Speaker 1 ([00:01](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/XE1MmogfsBe8zwnHUS27U12PMy6AsaqgU2ohdTpLHxAaDDg4g8xMeGt-n72ETdaScG47pPPvf37ffD7yycEb34vpQLk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1.8)):

Hi everyone, and welcome to this episode of Ask a Doula Giver. My name's Susan O'Brien. This episode is How to Care for Dying Veterans, something that is very challenging and so vitally important. Welcome to this episode. I wanna start out by saying that veterans have been the most challenging end of life, uh, scenarios that I have been a part of. And we'll go into why in this episode and what you can do to support them. But I wanna start by sharing a story that I have of a veteran named Bob, and I was taking care of him. He had a wife and he had four adult children and he had served in the Vietnam War. Um, you know, and he had identified obviously very closely with that as a part of, of his identity and life. But at the end of life, what happens is, in general, so let's talk about in general, at the end of life, at the end of life, everyone's stuff bubbles up to the top.

([01:05](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/INncVZb54KEeRe3b4Ih-8CTd-qkipEdn6O9biL_4n1bliVaq5eLWQWlYkdBIcRxDjb7TgByKnBZaFhcxcuyNDVcqQxo?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=65.64)):

So all of the traumas, all of the experiences that we didn't wanna deal with, right, that we didn't, haven't processed at the end of life organically, everyth bubbles to the top. And sometimes that can be a really tough order cuz here, here it all comes, right? We have this very limited window of opportunity, but for our veterans, our incredibly brave veterans who have done so much and gone through so much complex trauma on so many different levels, just trying to survive day to day after that, those experiences, I can't even imagine. And we know that it's very difficult. We know the statistics and we know we're not doing the right thing by them. However, at the end of life, when their traumas and when the stuff bubbles up to the top, it can be very complicated. So I had this gentleman, lovely gentleman named Bob, and as he was getting closer to his end of life and going through the journey, he was talking about how he had done things in the war that he thought he was definitely gonna go to hell for. And so it had weighed heavy on his heart. He had a lot of guilt and he had a lot of fear, and we can absolutely understand that. And so bringing in a social worker from hospice and helping to help him work through a lot of those things was really important. It didn't quite get there. And again, this is not our agenda. This is what we know end of life. Veterans are facing complex, deep rooted traumas and experiences that they probably cannot fully process in a short window of time. But we're gonna

Speaker 2 ([02:58](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/Mcod9UDUGSOAuyCOLwuYpHyNC7iNMKBXPtWprq2J2m_083w6vxjxb5D63LIOMTWIp6oL6Z3EpdjbZCRhJrZCTMUsHpY?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=178.84)):

Help in any and every way we can. But also what tools can we use immediately and also for the families that are, um, involved as well. So Bob thought that he was definitely gonna go to hell for the things that he had done in the war, and it was really intense. Now I'm gonna tell you that there was, um, in within the family dynamics, which by the way, most families have dynamics, right? Let's just face that he had, um, a wife that he was caring for that he was the main caregiver for, and she had some, um, cognitive, some mental issues. And now that he was gonna be having his end of life, he was leaning on the four children to follow his wishes and care for her, let her live in the house and to take care of her. Well, this is what his wishes were.

([03:50](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/BV7RHNsl7uQ00xpLK4DfdwtJBJavdaIZvZpj3FKMO4pxmvJ2MsFX8nUODCc08xExYkC8NsShRHk2aZ7_r7vGjo4Jtlk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=230.32)):

But unbeknownst to him, in its totality, the children were divided. So two of the adult children said that behind his back when he dies, they are going to sell the house and put her in a nursing home. And two of the other children said, no, we wanna follow his wishes and keep her in the house and let her live here and care for her. So I honestly believe that it was a combination of Bob knowing that the family was not on board completely with what was gonna happen after she, uh, he died and he was worried about his wife and his fear of what was gonna happen to him going what he calls to hell after he died because of what he did during the war. I think it was the combination of these two things that had Bob hanging on and not dying for.

([04:38](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/-f3gldYc2xrb8-mNjbfRlQXpsE5d5ZtsVi8QURCGM_uQ6kVokXtgo4UJ_DHk64OzOBmI3Lsv2s4RXsunUkhg6_rcFXc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=278.62)):

He lasted 11 days. And I wanna tell you that I have seen, I have been with over a thousand people at the end of life, been honored and privileged to be with over a thousand people at the end of life. And I have never in my life seeing somebody so thin, like I didn't even know it was possible. And I remember the last day I came to his house, he was in a sleeping coma. His one daughter was car caring for him. And I remember his back, his skin just separated on his back to start to rip open. And I just went home that night and prayed that he would die because this was going to lead to so much physical pain. And I've never seen that before. And he did die that night. But I also want to share with you, I feel like he was hanging on because of unresolved, obviously trauma and fear of what was gonna happen to him.

([05:31](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/sUDQBAe3ZNx5CiSMaxkQLn2RALr9xEU1InrigCeiO-Y21yciQcBY6-0IcnKRjG2Zu8qZjmQYYCSZYc1Ugh8aSWn9_UM?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=331.3)):

And this is probably not uncommon with veterans in general, having all of this trauma bubbling up or, or them really trying to keep all of this trauma down at the end of life. I mean, it's just as awful what they go through. And we, you know, they've served, they've served all of us selflessly, put their life on the line and really broken their life open in so many levels. And this is where they are when they get back. And this is where they are at the end of life. So from a non-judgmental point of view, we have to do everything that we can to support our veterans, not only at the end of life and their families, but obviously even, um, all during and after. So let's talk about the, the very specific needs of a veteran and how to care for them when they're dying.

([06:26](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/69QKvvL3bBIsRQF-qvI5SzLTKN7tWnlprCz2d6QfcFkKDIdBbvkZXFK69Cy6_jFX_SOXgdgDPo4ZcZYD_M4RB_QHstc?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=386.33)):

Number one, in the first phase, you always wanna build trust. So if you are coming in as a family member, as a volunteer, as a doula giver, as a death doula, you want to build trust. And I think that, you know, trust is something that is gonna set the tone, obviously for your whole relationship with this person at the end of life and their family. But it's also critically there's another layer with veterans. I feel like they've been obviously through so much and they probably don't think that you can understand and you, you probably don't and will never understand exactly what they went through. But understanding that building that trust and how to do that is by being a, a solid support and being present and being non-judgmental and being a great listener and asking, what can I do for you? How can I help you, sir?

([07:19](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/iot9EzphbExjCN4e8HkOnScZiZqSEs_qCE40M12rL4F2K3Ab-GsNr9suXOtaDWEmQyCIJ-Q7-KVyAigHtOD3VJoW-Ys?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=439.43)):

How can I help you, ma'am, this is exactly what we wanna do. And then ask them questions about, you know, where they served, how they served, you know, you can see that again, it's such a identifying part of their life and story and pride that allowing them to share might give you, again, some insight and, and allow to build that relationship. So building the trust by being present, being a, a great listener, but also knowing how, um, very deep the layers go and, uh, a complication of trauma that they've been through. And so whatever you can do to break those walls down and to create, again, that relationship is critically important to allow them to be able to express some of the traumas and things so that they can physically move that energy. Um, and but also again to, uh, give direction and help the family with suggestions.

([08:18](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/mq4-TqG7BQQaLeSAMAv8kCt1otJiEWhL310VfXhD9_THU2lEq9pjm8DlqDAvhWYLvtIoKTbIKYv6YMDgC24TtEJ5RXE?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=498.53)):

And if people don't trust you, of course they won't, they won't do that. So building the trust with not only that person that served, but they're family. And then this is the very important place of the stabilization phase. So when we identify acute phase, acute issues like pain and exhaustion and nausea, and all of those are tech taken care of now and stable, right? So the hospice nurse, you told the hospice nurse that he was having pain and all of that, and they, they came back, they did a great assessment. Now it's sy tight symptom management and things are what you call stable. It's the perfect time to have conversation and it's within this window of opportunity where forgiveness is going to be instrumental for that veteran to not only forgive others, but to forgive themselves. And just like Bob said, the things that he did that he was asked to do, we asked you as a country, as an, as a, uh, as the leaders of your service asked you to do certain things to defend the people of the nation, all of that, you were asked to do those things.

([09:32](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/zo2F7dXBNIkPJsAiVLLJW086y_aOoJSOhcosMM0zEmO20jrcds0hFDoOjG1j8G1-a-7xQ_Um-3K3JXakLizDWBBV138?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=572.95)):

So we wanna create a, a way where forgiveness can be utilized in shifting that heavy stuck energy. And I'm sure there's gonna be so many layers in so many areas, and I, and you probably won't even begin to get to all of them. But what I want you to know as that doula, giver, doula, family member caring for somebody at the end of life who is a veteran, is that it very much might require and usually does the help. And again, you have a very short window period of social workers of clergy, um, if their, um, veteran services support has their own even better because nobody can really know what a veteran goes through other than another veteran or somebody who works there. So if they have those specific support systems within it, but you may not have that accessible or you may not even might not have the timeframe for it.

([10:30](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/jRmcsIlhgZC4rlv4htGj4x5dgG0XU6P7X7U-jWMWmSUAj2br7IyykpMVzgawoOdfnfDxSXhgiCzBsofcQ2B69Phhmnw?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=630.33)):

So just know that forgiveness is the catalyst to helping veterans. Um, and, and we just, we wanna, you know, honor them so much in what they've given, not just in putting their life on the line, but it almost seems that all of them gave their life up because of the trauma that they had to endure in being, um, in the wars and doing the things they did. That even if they're still alive, they seem like a very different, it seems like a very different life that they live after. So it's almost giving up their, their past life for us. I mean, it's such an incredible selfless, um, act that they do. And so in this space of trying to acknowledge the forgiveness that's needed to give others forgiveness, that is so needed to give themselves, um, and releasing that, and some of the things that have been very helpful is again, acknowledging that you, you showed up with the highest level of courage and service and these things were asked of you, they were commanded of you, you followed the orders, you are released from any and all of the attachment responsibility, any of of that that took place.

([11:52](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/DX7m59PK8H6PJ7S1eDcejAAfvKO0_s04OV6CBYHuzDr7qjXv0Z6dKvWH1UNQ_MQEkiOYuI29tn6gSPMAiilbR5Oki9w?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=712.65)):

And so this obviously is gonna be something that may take many, many sessions and it's something that should not just start at the bedside of those at the end of life. But this is where organically stuck trauma and energy does come up. It bubbles to the top and will prevent somebody from having a peaceful end of life. So we really wanna help our veterans with this. One of the things that I wanna bring up at this moment is the use and, uh, psilocybin with veterans at the end of life. And this is something that I feel from everything that I've studied, from everything that I've read, from everything that I have seen is a thousand percent a wonderful, wonderful treatment and therapy for our veterans is psilocybin is the psychedelic even before we get to the end of life. But especially if we don't, if we don't have that privilege of having it before at the end of life, if there is a way to access the psychedelics that help to release or it it, whatever it does in the body, it gets right to it.

([12:57](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/QuxOlPUeomT_Ubmb-2lPJdr2HKgl7leJMDS2OI3ozgr6RstrmuyBaRHtmNqGtoog68QwyPHE5tHzVyTYfuvcleGBZCk?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=777.46)):

It breaks open the consciousness awareness of it all, it, it allows the healing, it allows the trauma to be moved without having to try and go to the layers without having to try and go through the trenches of it without having to, you know, uh, sit and try and pick it apart or feel all of the terror, the body terror to feel all the body terror that is locked in side of that veteran that's associated with what happened during those periods of time. The psilocybin cracks it open to be able to be moved and looked at in the safety, in the love, in the higher perspective and wisdom space. This should be a part of every veteran experience, not just at the end of life, but after they serve, um, because it's having such high success rates. So again, at the end, we're talking about right now, cuz it's just not given everywhere and it's not everywhere, but taking care of your dying veterans, if there's a way to access and it's not just, uh, psilocybin, it's it's other psychedelic, uh, properties that can be administered so that you ha probably have a high probability of being able to access some of them, um, where you live.

([14:24](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/7Dh6Fu5qpi8H1J3By9zVl4zPr1bDSBJMvLLlxOuQRg1IpUPXsDOwkoj8mKQ5NoH6NQTYeYzqDGyEt_clBFwfzM6ub4Y?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=864.52)):

So you wanna, you wanna know about this and also you wanna know that this is something that allows the person to remove, make sense release from those experiences without having to get into and feel all of the body terror, the mental terror, which they all seem to experience, which is just so heartbreaking. So in the stabilization phase, the use of psychedelics for therapy is highly recommended. Um, and also again, just allowing that forgiveness. And this can be used and needs to be used in combination. So if you don't have access to the psychedelic me therapies, then you'll have to use what you have. And but utilizing the power of forgiveness to release, to let that person understand that they were following orders, they're, they were of showing up to be of the highest service that they were just of course doing what with courage, what they were told, um, selflessly and releasing all the attachment energetically to all of those individual experiences that were part of that.

([15:28](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/yJqLV8hAG023rrrCdxqM3GRLRaePmvHAUeFRI7WISQAKTcWjpQGZUH9E2ncTWKrNoD8rCftEGq86Loh1hf7e3nb1BP8?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=928.92)):

If we can have the psychedelic medicine, uh, and therapy as part of that, you will, it will be light years of transformation. So psychedelic, but also therapy. And if you can't get your hands on psychedelic, I would definitely be asking where you could, um, even set up this ahead of time. And then the utilizing the power of forgiveness is the most instrumental tool for having the best end of life, not just for veterans, but for every single person. And the third thing that I wanna share about how to care for dying veterans is to work with the veteran and the family to make this vigil period, this transition period. Um, this is their journey. This is, this is their experience and we're here to support them and make it the best, most beautiful experience possible. Who do they want to be there? What readings do they want?

([16:28](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/PH6clJfs2A-h1vXJhHbekiheavpRz_d6foPqiBp1ilZxYcJkN8rv85ObiduexDZPSjA-iUky4pyUT9rco-LCSbmp8xg?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=988.28)):

What music do they want? Do they want to be dressed in their uniform? You know, all of it. Um, this is their sendoff, right in this life's experience. And they gave so, so much in the role that they played that we want to support that. And then with that being said, for the family, you know, again, if you can work with the individual person about what they would want for a memorial and their disposition would mean where they want to be laid to rest, of course we do that if it's not possible to work directly with them working with a family. So making, making this a sacred experience and honoring that role and the gift that that person played in this world for being such a selfless, um, individual that showed up to care for all of us, all of us. So maybe there's something that you want to again, help them with a special life celebration, memorial celebration, and then something that's ongoing.

([17:32](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/0BQjZYj3Ed_2jqDo0h-OKS19fInTh_KJNtQ878bTiTXctWa2ra4H7IYYeGGbgdNPu-ZZOILl9Q0fXnD8_PlRWXONh0c?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1052.06)):

So maybe on the birthday every year, on the birthday of that individual, you do a special, um, you know, event or something that honors them within the, you know, way that you want to be remembering them, but also that they want to be remembered the gifts that they have given. So it can go on and on. It's one of the most, um, selfless acts of courage is, is serving your country selflessly. And we ask of them so, so much. In fact, I feel like even beyond putting their life on the line, we ask them to give up their lives because it never seems to be the same after those experiences. So we want to know how critically important it is to show up to support our veterans, not just when they are at the end of life, but every minute that they need our support after they selflessly show up to serve us.

([18:26](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/shared/VgBIPqXC4_pQa5kMSv-4y54D7xfKPRT3zlWj_izY5HF8N09skNF6G052XvK9PEUsu5v4THu2RNsW5Ca3Yq_5nA5Ym00?loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1106.94)):

So if you would like to listen to our doula givers level one End of Life Doula, veterans Edition, specific Veterans Edition, it's an amazing webinar. You can access it now if you have a veteran that you know, or you know somebody that has a veteran, it will show you how to care for them at the end of life. It'll go into depth and d different areas of care. And also we have a beautiful expert that is on that webinar that is a veteran herself, um, Dr. Quinn Galloway Salazar. And she is just wonderful at sharing the importance of honoring our vets and where you can follow up to get more veteran resources. And again, these are the tools that you can specifically use when caring for veterans who are dying and they deserve everything that we can possibly show up to give them. Thank you all for serving, uh, we honor you and your families and are eternally grateful for your service. Thank you all for listening to this episode of Ask a Death Doula. Again, you can access the doula givers level one End-of-Life Doula, veterans Edition in the show notes. You can listen to it on demand, it's available right now. I thank you all so very much. Thank you for being here and we will see you in the next episode. Thanks everybody.