



Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program

For Those Who Serve and Those Who SupportSM

5 STEPS TO OVERCOME STEREOTYPES

This resource provides a five-step strategy for female Service Members to overcome the negative stereotypes that are created in society about women in the military. It also gives a list of reintegration tips for women experiencing stereotyping after deployment.

1. EXAMINE

Begin by examining the basis of the stereotype and why it is widely held. Frequently, stereotypes can hold negative attributions, and this is the first step in taking away potential stigma. If you can see and demonstrate that a stereotype is based on wrongly held assumptions, you can take away the power of the stereotype.

2. EVALUATE

Evaluate the reasons that the stereotype exists and has power. For example, is the stereotype powerful because it is based on fear? Most instances where stereotypes have a stronghold are based in miscomprehension and anxiety over not understanding differences in people and ideas.

3. ACCEPT

Encourage acceptance of differences rather than demonizing differences. Everyone is a product of their individual upbringing and background, and each is wonderfully different in its uniqueness. When you accept these differences and even encourage them, you can overcome and redefine stereotypes.

4. REDEFINE

Think outside the box. Clearly, just because the mainstream believes a certain way, does not make it right. The cornerstone of a free society is its willingness to look at things from multiple perspectives. By doing so, you can redefine and debunk stereotypes.

5. REFLECT

Reflect on your own ideas about people who are different from you. Think about the kinds of stereotypes you place on others.



TIPS FOR OVERCOMING STEREOTYPES DURING REINTEGRATION

Stay Calm

Reintegration can be difficult, and dealing with stereotypes during this time can add more stress. Try to stay calm when you experience stigma or people are stereotyping you. Yelling or getting upset will not change their mind, because they will be more focused on your anger than your words. Staying calm gives you the opportunity to share your perspective and redefine the stereotype. Remember that not all those who share in negative stereotypes are trying to be malicious, but they may not know any better or realize that it is offensive.

Be the Bigger Person

Unfortunately, there may come a time when someone is trying to be hurtful and throws negative stereotypes at you, but it is important to react in the right way. It can be difficult not to fight back, but an explosive reaction is usually what the attacker is looking for, so do not give him/her the satisfaction. Instead be the bigger person, explain that what was said is inappropriate, and act with the respect and pride of a U.S. Service Member.

Encourage Dialogue

Sometimes stereotypes come about because people are too afraid to ask for the truth, so they end up listening to rumors and making assumptions. Encourage questions and explain your perspective to help redefine the stereotype in a positive way.

Be Patient

It will take a lot of readjusting for you and those around you to have you back in civilian life. Be patient with yourself and others about the changes that may have occurred in your absence. You may feel that others do not acknowledge your status as a female Service Member, but it is important to be patient with those who hold stereotypes as well.

Share Your Experiences

Sharing your deployment experiences will help you reconnect with those around you. At the same time, sharing your experiences can eliminate many stereotypes. Many stereotypes come from lack of knowledge or misunderstanding, so telling your personal story of what deployment was like for you can clear up a lot of confusion and set the record straight. Who better to hear your side of the story than from yourself?



Surround Yourself with Support

Reintegration support can be vital to having a successful readjustment back into civilian life. It may also be extremely helpful to surround yourself with positivity and those who support you in every aspect of life. Facing negative stereotypes and stigmas is no easy task, and having others around you to block the negativity can help eliminate stereotypes and make reintegration easier.

Be Honest

Although there will be many changes that you will have to adjust to, being stereotyped is not one you should have to change for. Remove yourself from negative situations and be honest with people about their behaviors. The more honest you are up front, the easier it will be for you to reintegrate back into civilian life.

Accept Your Emotions

Realize that it is okay to feel angry, sad, or upset about being stereotyped. Do not dwell on hurtful actions that happened in the past, but instead be proactive and share your story so that you can prevent stereotypes in the future.

Get Involved

Some support can come from being involved with other female Service Members through support groups, recreational activities, advocacy groups, or social media. This can be helpful for reintegration support, but it also displays strength of female Service Members coming together as a minority.