



# AMES IN ACTION

## JANUARY 2024



### EXPLORING IDENTITY AND ADJUSTMENT TO CIVILIAN LIFE



#### WHAT DID AMES DO?

Dr. Thomas Hodges recently defended his dissertation and graduated with a PhD in International Conflict Management. In his dissertation, he surveyed military veterans about their identity, post-service adjustment, and prior history of trauma. He expected that experiencing moral injury, a type of trauma, would be related to difficulty adjusting to civilian life. He found that moral injury was associated greater identity dissonance, a term to describe feeling like your identity doesn't fit with where you are in life. This in turn was associated with greater adjustment difficulty after service.

#### HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO THE MILITARY, VETERANS, EMERGENCY SERVICES, AND/OR THE COMMUNITY?

This research is directly relevant to service members and veterans, but also has relevance to emergency services employees. In AMES research, we've found that about 20% of emergency services employees are veterans. This research highlights the importance of promoting a positive post-service transition for veterans and emergency services employees. Adjustment after service can already be difficult, and this research shows that exposure to trauma can make it even more difficult. Identity can promote a positive transition by helping in making sense of the trauma.

#### HOW CAN YOU APPLY THIS INFORMATION?



**ENSURE IDENTITY IS NOT AN OBSTACLE**



**PROVIDE SUPPORT DURING LIFE TRANSITIONS**

### **NOT AN OBSTACLE**

If an individual is experiencing trauma-related stress or mental health concerns, it is important that they do not let their identity get in the way of talking to a professional. Rather than thinking "I'm not the type of person needs help," Dr. Hodges sees speaking to a professional as a way to be the best version of yourself.

### **DURING LIFE TRANSITIONS**

Transitions in life can challenge our sense of identity. A common example is the concept of a "mid-life crisis." If friends or family in your life are experiencing a period of transition, support them by talking with them about their past, present, and future to aid in adjusting their sense of identity.