Class Activities for **Chapter 15: Veterans, Their Families, and Military Social Work**

**Class activity #1**

Break the class into groups and have them choose someone to be the recorder. Ask them to answer the following questions.

1) What traits do you associate with being a member of the military? Think of both positive and negative traits if you can.

2) What traits do you associate with being a social worker? Again, think of both positive and negative traits if you can.

3) Looking at your list of traits, what similarities are there? Are there more differences? What do you make of it? What would you expect a military social work officer to be like?

4) What typical social worker traits might make it hard to serve in the military? What typical military traits might make it hard to be a social work client?

Discuss as a large group.

Note that in reality, military service people are diverse and so are social workers. Certainly, many people fit the stereotypes to varying degrees, but it is important not to treat military members as a homogenous group any more than one would treat any group of clients with a common trait as homogenous. Still, it’s important to recognize the impact the strong military culture can have on people—both good and bad—and be prepared to deal with that in working with military clients.

**Class activity #2**

The textbook mentions the fact that social workers with military clients can experience “secondary trauma;” that is, they can empathize so strongly with their clients, who have often experienced catastrophic injuries or other events, that they can begin to feel symptoms of the same problems themselves. This struggle to maintain boundaries between self and client can lead to compassion fatigue and/or burnout. It can cause a social worker to feel extremely tired both physically and emotionally.

Of course, this is not the only area of practice where social workers may struggle to separate themselves from their clients (and their clients’ stories) enough to maintain their own health. It is essential for social workers, however, to have a good sense of what is necessary to maintain their own personal health.

After discussing the above, instruct students to come up with a list of tips and/or strategies they believe they can use to help themselves maintain a good emotional balance when it comes to work and personal life. How can they engage in solid self-care? What tactics will they use to do their best to leave work at work and to have a healthy home life and leisure life? What sorts of clients (or client experiences) do they believe would be the most challenging to them in maintaining this balance?

After they have had some time to come up with individual plans, ask for volunteers from the class to discuss with the large group, or if you prefer, break them up into small groups so that everyone gets a chance to speak to a few people about their plan, get feedback, and totally focus on a few peers’ plans as well.

**Class activity #3**

The military has taken more steps than ever in recent years to address the scourge of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and rape within its ranks. Without a doubt, men are also subject to these crimes, but as women have become more prevalent in the military ranks, the rates of these incidents have risen sharply, even though the vast majority still go unreported.

Break the class into groups to discuss what specific strategies they believe could be undertaken to reduce the volume of military sexual trauma (MST) and to encourage a higher percentage of victims to come forward. This is one area where, unlike many areas of practice, the funds that could be accessed are virtually unlimited if the use of them can be properly justified. MST costs the military a great deal of money every year, so prevention efforts that were effective would likely be welcomed quite openly.

Tell the students to keep in mind the hypermasculinity of the Armed Forces and the fact that most enlisted people and officers are men can make women who are assaulted or harassed even more reluctant to come forward with their stories.

Have the class discuss their strategies as a whole after each group has completed its list of ideas.