



Reaching Out to Military & Veteran Families

NAMI Homefront was developed to meet the unique needs of families of Service Members and Veterans who live with mental health conditions. It is a six-session adaptation of the evidence-based NAMI Family-to-Family program which is taught by family members who have a relative living with mental illness, also referred to as a brain disorder.

NAMI began offering NAMI Family-to-Family in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities around the country in 2000, to address the emotional toll of loving a Service Member or Veteran with a mental health condition and the impact symptoms can have on everyone around them. NAMI Homefront was developed to meet the specific needs of military and Veteran families.

NAMI Homefront is designed for spouses/partners, parents, siblings, adult children and others who love a Service Member or Veteran who's dealing with the complex challenges of a mental health condition. NAMI Homefront is taught by families of Service Members and Veterans who know what participants are experiencing. The curriculum includes the following components:

- Six 2.5 hour sessions of instructional material, discussions and interactive exercises which may be delivered as a series of consecutive weekly classes, or twice per week on consecutive weeks (e.g., twice on Saturday with a break for lunch or Tuesday and Thursday for three consecutive weeks, etc.) to accommodate busy schedules
- Information on how to access programs, benefits and resources for Service Members and Veterans are included in a General Resources section of the NAMI Homefront program manual
- An online version of the NAMI Homefront program is taught live by two instructors enabling those with caregiving responsibilities to participate from home no matter their location
- An evaluation process to both build an evidence base on the effectiveness of the program and ensure that the program continually delivers best practices and current information most needed by the families of Service Members and Veterans

The goals of NAMI Homefront are to:

- provide the fundamental information necessary for the family to understand what the Service Member or Veteran is experiencing including topics related to trauma, combat stress, TBI, substance use disorders, PTSD and other mental health conditions
- help participants cope with the impact that mental health conditions have on the individual and their family
- provide tools for the family to use even after completing the program that will assist them in responding as effectively as possible to challenging situations and crises
- help the family learn to take care of their own needs in addition to those of their Service Member or Veteran

Program Curriculum

- Class 1: Introduction to Family Education**
Special features of the course; learning about the normative stages of our emotional reactions to the challenges presented by mental health conditions in the family; the belief system and principles on which NAMI are programs are based; recognizing that mental health conditions are fundamentally biological disorders; addressing the challenges presented by the stigma around symptoms, specifically in military and Veteran culture.
- Class 2: The Biology of Mental Health Conditions and Getting a Diagnosis**
Overview of development and functions of key brain areas; research on functional and structural brain changes related to mental health conditions and brain injury; overview of the diagnostic process; critical periods in developing a brain disorder and symptom management; strategies in development of a Crisis File and sharing participant personal stories.
- Class 3: Understanding Trauma and Overview of Diagnoses**
Discussion of trauma from the perspective of the general public, then specifically about various types of trauma experienced by military personnel and their families; emphasize a picture of normal reactions to abnormal events and normalizing the fact that there is always some level of residue associated with exposure to trauma; overview of the types and subtypes of some of the major mental health conditions including mood episodes and mood disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, co-occurring brain disorder and addictive disorders.
- Class 4: Treatment Systems and Services**
Overview of the systems that may be involved in the Service Member's treatment including the U.S. Department of Defense Military Health System, the VA's Veterans Health Administration and the civilian mental healthcare systems; overview of different types of mental health service providers; overview of different types of therapy and treatment, including medications; emphasis on the importance of working collaboratively (the Service Member or Veteran, the healthcare provider and the family) to achieve the best outcomes; suggestions and tips for communicating with the healthcare provider and the importance of advocating for the needs of the Service Member or Veteran and the family.
- Class 5: Crisis Preparation and Communication Skills**
Acknowledge the impact of mental health conditions on each family member and the Service Member; learning to separate the symptoms and behavior from the individual; loving the person behind the disorder; learning various skills that can be used to improve day to day communications within the family as well as during episodes of crisis; communication skills, problem solving skills, tips for handling challenging behavior, crisis preparation and response, developing a relapse plan.
- Class 6: Family Roles, Recovery and Self-Care**
The unique challenges of various family roles (spouse/partner vs. parent vs. sibling, etc.); the importance of self-care in being an effective family caregiver; discussion of any unresolved needs of participants; emphasize building an advocacy team for the Service Member; invitation to join NAMI in the fight to end discrimination and ensure access to appropriate treatment services; evaluations and certificates.