

Questions to Avoid Asking Veterans

1. Did you kill someone? What's it like to kill?

WHY NOT TO ASK: This is one of most personal questions you can ask someone. Usually, veterans do not like answering this question because a) they have complicated feelings about it, and b) they do not know how you will respond to the answer, or whether you are ready to hear what they really have to say.

2. Are you crazy like the Vietnam vets?

WHY NOT TO ASK: Clearly there is a judgment attached to this question. There is no good way to answer it, so steer clear of asking it.

3. What do you think of the war (Abu Ghraib, atrocities, etc...)

WHY NOT TO ASK: This is a question whose answer may be very personal to a veteran. Moreover, the veteran may worry her answer may be one you don't like or can't relate to.

4. How did you get out of going?

WHY NOT TO ASK: This question implies that the veteran "tried" to get out of something, when it's far more likely that he or she was not asked to deploy for one of many reasons related to their duty station or MOS.

5. How come you only did one tour?

WHY NOT TO ASK: The problem with this question lies in the word "only," implying that serving one tour was not enough, or that the veteran may have shirked responsibility.

6. Good thing you didn't see combat (to women).

WHY NOT TO ASK: In more than any previous war, female OIF & OEF veterans have been exposed to combat situations or have been in harm's way. Even if someone has not been "in combat" per se, it is incorrect to suggest that their deployment was not stressful, dangerous or a major contribution.

7. At least you were only a... (cook, mechanic etc...)

WHY NOT TO ASK: Mostly because it's insulting. In addition, the current conflicts are characterized by 360° of fighting. Serving "only" as a mechanic or cook, does not in any way guarantee your safety, particularly from IED's and mortar or rocket attacks.