

Fight for Freedom from Service-related Moral Injury

The Essential Role of Caregivers in
Helping Service-members find Forgiveness



VCU



Agenda

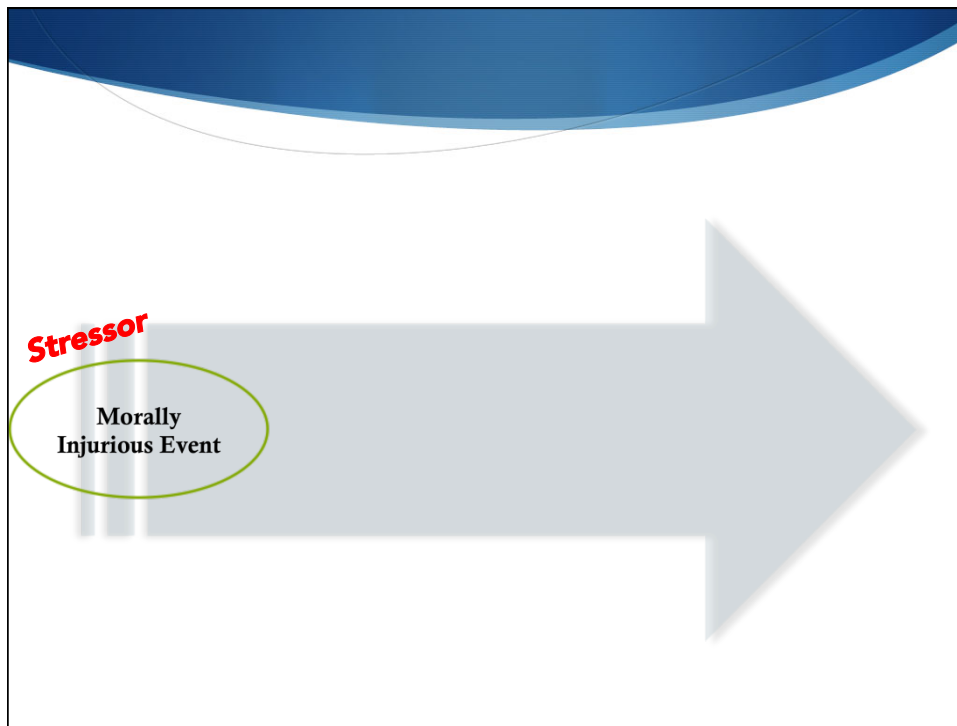
- ❖ Introduce Moral Injury, its causes and consequences
- ❖ Discuss a Strategy to Facilitate Recovery from Moral Injury
- ❖ Explore what Caregivers can do to Support their Veterans
- ❖ Comment about Caregiver Self-care

Service-related Moral Injury



What is a moral injury (MI)?

- ❖ “Perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.”
- Brett Litz, Ph.D., VA Boston Healthcare System, 2009
- ❖ “Disruption in an individual’s sense of personal morality and capacity to behave in a just manner”
- Kent Drescher, Ph.D., VA Palo Alto Healthcare System, 2011
- ❖ Inner conflict is “stress arising due to moral damage from carrying out or bearing witness to acts or failures to act that violate deeply held belief systems”
- *Combat and Operational Stress Control*, NTTP & MCRP, 2010



Potential Causes of MI

- ❖ Killing an Enemy Combatant
- ❖ Injury or Death of a Battle Buddy
- ❖ Injury or Death of Innocent Civilians
- ❖ Injury or Death of others under one's Leadership, Medical, or Chaplaincy Care
- ❖ Destruction of Property
- ❖ War-zone Atrocities (e.g., excessive use of violence, MST)

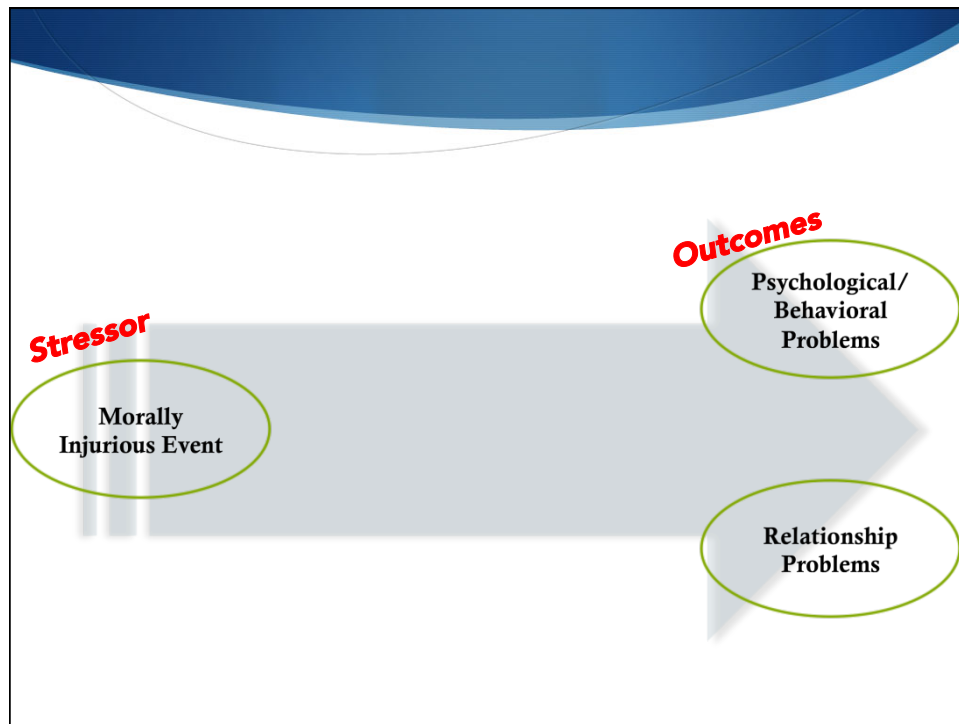
How prevalent is MI?

- ❖ In a survey of 143 active duty service members who were being treated for PTSD,
 - ❖ 22% reported *Moral Injury by Others*
 - ❖ 12% reported *Moral Injury by Self*

(Stein et al., 2012)

MI across every level of the Military Command Structure

Enlisted Ratings	Most likely to perpetrate or witness killing of enemy combatants, demise of a battle buddy, and exposure to severe human suffering (i.e., poverty, famine, etc.).
Non-commissioned Officers	Sense of duty exacerbates negative emotions when oneself or one's troops are rendered combat ineffective. Likelihood of repeated deployments.
Junior Officers	Performance-culture: Negotiate between managing the expectations of senior officers and expressing one's own moral fortitude.
Senior Officers	Despite the success/failure of an operation, senior officers' decisions have fall-out in terms of personnel who are injured or killed.
Support Personnel	Condemn themselves for the injury or death of service members in their professional care.



What are the possible consequences of sustaining a moral injury?

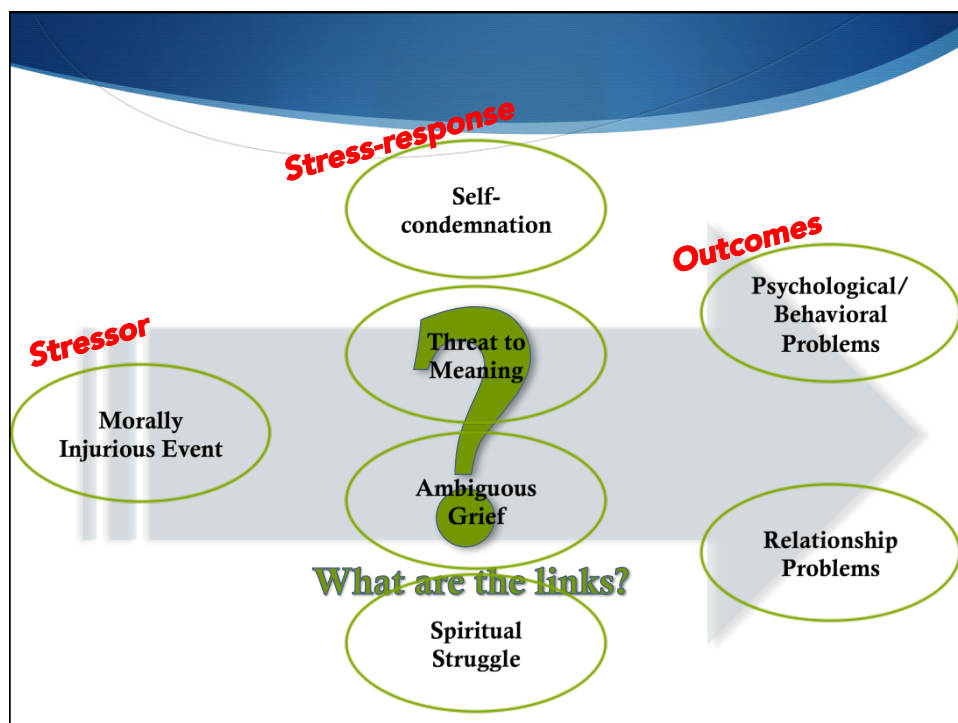
- ❖ Psychological Problems
 - ❖ Guilt and Shame
 - ❖ Aggression
 - ❖ Depression, Anxiety, Post-traumatic Stress
 - ❖ Feelings of hopelessness or meaninglessness
- ❖ Behavioral Problems
 - ❖ Social Isolation
 - ❖ Substance Abuse
 - ❖ Risk Taking
 - ❖ Non-suicidal self-injury, Suicidal Behavior

(Drescher et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2014)

What are the possible consequences of sustaining a moral injury?

- ❖ Interpersonal Relationship Problems
 - ❖ Conflicts with romantic partners
 - ❖ Conflicts with coworkers
 - ❖ Feeling alienated from others (e.g., children)
- ❖ Sacred Relationship Problems
 - ❖ Loss of Religious/Spiritual faith
 - ❖ Estrangement from faith community

(Drescher et al., 2011; Griffin et al., 2014)



1. Self-condemnation

- ❖ Service members and veterans may experience reoccurring intermittent or chronic self-condemnation if they engage in or fail to prevent actions that violate their internal beliefs (Worthington & Langberg, 2012).
- ❖ Self-condemnation was associated with PTSD, depression, and anxiety among male veterans ($N = 213$; Witvliet et al., 2004).
- ❖ Among romantic dyads, self-condemnation is associated with lower relationship satisfaction among both partners (Pelucchi et al., 2013).
- ❖ Self-condemnation may be perpetuated or exacerbated by if veterans feel judged by others (Hoge et al., 2004).

2. Threat to Meaning

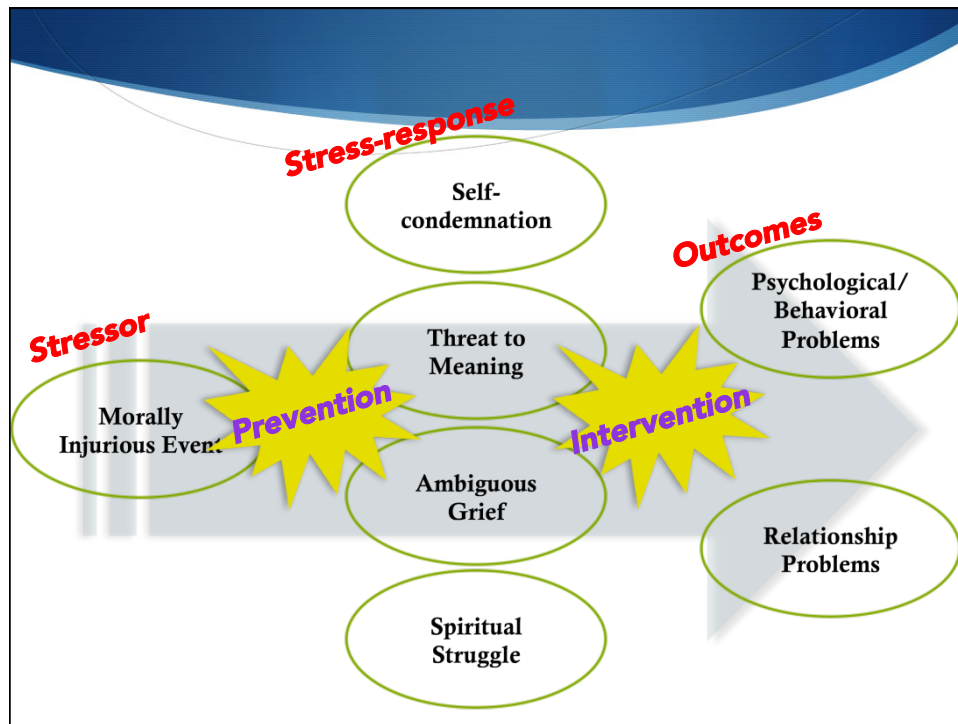
- ❖ When combat actions and beliefs about oneself and the world collide, it transforms our perspective and sometime threatens our sense of identity, purpose, and meaning in life (Janoff-Bullman, 2010).
- ❖ Among OIF/OEF/OND veterans ($N=31$), difficulty making meaning was found to mediate the association between exposure to a morally injurious event and problems including posttraumatic stress, depression, and risk of suicide (Currier, Holland, & Malott, 2015).

3. Ambiguous Grief

- ❖ Loss will always be part of war. And, where there is loss, grief will also be.
- ❖ Includes the loss of others as well as intangible things
 - ❖ Loss of Battle Buddies, Innocent Civilians, etc.
 - ❖ Loss of Innocence, Loss of Control, Loss of Trust
 - ❖ Loss of Things You Once Enjoyed due to Physical Injury
- ❖ No Instructions for How to Grieve much of What is Lost in War

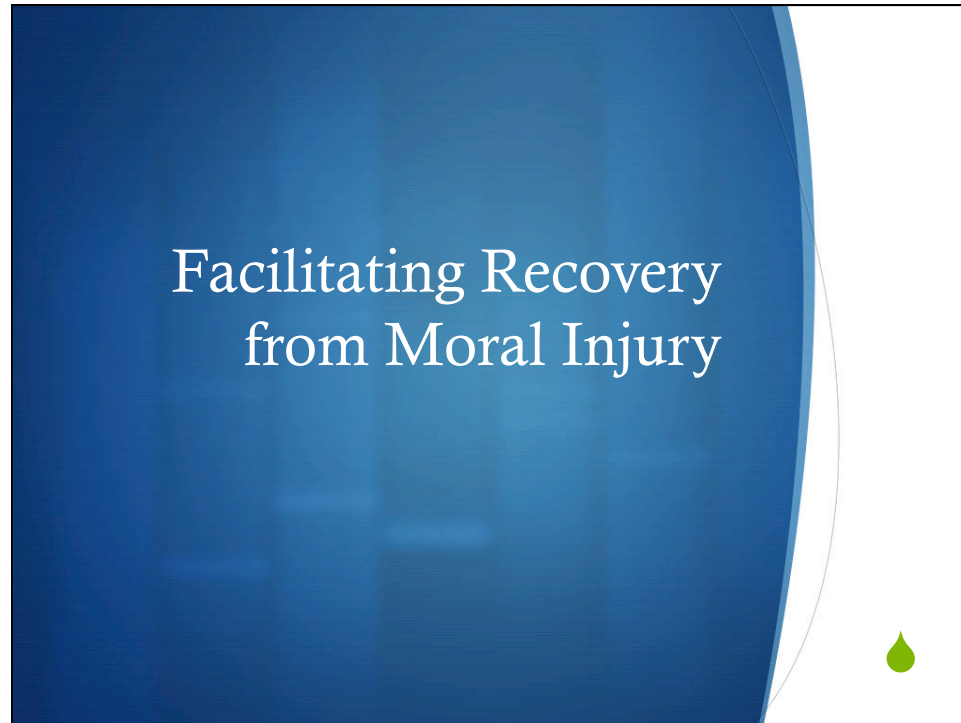
4. Spiritual Struggle

- ❖ Personal values are often imbued with sacred importance (e.g., marriage, parenthood, sexuality, vocation; Pargament & Mahoney, 2002).
- ❖ Desecrations occur when one violates a sanctified value (Pargament et al., 2005), which results in spiritual struggle (Exline et al., 2014).
- ❖ Spiritual struggles include feeling alienated from or angry toward God, religious fear and guilt, and conflicts with others in one's religious community.



Goals of Prevention & Intervention

- ❖ What can we do to equip our veterans by preparing them for and helping them resolve the challenges (e.g., self-condemnation, meaning making, ambiguous grief, spiritual struggle) that link exposure to a morally injurious event to psychological problems?



Recovery Model

1. Introduction
2. Assessing Responsibility
3. Grief
4. Self-forgiveness
5. Acceptance
6. The “New Normal”

MORAL INJURY
Recovery Program

Treatment Manual

First Edition


Manual developed by
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Introduction

- ❖ Psychoeducation about Moral Injury
- ❖ Personalize the Causes/Consequences of MI to each Veteran
 - ❖ Focus on the Present as much as the Past
- ❖ Encourage each Veteran to select One Event
 - ❖ If Veteran reports many events, they can train themselves by focusing on one event for the purpose of treatment and then apply what they learned to additional experiences.

Break-out Session Exercise #1

- 
- ❖ Description of the Event
 - ❖ Identifying Consequences
 - ❖ Evaluating Your Resources
 - ❖ Identifying Collateral Damage
 - ❖ Elements of a Good Confession
 - ❖ Coping with Loss
 - ❖ Self-Forgiveness Quotes
 - ❖ Self-Forgiveness Contract
 - ❖ Rethinking Rumination
 - ❖ Focusing on Present Choices
 - ❖ Connecting to What's Important
 - ❖ Evaluating Your Experience

EXERCISE 1A
Recall an Event

Instructions: Take a moment to reflect on your experiences and try to identify a single event from your service that went against your values or beliefs. You may have memories of the event that you can't forget or feel guilty and ashamed when you think about it. You may also have to deal with problems that it causes in your life today no matter how long ago it occurred. In the space below, describe what happened that violated your values.

Exercise 1B
Identify the Consequences

Instructions: Take a moment to reflect on your experiences and try to identify the past and present consequences of your offense. Using the list below, place an "X" next to each of the ways that the event you described impacts your life now. Although the event may have occurred a long time ago, select reactions that you may have had then as well as how you feel in the present.

- Feeling Guilty about What I've done
- Feeling Ashamed of Who I am
- Feeling Angry toward Others People
- Feeling Angry toward Myself
- Blaming myself
- Feeling Disappointed that things didn't turn out like I hoped
- Having Difficulty Trusting Others (e.g., family members, friends, etc.)
- Having Difficulty Trusting Myself
- Feeling Emotionally Numb
- Doubting my Religious/Spiritual Faith
- Believing that I'll Never Change
- Feeling Out of Control
- Feeling a Loss of Meaning or Purpose
- Grieving the Loss of Someone who I valued
-

Assessing Responsibility

- ❖ Process Experience to form an Accurate Blame Appraisal
- ❖ Acknowledge that Emotional Numbing is a short-term Protective Strategy that may lead to long-term Loss of Pleasure if perpetuated
- ❖ Normalize the Purpose of Negative Emotions (e.g., Guilt and Shame) and identify Specific Barriers to Healthy Resolution of each Veteran's Emotions
- ❖ Encourage Veteran to Reengage Negative Emotions by Making Amends

Grief

- ❖ Loss will always be part of war. And, where there is loss, grief will also be.
- ❖ Includes the loss of others as well as intangible things
 - ❖ Loss of Battle Buddies, Innocent Civilians, etc.
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Forgiveness

- ❖ Forgiveness of others for those who condemn others for the wrongdoing that they themselves witnessed
- ❖ Forgiveness of self for those who condemn themselves for perpetrating or failing to prevent wrongdoing
- ❖ What Forgiveness is Not!

“I can’t forgive myself . . . and the people who can forgive me are dead”
– Ret. Marine Capt. Timothy Kudo

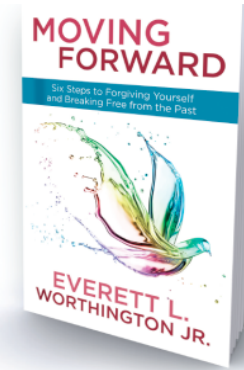
Self-forgiveness

Decisional
Affirmation of Values

		Low	High
Emotional Positive Self-regard	Low	Self-neglect	Self-punish
	High	Self-excuse	Self-forgive

Self-forgiveness, cont.

- ❖ Self-forgiveness intervention has been shown to alleviate guilt and shame and promote self-forgiveness.
- ❖ Self-forgiveness is associated with fewer psychological problems and destructive behaviors (e.g., suicide attempts, substance abuse), higher quality relationships, and less religious/spiritual struggle.



Break-out Session Exercise #2

- ❖ Description of the Event
- ❖ Evaluating Your Resources
- ❖ Identifying Collateral Damage
- ❖ Elements of a Good Confession
- ❖ Coping with Loss
- ❖ Self-Forgiveness Quotes
- ❖ Self-Forgiveness Contract
- ❖ Rethinking Rumination
- ❖ Focusing on Present Choices
- ❖ Connecting to What's Important
- ❖ Evaluating Your Experience

**EXERCISE 4B
Self-forgiveness Contract**

Instructions: When you are ready to make a decision to forgive yourself, complete the contract below. It is OK to complete the contract even if you sometimes continue to feel guilty or ashamed. These feelings may come and go even after people make a decision to forgive themselves. What is important is that this contract signifies that you agree to accept responsibility for your actions and to accept yourself as a flawed but valuable person.

I, _____, declare that on the _____ day of _____ in the year _____, I forgive myself for what I have done or left undone. By this I mean that I accept responsibility for my actions, without blaming others for my decisions or blaming myself for things not in my control. However, I will not punish myself to atone for my actions; instead, I pledge to treat myself like someone who is imperfect, but also who is valuable and able to learn from mistakes in life. Although I cannot change the past, I will try to make choices today with respect for myself and for others. I thus declare myself forgiven.

Signature Date

Witness

Acceptance

- ❖ We cannot change the past but we can change how the past affects us.
- ❖ Resolve role conflict by integrating warrior identity with other important identities (e.g., parent, spouse, friend, employee, etc.).
- ❖ Stay focused on your present choices rather than your inability to control things (e.g., the government)

The “New Normal”

- ❖ Promote Moral Engagement by encouraging Values-based Living
- ❖ Have Veterans reflect on the Treatment Experience to Plan for the Future



Break-out Session Exercise #3

- ❖ Description of the Event
- ❖ Evaluating Your Resources
- ❖ Identifying Collateral Damage
- ❖ Elements of a Good Confession
- ❖ Coping with Loss
- ❖ Self-Forgiveness Quotes
- ❖ Self-Forgiveness Contract
- ❖ Rethinking Rumination
- ❖ Focusing on Present Choices
- ❖ Connecting to What's Important
- ❖ Evaluating Your Experience

EXERCISE 6A
Reconnecting to What's Important

Instructions: Personal values are the things that you value most in life. Even though we may not talk or think overtly about our personal values, they guide our choices by giving us a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Thinking about what values are important to you and how your values direct your everyday life is an important part of finding your "New Normal."

In the space below, identify your Top 5 personal values and write a brief sentence about what each value means for you. If you're stumped, look at the next page for a list of common values from which you might choose.

Value	What It Means to You
Ex.) Integrity	It is important to me to keep my word.
1)	
2)	
3)	
4)	
5)	

Common Personal Values

Below is a list of values that people sometimes have. You can select values from this list, or you can use this list to help generate your own ideas

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Autonomy | Humility | Relationships |
| Balance | Humor | Reliability |
| Benevolence | Imagination | Resourcefulness |
| Compassion | Independence | Respect |
| Confidence | Integrity | Responsibility |
| Courage | Justice | Righteousness |
| Creativity | Kindness | Sacrifice |
| Duty | Leadership | Self-control |
| Empathy | Love | Self-discipline |
| Equality | Loyalty | Service |
| Faith | Money | Spirituality |
| Fairness | Nature | Stewardship |
| Family | Openness | Teamwork |
| Equality | Parenthood | Thankfulness |
| Freedom | Peace | Tolerance |
| Forgiveness | Patience | Trust |
| Gratitude | Patriotism | Truth |
| Growth | Perseverance | Understanding |
| Honesty | Privacy | Vitality |
| Hope | Prosperity | Wisdom |

The Caregiver's Role

- ❖ Give Unconditional Acceptance
- ❖ Remind them that You've Got Their Back
- ❖ Provide a Reality Check to Ensure Values-based Living
- ❖ Have Gutsy Understanding
- ❖ Respect Veterans' Decisions to Disclose or Not Disclose
- ❖ Help Veterans to Forgive but Not Forget or Condone
- ❖ Be Cautiously Optimistic

Questions?



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