



## **Quiet on the Homefront: Restoring Connections at Home Transcript**

The topic for this presentation is, Quiet on the Homefront: Restoring Connections at Home. Let's begin.

"There's no place like home." The character Dorothy in the classic film "The Wizard of Oz" is instructed to simply close her eyes, tap her ruby slippers, repeat these words, and her heartfelt wish to be home will come true. "Home is where the heart is." Home is the hallowed ground that our Servicemembers have fought to protect.

Home can be a source of safety and comfort, or a hostile and exhausting territory. Home may include the loved ones you live with or the family or friends outside of your living environment. You may find that in the stillness of your own individual self-reflection or quiet, there is a place you call home. Home can be a refuge from life struggles or home may be the place where your most difficult struggles are played out. Home may be all these things. However, just like in the movie the Wizard of Oz, we all long for the magical comfort and security in the familiar refuge we call home.

How do you create this refuge? How can you nurture that quiet place within yourself even when your environment is not at peace? There can be so many pressures and demands that you as caregivers confront each day that wear at your calm stability and sense of wellbeing. How can you create a place for yourselves and support your loved ones in creating your home refuge? This is what we hope to look at in this presentation, "Quiet on the Homefront: Restoring Connections at Home."

Caregivers are often front and center when managing the competing needs and demands on the Homefront. It is often these very competing needs and demands that can contribute to conflict and strain and can result in you becoming depleted. Whether you are negotiating the care needs of a recently returning Veteran, caring for children, an ill Veteran parent, or an aging Veteran spouse, managing the multiple and often conflicting needs of oneself and the loved ones that you live with or care for can be difficult. Your ability to negotiate with others, balance competing demands, and work together, can make the difference between home and family becoming a source of stress or your greatest support.

Developing a nurturing and restorative environment for you and your loved ones can be the glue that holds you all together when attempting to face the challenges in your daily life. This presentation will explore some potential strategies for caregivers to meet their own needs and bring some calm, healing, and connection, back to the Homefront.



Let's first begin to clarify who and what are we referring to when we describe this Homefront. The Homefront may actually be the quiet peaceful place within yourself that you can go to when in need of solitude, strength, comfort, or clarity. We can also be describing an actual dwelling or environment where you reside such as, your home, apartment, trailer, or tent. Home may be the place where your family resides together. The concept of home may include your immediate family, extended family, your friends and colleagues, or the community that you are connected to. The concept of home and its ability to provide nurturance for you can be expanded from the individual to the community. Home is a changing evolving place that includes old and new, blood related or non-related connections to others that are your source of comfort and security.

How do you define the boundaries of your "Homefront"? Who is included in its definition? How has your Homefront evolved or changed over time? What is your definition of family and whom does it include?

To begin it is important to simply consider, where is home for you and how does that space provide something important to you? Whom do you consider a part of your network of supportive connections? Who are the people that you turn to for: help, feedback, a listening ear, wisdom, knowledge? Who do you share your celebrations, heartaches, your meals or holidays with? Who do you share the responsibilities and daily routines with? Who shares your values and beliefs? Whom do you care for, and who cares for you?

You might wonder why it's important to define your Homefront. Well, if you are going to rely on this source of resilience, you need first to recognize and identify its powerful positive qualities. For example, it can help to identify the special corner in your home that you go to when stressed to relax. We will talk more about how to enhance your home environment in a bit, but first know that your home environment can be a critical source of comfort.

Along with identifying the space at home that gives you comfort it is also important to identify the people you include in your circle of support. For example, you may have a friend or sibling that you turn to for wise feedback when you struggle with your spouse or when your children are pushing your buttons. Your significant other may be the one that comforts you when you are worn out or worried. It is important to take some time to consider and even write down who is included in your definition of family or circle of support, and update as these supports will change over time. Make that



definition as broad as possible because what we do know is that the more support you have, especially as you age, the better able you will be to cope with life challenges.

So again, take the time to make a mental inventory of your safe spaces and the people you turn to inside and outside the home that contribute to your wellbeing. Consider writing down these names to have as a reminder of who you might turn to when feeling stressed.

For many reasons some Homefront's may not provide the support, sustenance, nurturing, or safety that you need. Sometimes, the skills of developing a safe harbor weren't provided for you growing up and you just don't know what to do to develop it now. Your home may have been depleted by the challenge's life has thrown at you. Home life can be impacted by financial struggles, emotional conflicts, illness, a lack of privacy or order. Home and family life may be chaotic as a result of mental health, substance abuse problems, or any other number of challenges. The challenges of deployment, military service, illness, injury, losses, and aging all contribute to strains that overtime can wear at the fabric of your individual and family resilience.

So how do you move forward to build on the strengths that are there in every home environment and how can you address the weaknesses and grow stronger? There are qualities that are known to enhance and support individual and family resilience in the face of adversity. This is the hopeful news here! Every individual and family have its strengths that have developed as a result of managing life challenges. You can build this resilience for yourself, and you can help to support this in your own family or circle of support. This is the positive news to hold on to despite the challenges; there are always ways to build this cradle of support beneath you. Let's look at some of the qualities that may help you.

Let's begin by looking at your environment. Your physical environment can offer you a place of security, soothing, contentment, and comfort if given proper care and attention. It does not require a million-dollar mansion to create a space that provides this feeling rather, it is making the space that you do have, meaningful and calming to you. There are a number of qualities that have been thought to enhance the positive benefits of home. One such quality is order.

Think about it. How does it feel when you walk into an environment that is jammed with stuff everywhere? Has clutter taken over your counter tops and closets? Are the kid's toys all over the house? Are there papers, magazines, and mail stacked up like little mountains everywhere? Is the laundry in so many piles that it's hard to tell any longer if they are the clean or dirty?



Clutter is chaotic, and order brings calm. Start with a corner, a closet, a drawer, and create some order. Remember the old adage, “A place for everything and everything in its place.” There is not only calm that you create with order, you can be much more efficient if you know where things are and you’re not pouring through the piles to find your missing keys, unpaid bills, your favorite t-shirt, or your kids’ homework.

In our culture of excessive stuff, much has been written about the benefits of paring down and clearing away those things that create both emotional and visual clutter. Clearing out, and cleaning your environment, can improve your perspective and feel empowering. Having order in your home can also provide an atmosphere that isn’t over stimulating especially for a loved one with dementia and can contribute to the safety of your home. A clean and orderly space is more inviting. So, make the bed before you get going for the day, or you can wash the dishes after meals to give you a fresh start. Order can help you manage the current, sometimes chaotic demands, by providing that constant, clean home base.

Make a project out of it and include your family in clearing out the house. Ask yourself why you are holding onto this stuff and whether you really need to or not. Hold on to what is really important. Decide what brings you joy, what has meaning, and clear out the rest.

There are other simple non-costly ways to enhance the peace and beauty of your home environment. Bring life into your space by opening curtains and windows, let the air, and light in. Light and color can have a significant impact on your mood. What colors bring you a feeling of contentment or joy?

Another significant way to alter the mood and wellbeing of your home environment is focusing on the impact of sound. Do you have news or TV constantly in the background? You might find that turning off and filling a space with quiet can really improve your sense of calm. Or, you might introduce music, which has the power to energize and soothe. Simple changes like lighting candles or building a fire can bring a feeling of nurturing to your home. Make a special place in your space for pictures or mementos that reflects what and who matters to you.

Introducing nature into the home is another healing and life affirming addition to your home environment. You may not be able to grow a tropical garden in your living space but may find that starting some seeds for herbs in your kitchen window or picking some wildflowers add beauty and life to your environment. Another consideration is to fill your space with your favorite smells and scents whether it’s from your home cooking or the addition of natural oils or aromatherapy.



Create a sanctuary for you. Clear away the clutter and purposefully construct a space that gives you and your loved ones a feeling of comfort, soothing, and joy. Be creative: this space is a reflection of you.

Ok, so we have talked about how to work to make the space you live in a space you want to be, next let's explore some of the less concrete qualities that improve the bond between you and your circle of support.

I would venture a guess that the most significant and difficult task in maintaining supportive connections within your family or circle of support is clear and compassionate communication. Establishing safety in expressing yourself and negotiating the demands of everyday life requires the ability to communicate clearly and fairly. Listening and respecting another's point of view is the other piece of this equation. Each individual in your circle of support, young or old, needs the room to express feelings and needs with the assurance they will be listened to and respected.

There are many communication traps that can get in the way of fair communication. For example, if you express upset by yelling, if you name call, or blame the person for how you feel, you are asking for a fight. If you over generalize by saying they always or never do this or that, you are asking for a fight. If you make assumptions about their motives without hearing their point of view, then you are asking for a fight. As for the listening end, if you respond with a defensive explanation, tell them they shouldn't feel this way or that, or blame them back, then you are asking for a fight. So how do you manage not falling into these traps? This no doubt is the very tough work of communication.

The first step of fair communication starts with calming down. You may need to repeat this step multiple times particularly during difficult or conflicted conversations. If you are too upset to present your concerns or feelings in a productive way, it is better to take a break and come back to it later. Also, if you are too upset to listen without engaging in a fight then it's better to take a break. Now, that doesn't mean permission to abandon the person or conversation altogether. It is important to schedule a time later to resume when you are calm. We will be doing a short meditation exercise at the end of our discussion, and this is something you can try when looking for the calm within.

Once you are calm, sort out what it is that you are feeling and what specifically happened to stir this up. Feelings arise if your needs are unmet or when your needs are threatened. Your feelings are your personal reactions and not anyone's fault. The important point here is to underline that your feelings are ultimately your responsibility to



care for. So how do you care for the feelings that arise particularly when reacting to another?

What you can do to care for your feelings is to share it. If someone has done something that felt hurtful, sad, or upsetting to you, then simply expressing yourself, can bring you relief. In the best of circumstances, the other person can hear you, understand, and apologize. Your feelings are yours and are valid; this doesn't mean feelings are the truth; they are only your truth.

Oftentimes we share our feelings in a manner that places blame, For example, we might say, "It's your fault I feel this way." Maybe you share your feelings in an attempt to get someone to change or give you something you need. The important piece of sharing a feeling though is really to express it and give it validity for yourself, while also informing the other how you are feeling or how their behavior has affected you. You can hope that if you share with someone that their behavior was hurtful to you, they will want to change this behavior so to not hurt you again, but the fact is, sharing your feelings doesn't guarantee that someone will change their behavior towards you. Whether or not the behavior of another changes, ultimately it remains up to you to sort out what decisions you need to make to take care of you.

There are some simple steps to try to remember when expressing how you feel or what you need in a way that is fair and balanced. Keep it simple. Start by describing the details of the event that prompted your reaction. Such as, "when you did this or said this." Describe the event or words spoken specifically without adding your spin on it.

Next, share the feeling. The feeling you are trying to share should be a one-word feeling, such as sad, angry, worried, or lonely. This is when many get stuck blaming, "you made me feel, or you did this to me" scenarios, which often leads to arguments. Describe what happened specifically, and then share the one word feeling that arose as a result. It also helps then to let the person know what it is you needed from them and ask them if they could do something different moving forward.

As I said earlier this can be the most challenging aspect of making a Homefront safe for everyone. A place to express how you feel, ask for what you need and also a place where feelings, even those that are difficult to hear, can be spoken and listened to with respect and compassion. This doesn't mean that those within our circle of support are always going to be willing or able to meet our need or request. This is the important piece to remember, that you are ultimately responsible for your own feelings and needs being met.



So, to review, first simply get calm, or centered. Describe in specific concrete terms the behavior or event that prompted your reaction. Next, clarify your one word feeling and the need that was not being met, and express it. Consider what it is that you would like or that you need from the person. Ask for what you need. Finally, provide them the space to listen, and respond.

It can be really tough when faced with emotional demands, conflicts and needs to make a place for everyone's feeling to be heard and respected. Despite the challenge, it is critical to you and all your attachments, both young and old, to be heard and understood. Your wellbeing relies on the bonds of connection both inside and outside your home. These strong bonds are built when you are able to share your feelings and perspectives as well as honor, listen, and respect others.

An important aspect of building these bonds is to make a space and time for communication and connection to happen. In our fast-paced world, it requires a concerted effort to make the time for it. Sit down to a meal together without the internet, cell phones, or TV interfering with that connection. Check in at your morning coffee about what the day holds for you and your loved ones. Make a date with your spouse or schedule family time with kids or extended family to enjoy together. Working on a project together as a family can build time for connection and communication. Ask questions and show interest. We all want to be paid attention to and have others show interest. You might be surprised how it builds a feeling of safety and connection when you listen and pay attention to your supports. It also invites it being returned to you.

Family rituals are another way to build a resilient bond. Rituals such as a daily dog walk, a bedtime story, shared mealtime, brings together the household in a joint activity, and this can create opportunities to talk, laugh, or share ideas. Family rituals like Sunday dinner, holiday parties and birthday celebrations, vacations or picnics are places for connection. Rituals build the family's strength and create the benefits in the present and build memories you will hold dear moving forward. What are your family routines and rituals? Do you notice how they provide you a feeling of continuity, knowing what to expect, and look forward to? Are there opportunities you might consider for building new rituals or routines that you and your circle of support can benefit from?

Another characteristic important in building resilience at home relates to clear rules, routine, roles and responsibilities. Clarity contributes to the working of any efficient system. Without this clarity, there is chaos and uncertainty. Many times, caregivers of Veterans and their families have had to accommodate shifting roles and



responsibilities due to deployments, or if the Veteran is grappling with illnesses or injuries that impair their ability to contribute as they have been. It can be quite a challenge to make these changes and flex roles, responsibilities, and routines. Clarity can help.

Sharing the chores, clarifying roles and responsibilities, asking others for help, provides each individual a stake in the positive benefits of home. Adapting to life changes and expanding your roles or responsibilities can provide opportunities for you to learn new skills and grow. Sometimes it also presents you with the opportunity to reach out and seek support from others thereby creating new avenues of support in your network. It is important to reinforce that home is created by those that contribute to it, not just benefit from it. How is your circle of support contributing to the Homefront? Do you need to ask for more help? Are you over functioning and not holding others accountable to contribute? Caregivers can often run the risk of taking on more than the fair share of responsibilities and in the process, run yourself into the ground trying to do it all. Speak up. Set boundaries and communicate your needs and requests. This can make a big difference in your overall health and strengthen everyone's investment in the home.

Another way to strengthen bonds is to let your loved ones know what you love, admire, appreciate, or enjoy about them. Maybe you have felt forgotten and unappreciated yourself and find this makes you want to hold back from verbalizing appreciation to those in your home. The funny thing is though, that this kind of attention or appreciation grows wherever it is planted. When you notice your loved ones with appreciation, it's like planting a seed in fertile soil. You may think your appreciation no longer matters to your spouse, family, and friends, but I guarantee we all need to feel appreciated. Try it and see how they light up.

Noticing, thanking, and affirming one another, builds resilience. The bonds that you share and that hold you together when things are tough are strengthened with attention and appreciation. Consider showering this attention and sharing this feedback with those you love and count on every day. When sharing this attention to others you create an example that encourages others to return this gift to you.

Many of you may have found that due to illness, aging, military moves, the changing life cycle of the family, has diminished your circle of support and left you feeling isolated and alone. Change in this circle is inevitable and can contribute to feeling alone. Family or friends may have distanced, or you may be less able to get out due to the challenges of illness and caregiving. This is a very real challenge, and takes





creativity, flexibility, and some effort to offset. You may need to reinvent how you connect with others and may need to open up to new sources of friendship and support. So be open to exploring options, write letters, join a club, call friends on the phone, join an internet group, even attending this group provides yet another connection. This effort to connect holds a critical key to your ongoing resilience and happiness.

Let's review, we have talked about some qualities that contribute to building a respite from this ever changing and challenging world. We have talked about the importance of identifying and expanding your circle of support. We have discussed the value of making your home environment a clean place of order that reflects you and that invites open windows, sunlight, nature, music, and good scents indoors. We discussed the importance of roles and responsibilities so that all members bring a contribution. We have highlighted the importance of engaging in activities and rituals, where you make a place for connection and communication. We also have identified the power and healing that can come when you pay positive affirming attention to those you love. Finally, we have discussed the need to communicate fairly and honestly, making your feelings, needs, and requests known and providing the space for others to do the same.

All of these tools will surely contribute to your Homefront becoming more of a respite for you when the times are tough. While you look to your Homefront and your circle of support as your go to source of comfort, understanding, and nurturing, there are going to be times when, either your home, or loved ones are not providing for you. Possibly your home or love one may actually contribute to your distress. What do you do then?

As we mentioned previously, there will be times when you are left to take responsibility for your own wellbeing. You can share your feelings, needs, requests, honestly and respectfully but that doesn't necessarily mean that those you are turning to are able to provide what is needed. This may be one of those times that you need to dig down deep and find a way to get comfort, and relief for yourself. Build a bag of tricks that you can turn to when you find yourself in need. Think about what gives you comfort. What helps you calm down, slow down, and feel nurtured?

One of the tools that can help during these times when you find yourself in a state of distress is a practice called mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness meditation may provide perspective and needed soothing. Mindfulness is a practice of paying attention in the present moment and bringing an attitude of compassion and kindness to you.



When distressed, you may fight what is happening; you may be flooded with thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Mindfulness encourages you to focus your attention in the present moment, not at what did happen, or what could happen, but to guide your attention to the present moment. You do this by focusing your attention on one particular thing, such as your breathing. While you focus on your breathing, in and out, you simply observe the thoughts and feelings that try to take hold of your attention. You notice these thoughts and feelings but don't cling to them. You keep returning your attention to chosen focus, or your breath in this example. Another powerful aspect of this practice is that it asks that you bring an attitude of kindness and compassion for you. The beauty of mindfulness is that it can create that safe place where you can find compassion, calm, and comfort rooted deeply inside you.

Let's take some time now before we close our presentation to slow down and practice a brief mindful meditation.

Please have a seat placing your legs uncrossed and feet on the floor. Place your hands on your thighs or in your lap. Close your eyes if you want to remove distractions and are able.

Keep your mouth gently closed, not clenched, and let your tongue lightly touch the roof of your mouth. Breathe through your nose, unless for some reason you are not able.

When you are settled, we will start by taking a few deep cleansing breaths, deep into your belly, and then exhale slowly.

Breathe in deeply and exhale slowly

Now simply follow the movement of your breath with attention, observing the rise and fall of your breathing

No need to force your breath in anyway just allow it to find its natural depth and rhythm

Thoughts and feelings will rise to your attention just observe them with kindness and let them pass gently

If your thoughts are busy with what came before and what is next .... let them float through returning your attention again to the quiet of your breath

Deep in the quiet of your breath, you are whole, and you are home



Here with attention to the present moment, you are home

Here in the warmth of your loving kindness and compassion, you are home

There is a home for you, whenever you need to feel:

“There’s no place like home.” “There’s no place like home.” “There’s no place like home.”

As you recognize the calm refuge you may have found in this exercise remember that it is always available to you. Please gently return your attention now to your surroundings, open your eyes, maybe stretch a bit.

We hope that this exercise and the ideas that we have encouraged in this presentation may support you in creating the refuge that you long for and need as you face life’s challenges. Your home, your circle of support, your roles, rituals, beliefs, and bonds are the roots of your individual resilience and strength.

We hope that you found affirmation in identifying what you already do to contribute to your resilience, and we further hope that you will consider some of the avenues that we have suggested to expand and adapt to the ever-changing challenges that you confront. Please include us at the caregiver support line in your circle of support as a connection you can turn to when you are in need.