

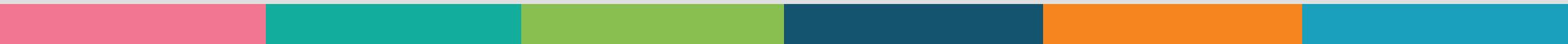
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Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

Defense Health • Global Health

LIMA

LEADERSHIP IN MORAL AWARENESS



Why LIMA?



Moral injury impairs Soldier wellbeing and readiness.

Moral injury affects you and your Soldiers – whether you know it or not.

This training is designed for you as a leader to understand moral injury and mitigate the impact of moral injury.

Moral Injury: The Facts

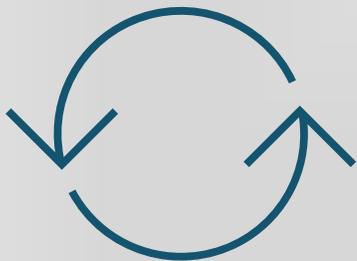
40-60%

Estimates of combat veterans who experience moral injury

(Maguen et al., 2020; Nichter et al., 2021; Wisco et al., 2017)

(Held et al., 2019)

Common Responses



- Negative emotional responses
- Constant thinking about the event
- Substance abuse
- Social withdrawal/isolation



Increased risk of PTSD, depression, anxiety, and suicide.

(Ames et al., 2019; Bryan et al., 2016)

(Battaglia et al., 2019; Weiss, 2023)



Does Not Discriminate

Can affect all military members regardless of gender, race, nationality, MOS, etc.

Training Plan

Moral Injury

- What it is
- What it looks like
- What are the effects

Leadership in Moral Awareness

- Why leaders matter
- What practices you can engage in
- Where to find resources



Morals vs Ethics

Morals

- Focus on one's **internal** views about what to do and what not to do.
- Associated with:
 - Personal Beliefs
 - Personal values
 - Societal norms and expectations

Ethics

- The **external** principles and standards that guide conduct, decisions, and actions.
- Associated with:
 - Fairness
 - Justice
 - Responsibility

Definitions

Moral Injury

Psychological, mental, and/or spiritual trauma whereby an individual's observation of, or participation in certain acts runs counter to deeply held moral beliefs.

Potentially Morally Injurious Events (PMIEs)

Actions or events that transgress deeply held moral beliefs committed by self or others.

Moral Awareness

Ability to recognize and consider the moral elements of VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) events and situations.



Forms of PMIEs include:

- Moral transgressions by self
- Moral transgressions by others
- Betrayal

Moral Transgressions By Self

Moral injury can occur when an individual engages in actions that are inconsistent with their morals.

A person might say or be thinking:

“I shouldn’t have acted in that way. That’s not who I am. That’s not who I want to be.”

“I should have done something in that moment. I’m so disappointed in myself for not jumping in.”

Examples

- A child combatant approaches you in theater and you need to decide how to respond.
- Failure to act when a battle buddy was under fire.
- You miss the birth of your child because of a mission.

Moral Transgressions by Others

Moral injury can occur when an individual observes others engage in actions that are inconsistent with their morals.

A person might say or be thinking:

“I’m ashamed that another person did such a terrible thing.”

“I saw things that were morally wrong. A good person would never do that.”

Examples

- Witnessing another Soldier sexually assault someone.
- Observing a Soldier mistreat a non-combatant.
- Knowing that a fellow Soldier lied about their performance on a task.

Betrayal

Moral injury can occur when an individual feels betrayed by others or the institution they work for.

A person might say or be thinking:

“How could my squad leader cheat after preaching to us in every safety briefing.”

“I feel betrayed by a fellow service member who I once trusted.”

Examples

- A leader receives a DUI after punishing the unit for drinking.
- Following orders that the Soldier believed were immoral.
- Delay in acknowledging service-related harms related to burn pits.

Moral Injury: Signs & Symptoms

Behavioral

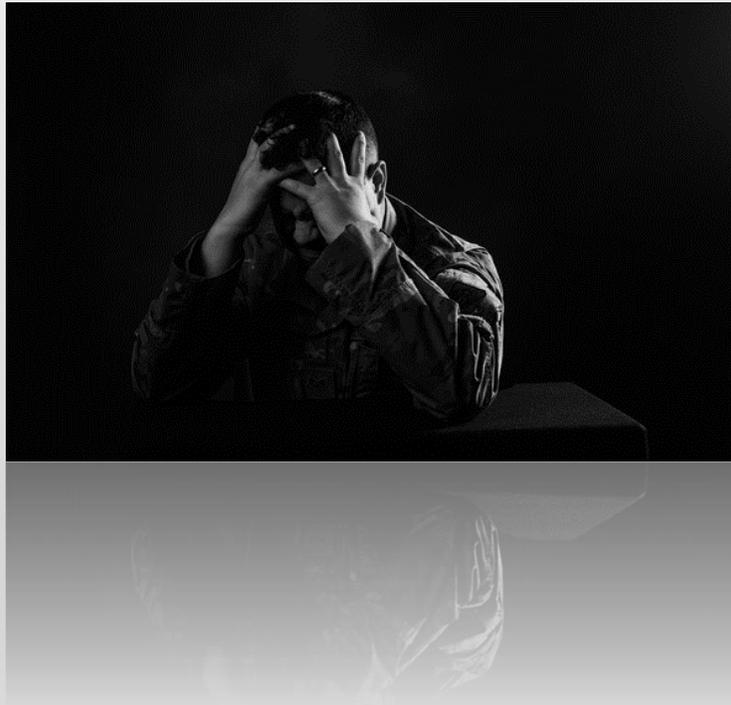
- Self-sabotaging

Cognitive

- Self-condemnation
- Difficulty forgiving
- Regret
- Low self-worth
- Distracted

Emotional

- Guilt
- Shame
- Anger



Social

- Loss of trust
- Self isolation

Spiritual

- Religious struggles
- Loss of Faith
- Loss of meaning



Impact of Moral Injury on Units

- Reduced Cohesion
- Loss of Trust
- Increased Behavioral Health Concerns
- Loss of Faith in the Mission
- Loss of Respect
- Reduced Individual and Unit Performance

Case Study

PFC Jones was on his first deployment and on routine patrol. His convoy was ambushed, and another Humvee was set on fire. He heard the shouts for help and had a strong desire to jump to action, but was ordered to stay in his vehicle. PFC Jones was immediately angry at the orders but followed them. Later, he expressed to his squad leader that he felt guilty for not rendering aid when he felt he should have. Throughout the remainder of the deployment, he isolated himself from the unit and expressed to other Soldiers in the unit a loss of trust and respect for the mission. When PFC Jones returned home from deployment, he shared with his closest friend that “he should have helped” and regrets his inaction.

Common Misconceptions

Moral injury is NOT ...

A Character Flaw

Simply Weak Faith

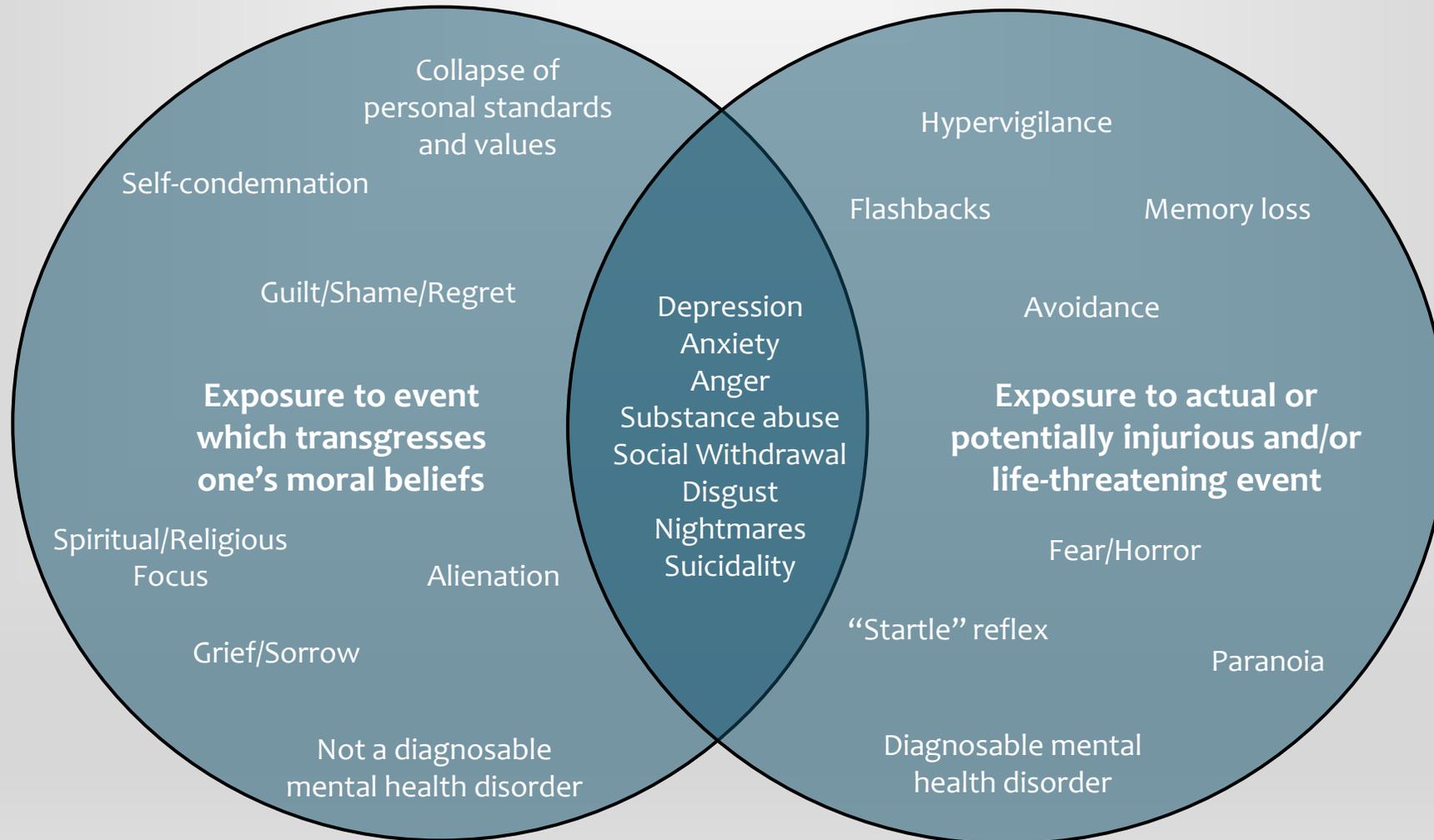
A Mental Illness

Fear Based

Untreatable

Moral Injury & PTSD

Moral Injury



PTSD

PMIEs ≠ Moral Injury

(PMIEs do not always result in a moral injury)

Examples of healthy coping
after a PMIE

Being open minded

Asking questions about the experience

Taking time to rest

Leaning on friends and family

Prioritizing a healthy lifestyle

Avoidance of self-destructive behaviors

Discussion Question

How can this knowledge of moral injury impact how you lead?

Leader Actions Matter

Moral Awareness

Ability to recognize and consider the moral elements of VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) events and situations.

Leadership in Moral Awareness

Actions taken by leaders to foster a morally aware unit culture and reduce the frequency and harms associated with moral injury.



Leadership Impact



Leader Practices for Fostering Moral Awareness





Set Expectations

- Have clear expectations about moral/ethical behavior for yourself and your Soldiers.
- Setting clear expectations about ethical behaviors serves as a guide for decision-making in VUCA situations, strengthens accountability, and can prevent conflicts from arising.
- Do not leave your Soldiers wondering and guessing – be explicit.

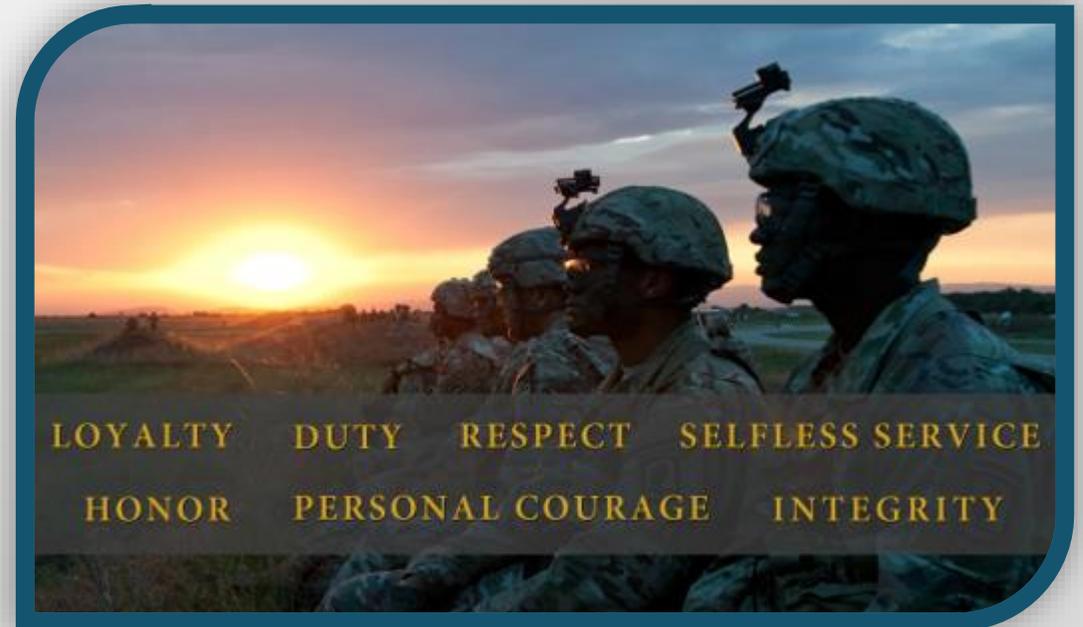
Tips for setting expectations:

- Lead by example
- Communicate clearly
- Set expectations publicly
- Set expectations in-person
- Establish Accountability
- Align expectations with Army values



Connect Values

- Connect Army values to moral awareness.
- Connecting values to moral awareness can inform decision-making and support reconciliation after action.
- When Soldiers bring up moral issues, encourage courses of action from an Army values-based framework.





Share Personal Challenges

- Sharing your personal challenges with moral dilemmas can help Soldiers navigate their own difficulties more effectively.
- By being open about your own difficulties, you set the conditions for honest communication about challenges.
- Consider the appropriateness of the context and ensure that sharing serves a constructive purpose.





Promote Forgiveness

- Forgiveness is the deliberate decision to let go of anger and offer understanding when a person or group has done something wrong or made a mistake.
- Forgiveness is NOT permissiveness or avoidance of consequences.
- By promoting forgiveness, you can foster trust, respect, and growth in your Soldiers.

Tips for promoting forgiveness:

- Perspective Taking
- Calm Approach
- Encourage Accountability
- Provide Constructive Feedback
- Harness Empathy



Foster Open Discussion

- Discuss the challenges and nuance of moral dilemmas with your Soldiers.
- Fostering open discussion about moral issues can enhance moral decision-making, promote transparency and trust, and reduce stigma about moral issues.
- You can foster open discussion by creating an open, transparent environment that reinforces values-based decision-making.

Tips for fostering open discussion:

- Transparent environment
- Encourage self-reflection and self-awareness
- Clear communication channels
- Normalize moral discussions
- Allow hard questions



Prepare Soldiers

- Be deliberate about bringing moral awareness into mission planning.
- Anticipating PMIEs gives your Soldiers the benefit of forethought.
- Prior to each mission consider what sort of moral challenges you might encounter.

Questions to Prompt Discussion:

- What are some potential moral challenges we might experience?
- Do you expect your judgement to be perfect in every situation we encounter?
- What sorts of things might affect your judgement on this particular mission?
- Aside from survival, what do you worry about most?

Applied Learning Activity

Set Expectations

Create an elevator speech for your moral expectations. Work together to create a plan to set expectations with your squad.

Connect Values

One of your Soldiers is concerned about resource allocation during humanitarian assistance; specifically, about the potential for unfair distribution. How can you harness Army values to help your Soldier?

Share personal challenges

Develop your personal story regarding a moral challenge or injury that you have experienced and can share with your Soldiers. What are things you should consider before sharing and while sharing?

Promote Forgiveness

A newer Soldier in your unit fails to recognize mental health warning signs in a battle buddy, resulting in inadequate support. How will you promote forgiveness with this Soldier?

Foster open discussion

One of your Soldiers is working with friendly forces during a training exercise and encounters different human rights standards. How can you foster open discussion with your Soldier and unit?

Prepare Soldiers

You're conducting a mission brief prior to deployment for the first time with a new unit. How can you prepare your Soldiers for this mission?

Leader Action Plan

Leader Practice	Application of practice
Set clear expectations about moral behavior	
Connect military values to moral awareness	
Share personal moral challenges	
Promote forgiveness	
Foster open discussion about moral challenges	
Prepare Soldiers for moral challenges	

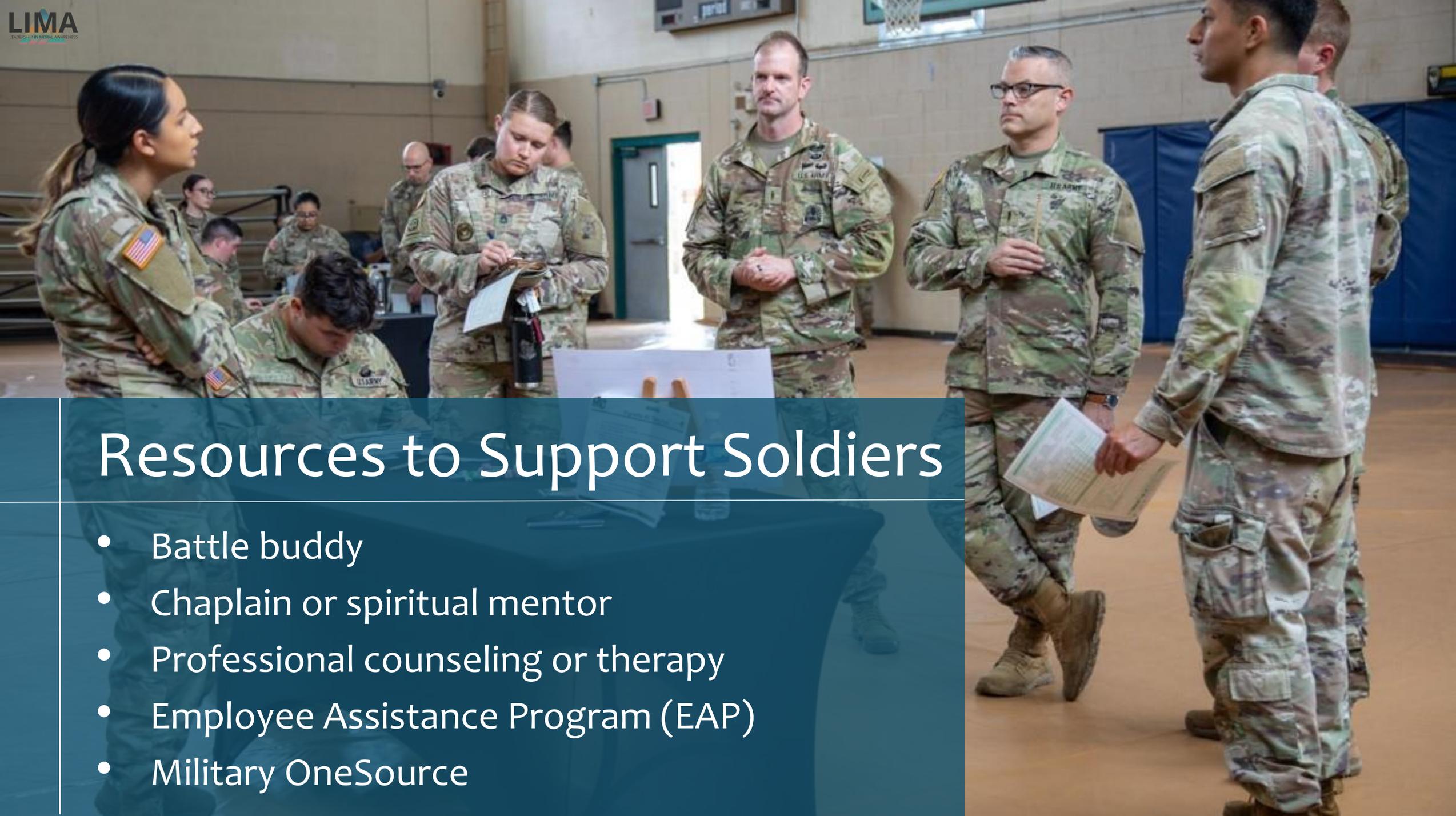


Supporting Your Soldiers through Moral Injury

- While your actions as a leader can influence the moral climate of your unit, moral injury can still occur.
- As a leader, it is not your responsibility to treat a Soldier's moral injury.
- Refer to behavioral health or Chaplain when necessary.

If you see...

- Excessive shame, blame, and guilt
- Behaviors that jeopardize the mission
- Reckless or dangerous behaviors
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Significant relationship problems
- Alcohol, substance, or prescription abuse
- Persistent problems with sleep
- Thinking about harming oneself or others



Resources to Support Soldiers

- Battle buddy
- Chaplain or spiritual mentor
- Professional counseling or therapy
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Military OneSource

Additional Resources to Learn More

Books

- *Black Hearts: One Platoon's Descent into Madness in Iraq's Triangle of Death* by Jim Frederick
- *Arsenal of Hope* by Jen Satterly
- *All Secure* by Tom Satterly
- *War and Moral Injury: A Reader*

Articles

- Gutierrez et al. (2023) - Leadership in moral awareness: Initial evidence from U.S. Army Soldiers returning from deployment.
- Held et al. (2019) – “I knew it was wrong the moment I got the order”: A narrative thematic analysis of moral injury in combat veterans.

Doctrine

- DA PAM 165-19: Moral Leadership
- AR 350-1: Army Training and Leader Development
- AR 165-1: Army Chaplain Corps Activities
- ADP 6-22: Army Leadership and the Profession

Websites/Organizations

- [Veterans of America](#)
- [Moral Injury Support Network for Service Women](#)
- [BRITE Divinity School](#)

Thank you!

Thank you for your dedication,
hard work, and continued service!

