



COMMANDER'S CALL TALKING POINTS

JUNE 2020



June is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness Month

PTSD Awareness Month is an opportunity to educate yourself and your Airmen on PTSD symptoms, impacts to daily life, and available resources, in order to best support Airmen living with this [invisible wound](#). PTSD is a prevalent condition in both the civilian and military sectors—8 million adults live with PTSD during a given year¹. PTSD can have serious effects on an Airman's personal and professional lives—interfering with their resilience and mission-readiness. It is important to promote awareness of PTSD and openly communicate with your Airmen, so that they feel supported and are encouraged to seek help and treatment; if and when it's needed.

Recognizing the signs and symptoms in yourself or others is the first critical step in addressing when help and support may be needed. While everyone experiences trauma and PTSD symptoms differently, the following are the most common symptoms in those experiencing PTSD:

- **Trouble sleeping, insomnia**
- **Fatigue**
- **Feeling anxious**
- **Feeling depressed**
- **Flashbacks**
- **Irritable, frustrated, angry**
- **Poor self-care**
- **Trouble with memory and attention**

Refer to and share the [IWI PTSD Infographic](#) for more information, including statistics and details about where to get help for your Airmen who may be experiencing PTSD.

PTSD and the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 outbreak, it is difficult to predict the potential impacts that social isolation, shelter-in-place requirements, and major life changes will have on our Airmen and their resiliency. During this atypical time, help prepare your Airmen adapt to these changes by using and sharing the [Air Force's COVID-19 Products](#), including this piece on [maintaining mental fitness](#). The products contain tips, resources, and guidance to support and maintain an Airman's overall fitness.

While there is a tendency to associate PTSD with events like war, it is also important to recognize that PTSD is a chronic psychiatric disorder that can occur in individuals who have experienced or witnessed any traumatic event, like sexual assault, death, or a serious accident. The COVID-19 pandemic can be a particularly turbulent and uncertain time that may have many traumatic impacts and stressors that can lead to PTSD or worsen existing symptoms of PTSD, and greatly impact an Airman's ability to cope or seek help. Mission essential Airmen on the frontlines of the pandemic may have increased exposure to potentially traumatic situations, which may lead to overwhelming stress, anxiety, depression, and the potential for developing or worsening mental health conditions.

Seeking Treatment and How to Support Your Airmen

PTSD treatment is aimed at teaching and practicing coping skills to manage symptoms that arise due to new or existing triggers as a result of this stressful and uncertain time. 94% of Airmen who have received PTSD treatment continued to progress to in their careers.

Leaders can empower and support Airmen with PTSD by promoting these following tips:

- **Do not self-medicate**
- **Find a support group**
- **Follow the provider's treatment plan**
- **Learn more about PTSD**
- **Practice positive self-care**
- **Stay connected with trusted advocates**
- **Stay physically active**
- **Talk to a mental health professional**

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted in-person appointments, there are still a number of telehealth options, coping methods, and other resources to increase an Airmen's quality of life. Encourage your Airmen to come forward if they need support for PTSD, or any other invisible wounds.

Resources



The [U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs' National Center for PTSD](#) is the world's leading research and educational center of excellence for PTSD and traumatic stress. Visit the website for more information about PTSD, resources, and treatment options.



[AF Medical Service](#) offers resources on PTSD and information on the specific impacts on Airmen such as risk factors, symptoms, diagnosis, the CAF model, deployments, and more.



[AF Resilience](#) provides a Leader's Guide on how to support their Airmen with PTSD.



The [PTSD Coach app](#) can help Airmen manage symptoms that often occur after trauma.

¹ U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, PTSD: National Center for PTSD. October 2019. https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common_adults.asp