entry in the **Relationship Patterns Worksheet** resource twice before the next module .

Key Points for Veterans and Helpful Hints from Champions

Coaching:

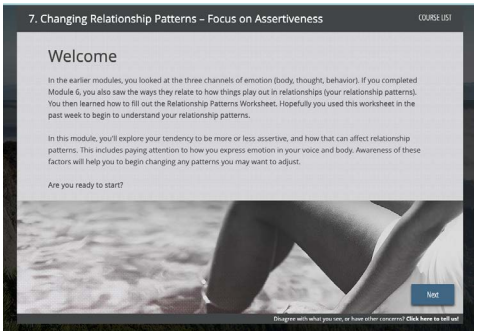
- The relationship modules are more example-based and, therefore, do not always provide explicit skills. It is important to discuss with Veterans how they are applying them to content and help them consider ways to apply them if they are having difficulty doing so.
- Help Veterans tie together dysfunctional patterns and behaviors that might be influenced by trauma.
- Remind Veterans that relationships in webSTAIR are not limited to romantic relationships but rather encompass all sorts of relationships (e.g., with friends, family, coworkers, even strangers).
- Veterans sometimes feel "left hanging" with the Relationship Patterns Worksheet, as there is no corrective behavior. Try to redirect this frustration, and encourage them to pick up on the triggering situation; but also notice positive feelings, and capture that with the Relationship Patterns Worksheet.

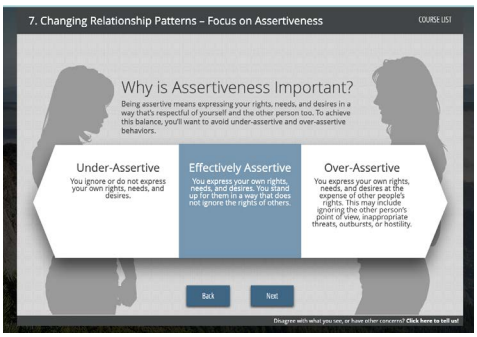
Session Content/Therapy:

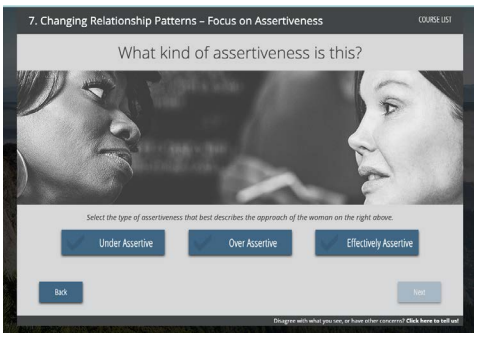
- Emphasize that there is so much going on in relationships – we are usually doing a pretty good job most of the time. We are just trying to refine the 5-10% of the times that relationships aren't going well.
- A lot of our expectations and behaviors are easier to identify/understand than trying to understand our underlying beliefs. Thinking about examples of behaviors before trying to identify beliefs may help Veterans connect with beliefs more easily (e.g., what behaviors would relate to power and control).
- Understand what Veterans are assuming, what is helpful to them, and what might be inadvertently contributing to avoiding new opportunities.
- This is another area that can point out areas of growth – Veterans can think about what they bring to the relationship (what behaviors for power and control) – they can make shifts and notice that compared to their functioning five years ago.

MODULE 7: CHANGING RELATIONSHIP PATTERNS—FOCUS ON ASSERTIVENESS

In this module, Veterans learn about different kinds of relationship patterns. They also discover which ones they tend to have. This module will describe how to begin changing any patterns Veterans may want to adjust. This includes paying attention to how they express emotion in their voice and body. Veterans start with a **self-assessment** and receive feedback on how symptoms have shifted over the last week. Psychoeducation is provided on common boundaries in relationships that are not close enough, too close, and ideal; and an exercise is completed by Veterans identifying different boundary types from example vignettes. They also hear recordings and view video examples of how tone and body language impact interactions. Finally, Veterans learn how they can start to change their relationship.







Recommended Skills Practice

- Practice preferred skills from each channel in the **Tools** section daily before next module.
- Create a new entry in the **Relationship Patterns Worksheet** resource twice before the next module.

Key Points for Veterans and Helpful Hints from Champions

Coaching:

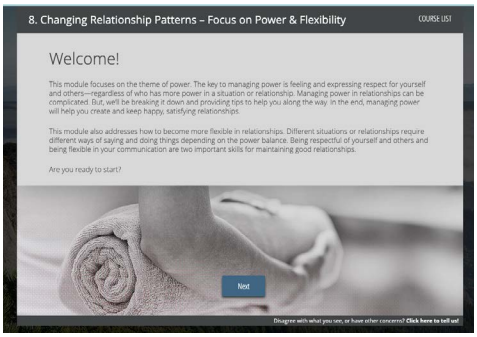
- Some Veterans ask about mind-reading – explain the difference between picking up on schema/pattern versus mind reading. Suggest that is the way people might be seeing the world.
- Notice that there are pros to "too close" and pros to "not close enough"; reasons for this could be related to trauma.
- Review the Relationship Patterns Worksheet – help them practice getting the pieces for each. Work through some examples together.

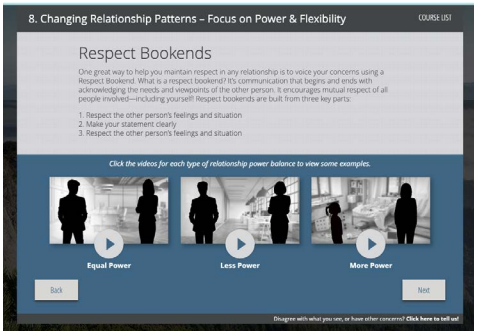
Session Content/Therapy:

- Looking at how people interact can lead to change. It is possible to shift those patterns, and this offers hope.
- It is helpful to consider times when Veterans have been in relationships and what behaviors they had when they were too close versus not close enough.
- Patterns have served an important purpose. All relationship patterns come from experience – they protect us and help us survive – but maybe now that we are in different environment, things can be different. We want to imagine what could be possible in the new environment.

MODULE 8: CHANGING RELATIONSHIP PATTERNS – FOCUS ON POWER AND FLEXIBILITY

In this module, Veterans learn how setting relationship boundaries requires flexibility, and the right communication style depends on their goals and the type of relationship. Veterans start with a **self-assessment** and receive feedback on how symptoms have shifted over the last week. They learn about assertiveness and closeness and how these two must be balanced. Veterans move through the **Assertiveness Roleplay** scenario and/or the **Closeness Roleplay** scenario, where they select an interaction partner and their tone of voice, as well as their own words and how they might respond to their partner. They are given feedback on their selections and their level of assertiveness or closeness.





Recommended Skills Practice

- Practice preferred skills from each channel in the **Tools** section daily before next module.
- Create a new entry in the **Relationship Patterns Worksheet** resource twice before the next module .

Key Points for Veterans andHelpful Hints from Champions

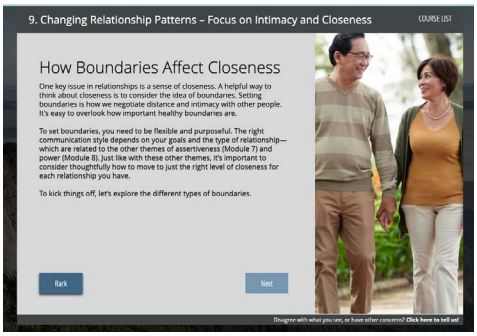
Coaching:

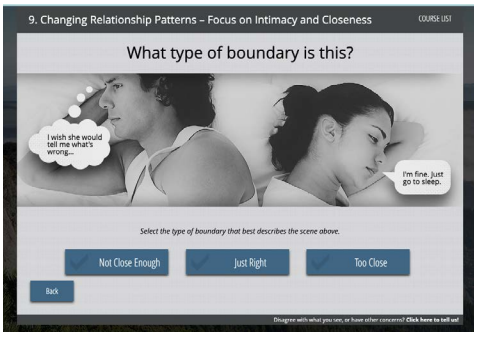
- Sometimes Veterans will choose assertiveness or closeness roleplay answers that are short or clipped, which they describe as appropriate in their closest relationships. Affirm that the words and approach they use will vary according to the specific relationship, and that even a "wrong" answer on the activity can be a "right" one in a specific relationship, if Veterans are clear about what assertiveness or closeness means and work toward those goals (e.g., clearly expressing their needs in a way that doesn't deny the other's rights, sharing where they are with a friend).
- It can be important to reinforce that successful assertiveness means communicating one's needs and wants with respect for oneself and the other person, but that it does not guarantee that others will agree with or be able or willing to give what they are hoping for. Celebrate assertiveness wherever Veterans are showing it, regardless of the outcome they are receiving.

Session Content/Therapy:

- Be aware that Veterans might not agree with the language or approach that is rated as ideal or the feedback on their choices. Ask them what parts resonated, what parts they disagreed with and why, how they would go about approaching the situation in their own healthy way, and how they expect the interaction would go if they did. Provide encouragement and feedback and help shape responses as needed.
- When reflecting on assertiveness word choice, tone, and body language, some Veterans find it helpful to consider that what may be perceived as passive, assertive, or aggressive might differ from culture or environment to another (e.g., assertiveness in a military environment might come across as aggressive in a civilian one).
- Sometimes Veterans benefit from considering how others' word choice, tone, or body language impacted their experience in a recent interaction.
- Normalize that increasing assertiveness and closeness takes courage and inevitably involves some vulnerability and risk. It can be helpful to review distress tolerance concepts related to Veterans' relationship goals, especially the pros and cons of both trauma-related patterns and newer, more adaptive patterns that move them closer to their goals.
- Try to encourage Veterans to try out their skills in relationships with others who want them to succeed. Normalize that it can take time to change longer-standing relationship patterns, so encourage them to be compassionate with themselves and others as they try out new ways of expressing their needs and desires and building closeness over time.

MODULE 9: CHANGING RELATIONSHIP PATTERNS—FOCUS ON INTIMACY AND CLOSENESS





This module focuses on how to create and keep happy, satisfying relationships. This includes learning how to be flexible about expectations of others. It also addresses how to resolve or accept mistakes and misunderstandings. All these skills involve flexibility and compassion for oneself and others. This module gives Veterans exercises for gaining a greater sense of compassion for themselves and in their relationships. Veterans start with a **self-assessment** and receive feedback on how symptoms have shifted over the last week. They are asked to reflect on how they show compassion to themselves and others and how power in relationships relates to flexibility. Veterans move through the **Closeness Role Play** scenario to practice being more flexible. They choose the scenario and three practice partners (e.g., boss, partner, friend, child, coworker) before completing a puzzle matching appropriate responses to the partners' statements and receiving feedback on their selections. Veterans complete the Compassion Balance, identifying ways to be more compassionate with themselves and others. They then identify kind things they can do for themselves and others and schedule when they will complete these activities. Finally, Veterans complete the **Self-Compassion Meditation**.

Recommended Skills Practice

- Practice preferred skills from each channel in the Tools section daily before next module.
- Practice the Self-Compassion Meditation tool daily before the next module.
- Create a new entry in the Relationship Patterns Worksheet resource twice before the next module.

Key Points for Veterans and Helpful Hints from Champions

Coaching:

- Encourage Veterans to push through with the Self-compassion Meditation Tool, if they haven't listened to it. Point out the convenience factor. Does this take longer than finding something on YouTube? – why not use what you have in front of you.
- Veterans may need help in looking at compassion and flexibility in all of their relationships, not just intimate relationships, as the photos in the module tend to reflect. It can be compassion and flexibility with members of their support group, or work colleagues, to name a few.
- Sometimes flexibility content can feel a bit confusing. Emphasize that flexibility is

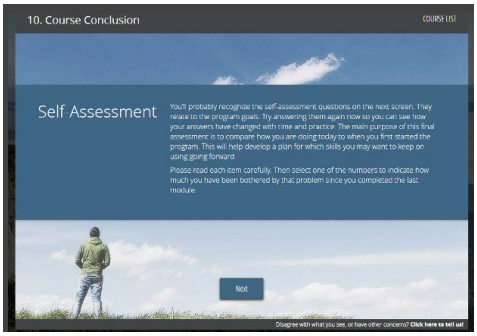
about varying how you communicate based on the type of relationship or power balance, but that respect for self and others is a constant. It can help to emphasize that the role-plays Veterans completed in Module 8 drew upon flexibility skills.

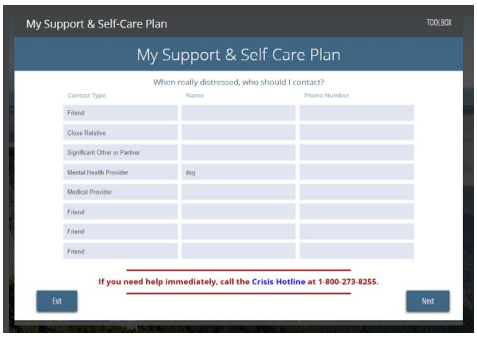
Session Content/Therapy:

- Focus on the experience of compassion – have you ever tuned someone out because you weren't really interested in what they were saying? Perhaps in a support group? Compassion means being kind and showing that the feelings and experiences of other people are as important as your feelings and experience. In this case, simply "showing" interest is a sign of kindness toward the other person.
- Think about flexibility. We, and others, benefit when we recognize that how we speak to our boss is going to be different then how we speak to a friend, or family member.

MODULE 10: COURSE CONCLUSION

In this module, Veterans review what they have learned in webSTAIR and complete the final **self-assessment**. They receive feedback on how symptoms have shifted in the last week as well as comparisons to their baseline assessment. Veterans are reminded to have compassion for themselves and others and asked to reflect on their experience in webSTAIR and what they might want to do as they move forward in their lives. They are encouraged to continue using the **Tools** learned during the program and to use their **Support and Self-Care Plan**. Veterans are provided with an overview of the Achievements they earned during the program and encouraged to print **worksheets** to save for future use.



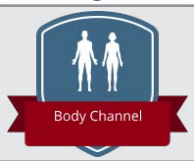
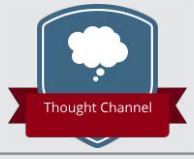
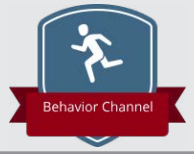


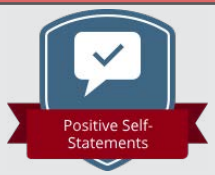
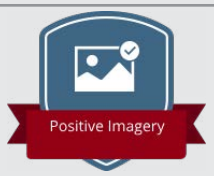
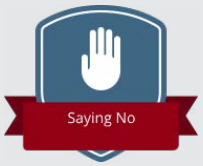
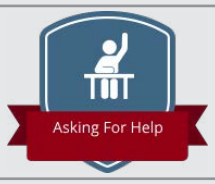
Key Points for Veterans and Helpful Hints from Champions

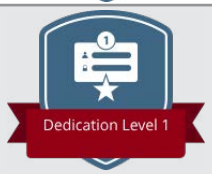
- What kinds of things do the Veterans want to hold onto and keep using moving forward? Think about one to two from each channel. What else from their lives can they use? Make it sustainable and realistic.
- If Veterans found the program helpful, print out or save the things that they like right now. Remember to keep these in your back pocket and use as needed in the future.

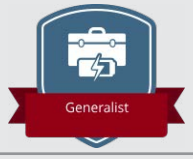
ACHIEVEMENTS

As Veterans work through the course, they'll unlock achievements based on their progress.

CATEGORY	ACHIEVEMENT	AWARDED FOR	BADGE
SETUP FOR SUCCESS	**Courage**	Deciding to take the course	
	Goal Setting	Setting a goal in the Welcome Module	
	Support Network	Completing the My Support and Self-care Plan in Module 4	
CHANNELS OF EMOTION	**Body Channel**	Completing Module 2	
	Thought Channel	Completing Module 3	
	Behavior Channel	Completing Module 4	
EMOTIONAL AWARENESS	**Feeling Wheel**	Exploring all feelings in Welcome Module or from the Resources page	
	Feelings Monitoring	Completing the Feelings Monitoring Form introduction in Module 1 and adding two entries through the Resources page	
	Distress Tolerance	Completing the Distress Tolerance Form introduction in Module 5 and adding two entries through the Resources page	

CATEGORY	ACHIEVEMENT	AWARDED FOR	BADGE
STAYING POSITIVE	**Positive Self-Statements**	Exploring the Positive Self-Statements tool in Module 3 or from Toolbox	
	Positive Imagery	Completing the Positive Imagery tool in Module 3 or from the Toolbox	
	Thought Shifting	Exploring the Thought Shifting tool in Module 3 or from the Toolbox	
	Pleasurable Activities	Completing the Pleasurable Activities tool in Module 4 or from the Toolbox	
COMMUNICATION	**Interpersonal Awareness**	Completing Module 6	
	Assertiveness	Completing at least one Assertiveness Roleplay scenario in Module 8 or from the Resources page	
	Closeness	Completing at least one Closeness Roleplay scenario in Module 8 or from the Resources page	
FLEXIBILITY	**Saying No**	Completing the When and How to Say No activity in Module 9	
	Asking for Help	Completing the Asking for Help activity in Module 9	
	Small Talk	Completing the Small Talk activity in Module 9	

CATEGORY	ACHIEVEMENT	AWARDED FOR	BADGE
COMPASSION	**Compassion Scale**	Completing the Striking a Balance activity in Module 9	
	Compassion for Self	Adding at least three Self-Compassion activities to the calendar in Module 9	
	Compassion for Others	Adding at least three Compassion for Others activities to the calendar in Module 9	
DEDICATION	**Level 1**	Logging in to webSTAIR at least three times	
	Level 2	Logging in to webSTAIR at least nine times	
	Level 3	Logging in to webSTAIR at least 15 times	
CONSISTENCY	**Level 1**	Logging in to webSTAIR at least two days in a row	
	Level 2	Logging in to webSTAIR at least four days in a row	
	Level 3	Logging in to webSTAIR at least six days in a row	

CATEGORY	ACHIEVEMENT	AWARDED FOR	BADGE
TOOLKIT PRO	**Explorer**	Exploring at least three different tools in the Toolbox	
	Generalist	Exploring at least four different tools in the Toolbox	
	Worksheet Master	Completing all three worksheets through the modules or from the Resources page	
	Meditator	Practicing medication exercises at least five times through the modules or from the Toolbox *(including: Emotion Surfing, Focused Breathing, Self-Compassion Meditation)*	
SELF ASSESSMENT	**Level 1**	Filling out the first self-assessment and well-being question	
	Level 2	Completing five self-assessments and at least two well-being questions	
	Level 3	Completing all 10 self-assessments and at least four well-being questions	

APPENDIX 1: GRID OF MODULE CONTENT

MODULE	TIME (MIN)	TOOLS, RESOURCES, & ACTIVITIES
WELCOME	25-30	My Support and Self-care Plan Treatment Goals How do I know if my life is being impacted negatively?
1. EMOTIONAL AWARENESS	40-45	Feelings Wheel Channels of Emotion Intensity Scale Emotion Surfing Feelings Monitoring Form Purpose of Emotions
2. BODY CHANNEL	30-35	Focused Breathing Soothe the Senses Progressive Muscle Relaxation Triggering Scenarios
3. THOUGHT CHANNEL	35-40	Checking your Beliefs Positive Self-Statements Positive Imagery Thought Shifting Beliefs about Feelings Noticing Thoughts (Identifying common negative thinking patterns)

MODULE	TIME (MIN)	TOOLS, RESOURCES, & ACTIVITIES
4. BEHAVIOR CHANNEL	20-25	Simple Break/Time Out Replace Problematic Behaviors Pleasurable Activities My Support & Self-Care Plan Exploring Coping Behaviors Seek Support
5. DISTRESS TOLERANCE	30-35	Distress Tolerance Worksheet Ideas for Goals When It's Important To Tolerate Distress When It's OK Not To Tolerate Distress Decisional Tool To Tolerate Distress + Using Coping Strategies
6. RELATIONSHIP PATTERNS	35-40	Relationship Patterns Worksheet Relationship Pattern Scenes What I Believe (safety, trust/intimacy, power/control, self-esteem/needs) What Others Think of Me What Happens (how beliefs impact what happens)
7. IDENTIFYING PATTERNS	20-25	What Kind of Boundary Is This (script; tone of voice; body language)?
8. ASSERTIVENESS & CLOSENESS	20-25	Assertiveness Roleplay Closeness Roleplay

MODULE	TIME (MIN)	TOOLS, RESOURCES, & ACTIVITIES
9. FLEXIBILITY & COMPASSION	30-35	**Self-Compassion Meditation** **Compassion self-statements** **Where Do I Show Compassion?** **Increasing flexibility With Others (when and how to say "no"; asking for help; small talk)** **Striking a Compassion Balance** **Selecting/Scheduling Compassionate Activities for Self/Others**
10. CONCLUSION	10-15	**Support & Self-Care Plan** **Overview of Individual Progress in Program**

Veterans Crisis Line

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