



COMMANDER'S CALL TALKING POINTS

JANUARY 2020



A New Year for Resiliency

The New Year brings an opportunity for Airmen to set new goals regarding their mental, physical, social, and spiritual well-being. Encourage your Airmen to take the opportunity to prioritize their mental health and comprehensive fitness. This is also a time for you to learn about possible triggers of [invisible wounds](#) and how to recognize their warning signs. Understanding this information will help you better recommend potential coping methods and resources to support your Airmen and their families.

"For me, resiliency refers to that ability to make it through the tough times. I've accepted that life is tough and it's going to be tough and things will happen. You'll go through your ups and you'll go through your downs, and sometimes it will be self-inflicted and sometimes it will be the universe."

- Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth O. Wright

Understanding Triggers

A "trigger" is an internal or external reminder of a traumatic event. Individuals often respond to triggers with an increased heart rate or other symptoms of anxiety. Triggers of invisible wounds can differ between each individual and may cause a mix of emotional, physical, or mental stress. Additionally, triggers can happen anywhere, at any time; and sometimes an individual may even be unaware of their own triggers. Having a better understanding of triggers can help you identify areas of added stress and when your Airmen may need your support. Be on the lookout for the following common triggers:

- ✧ **Flashing lights**
- ✧ **Inadequate sleep**
- ✧ **Loud noises**
- ✧ **Major life changes**
- ✧ **Scenes in TV shows/movies or news events**
- ✧ **Sounds, smells, or scenery reminiscent of the trauma**
- ✧ **Specific dates or people**
- ✧ **Substance use**
- ✧ **Unexpected schedule changes**
- ✧ **Unfamiliar people, places, or situations**

While triggers can largely differ at the individual level, warning signs tend to be more common and some of the earliest indicators of an invisible wound. Identifying the following warning signs may be the first step in recognizing when your Airmen might need help¹:

- ✧ **Avoidance** of people, places, or activities that the individual previously enjoyed
- ✧ **Hypervigilance**, or constantly being on guard, resulting in trouble sleeping, irritability, reckless behavior, trouble concentrating, etc.²
- ✧ **Negative feelings** or moodiness that seem out of character, including shame, survivor's guilt, fear, etc.
- ✧ **Physical reactions to triggers**, including panic attacks, racing heart, shaking, or physical discomfort

Finding the Right Solution

The severity of an Airman's invisible wound and its impact on daily life will vary. Encourage your Airmen to try different coping methods and resources until they find the solution that works best for their specific needs. An individual may want to avoid triggers altogether, but not all triggers can or should be avoided. Work with your Airman to develop a plan to ease added stress and navigate their triggers while supporting the mission³. Share these common coping methods⁴ with your Airmen and their family members to encourage comprehensive fitness and resilience:

- ✧ **Engage in hobbies**
- ✧ **Exercise**
- ✧ **Go to counseling or join a support group**
- ✧ **Keep a journal**
- ✧ **Make lifestyle changes**
- ✧ **Meditate, practice yoga, or try deep breathing**
- ✧ **Spend time with pets**
- ✧ **Try art therapy or other relaxing activities**
- ✧ **Utilize aromatherapy**

¹ PTSD and Veteran's Symptoms, Military Benefits. 2019. <https://militarybenefits.info/ptsd-and-veterans-symptoms/>

² PTSD in Military Veterans, HelpGuide. October 2019. <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/ptsd-in-military-veterans.htm>

³ Coping with PTSD, verywellmind. November 2018. <https://www.verywellmind.com/coping-with-ptsd-2797536>

⁴ Five Ways to cope with PTSD, Medical News Today. 2019. <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/319824.php#10>

Resources



AF Resilience
provides leadership resiliency tools and resources for crisis prevention, intervention, and postvention.



The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs
maintains their own National Center for PTSD. Their site contains information regarding self-help and coping methods, therapists, treatment options, and other ways to help.



Military Health System
provides information on signs of distress, self-assessments, articles, and additional resources to help military personnel.



Military OneSource
offers support and direction to a variety of Department of Defense resources. Non-medical counseling is available in person, by phone, video, or [online chat](#). Call 800-342-9647.