



# COMMANDER'S CALL TALKING POINTS

## MARCH 2020



### March is Brain Injury Awareness Month

Take time this March to support Brain Injury Awareness Month by building a supportive environment within your unit and talking with your Airmen about brain injuries. Help normalize the discussion about brain injuries by empowering those who have experienced them to seek needed support and promote available resources to help your Airmen in their recovery.<sup>1</sup> Because of the profound impact of brain injuries and other [invisible wounds](#) on our Airmen and their families, it is important to encourage positive communication about these topics.

### Understanding Traumatic Brain Injuries

A Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) is defined as a disruption in the normal function of the brain that can be caused by a bump, blow, jolt to the head, or penetrating head injury.<sup>2</sup> Everyone is at risk of a TBI and in fact, 413,858 total military service members have been diagnosed with a TBI from 2000-2019. The Air Force cares deeply about raising awareness for TBI and providing support for Airmen who are impacted by brain injuries and other invisible wounds.

Learning the signs and symptoms of a TBI can be the first step toward recognizing when a fellow Airman may need support. Although everyone experiences a TBI differently, common signs and symptoms may include:

- **Trouble with memory and attention**
- **Sensitivity to light and sound**
- **Headaches, migraines**
- **Chronic pain**
- **Poor self-care**
- **Irritable, frustrated, angry**
- **Feeling depressed**
- **Trouble sleeping, insomnia**
- **Fatigue**
- **Vision changes, double vision**

### Treatment Options for TBI

If you or someone you know has experienced a TBI, seek immediate medical treatment. TBIs are categorized into four severity levels: mild, moderate, severe, and penetrating.<sup>3</sup> Depending on the severity and specific presenting symptoms, the treatment may include medication for headaches or anxiety, and limited duty with progressive return to duty recommendation. When indicated, additional treatments such as cognitive, physical, speech, or occupational therapy can also be recommended to address specific types of symptoms.<sup>2</sup>

While a minority of individuals may experience persistent symptoms that last for several months or longer, most people who sustain a mild traumatic brain injury or concussion recover completely within days or weeks of the injury.<sup>4</sup> As a leader, make sure you are creating a supportive environment for your Airmen, which can include allowing your Airmen the necessary time needed for recovery. In fact, many Airman should be able to return to duty when they are free of symptoms, have finished their recovery period, and have been cleared by their medical provider.

### Where to Get Help

A variety of resources are available to Airmen and their families living with a TBI. If you are experiencing a crisis, seek immediate help by contacting the Military Crisis Line at 800-273-8255 then press 1, or dial 911. Learn more invisible wounds and available resources at [www.ReadyAirmen.com](http://www.ReadyAirmen.com) and in the Resources bar provided on the right.

<sup>1</sup> Craig Hospital. Brain Injury Awareness Month. <https://craighospital.org/blog/brain-injury-awareness-month-2018-change-your-mind>

<sup>2</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Traumatic Brain Injury & Concussion. 2019. <https://www.cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> Military Health System. Traumatic Brain Injury. 2020. <https://www.health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Conditions-and-Treatments/Physical-Disability/Traumatic-Brain-Injury>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. Office of Research and Development. Traumatic Brain Injury. 2018. [https://www.research.va.gov/pubs/docs/va\\_factsheets/tbi.pdf](https://www.research.va.gov/pubs/docs/va_factsheets/tbi.pdf)

### Resources

To help bring awareness and support to TBI throughout the month of March, use the hashtag **#BIAMonth**.



[National Intrepid Center of Excellence \(NICoE\)](#) is a research, diagnosis, and treatment facility at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, MD utilizing collaborative short- and long-term treatment plans with a variety of providers. Call 301-319-3600.



The [Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center \(DVBIC\)](#) is part of the [Military Health System](#). DVBIC promotes state-of-the-science care from point-of-injury to reintegration for service members, veterans, and their families to prevent and mitigate consequences of mild to severe TBI.



Hosted by DVBIC, [A Head for the Future](#) provides resources to the military community to help prevent, recognize, and recover from TBI. Learn about TBI and watch the videos of service members who have recognized TBI symptoms and received care.