



COMMANDER'S CALL TALKING POINTS

SPECIAL EDITION - MAY 2020



The Invisible Wound Initiative's May Commander's Call Talking Points is a Special Edition focusing on mental health and COVID-19 resources, including a Wellness Checklist for Airmen.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

For 70 years, May has been observed as Mental Health Awareness Month. It's important to educate Airmen and families about [invisible wounds](#), the importance of seeking support, and mental health resources to stay resilient, even during challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mental Health: The Big Picture

One in five adults in the U.S. live with a mental health condition.¹ Everyone can be susceptible to invisible wounds regardless of background or career. Invisible wounds include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), or other cognitive, emotional, or behavioral conditions associated with trauma experienced by an individual. Although a traumatic experience can impact mental health, there are also other factors that may contribute to the development of mental health conditions^{2,3}, including:

- **Biological Factors:** Family history or genetic factors
- **Social Factors:** Personal relationships or life experiences
- **Environmental Factors:** Periods of isolation or times of crisis

Early intervention is a key factor in improving recovery outcomes, but it's never too late to seek help. Many Airmen who have sought help for invisible wounds continue to work, and thriving in their careers. Mental health is a priority of the Air Force and many resources are available to support Airmen, including:



Talk to Someone

- Trusted Advocates (Wingmen, Family, Friends)
- Chaplains
- Military & Family Counseling Program
- [Military OneSource](#)
- [Vet Centers](#)

Medical Support

- Military Treatment Facility
 - Behavioral Health Optimization Program
 - Mental Health Clinic
- Mental Health Professionals Embedded in Units (where available)

For additional information and resources about invisible wounds for Airmen, visit www.ReadyAirmen.com.

Mental Health Resilience during COVID-19 Pandemic

By striving for resilience and seeking support when needed, Airmen prepare themselves to face any challenges that come their way both at work and at home.

As a regular component of an Airman's readiness, mental health is especially critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the physical distancing requirements, Airmen may be more susceptible to experiencing symptoms associated with increased anxiety, feelings of isolation or hypervigilance, hopelessness, or any other mental health symptoms. Encourage your Airmen to stay socially connected with friends, family, and other Wingmen during this time, and remind them that they are not alone.

Share the following COVID-19 information pages with your Airmen to ensure you and your team are aware of the latest information and updates:

- [Air Force](#) Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Website
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) Coronavirus (COVID-19) Website
- [Military OneSource](#): How to stay healthy during the COVID-19 Quarantine
- [Air Force Resilience](#) COVID-19 Resources Website

Resources



[Air Force Resilience](#) has a list of recommended mobile applications for use by all Airmen.



The [Dream EZ](#) mobile app teaches you how to improve your mental health and helps you sleep better. Based on the principles of imagery rehearsal therapy (IRT), which can help change nightmares into less disturbing dreams.



The [Virtual Hope Box](#) mobile app helps you learn to reduce your stress and anxiety and elevate your mood. Designed initially for use in conjunction with treatment, Virtual Hope Box is also beneficial for use as a self-care tool.



The [Breathe2Relax](#) mobile app teaches you how to lower your stress and reduce your anxiety. Initially designed for the military community but beneficial for use by anyone, the relaxation app trains you on the "belly breathing" technique that has proven benefits for your overall mental health.

¹ National Institute of Mental Health. Mental Illness. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness.shtml>

² U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. What Is Mental Health?. 2020. <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health>

³ CDC. Learn About Mental Health. 2020. <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health>

Combating Social Isolation while Physical Distancing

Crisis situations, such as COVID-19, create uncertainty, which may lead to feelings of worry, confusion, or fear. The pandemic guidelines of physical distancing may also increase feelings of social isolation.

Use this atypical situation as an opportunity to share the following tips and resources with your Airmen to help them maintain and improve their Comprehensive Airman Fitness (i.e., physical, mental, social and spiritual fitness), relationships, and productivity during this time.

Staying Connected

Taking actions to stay connected will combat feelings of isolation and support those with invisible wounds. Here are some tips to support staying connected:

- **Social Media:** Regularly connect with loved ones and friends through social media⁴
- **Video Gatherings:** Set up designated times to have virtual gatherings with friends and family. Seeing a familiar face, or group of faces, increases feelings of connectedness
- **Phone Calls:** Take time to talk to family and friends on the phone, especially those who may not have access to social media, video capabilities or are home alone

Staying Resilient

Below are helpful tips for staying resilient during this time of physical distancing:

- **Stay active:** A regular workout routine is vital for your physical wellness
- **Take screen breaks:** It is important to take breaks from computer, TV, and phone screens to help recharge and reset both your eyes and your brain
- **Make a schedule:** Proper nutrition and rest are key to staying healthy⁵. Set a routine for sleep, meals, and other activities like workouts or doing something enjoyable to relax or connect with friends and family

Leadership Guidance to Support Airmen

Your Airmen may need more support than usual during this pandemic. Work and home conditions are likely changing, exposing your Airmen to situations that may make them more susceptible to feeling isolated or experiencing mental health-related symptoms.

Use the following 4-step guide to have positive conversations with your Airmen about invisible wounds and to encourage them to seek support:

STEP 1: TALK

- Text and ask if it's a good time to talk
- Make the call or video chat
- Get information from them

STEP 3: SUPPORT

- Encourage help seeking
- Address barriers to seeking care
- Support them in getting care

STEP 2: EMPATHIZE

- Legitimize their feelings
- Summarize their situation to show you understand
- Affirm their feelings
- Speak positively about invisible wounds and seeking care

STEP 4: SUSTAIN

- Continuously follow-up after care has started
- Show your support for their recovery process

Below are links to lists of recommended mobile applications and resources that can help your Airmen stay resilient:

- [Air Force Resilience Mobile Apps](#)
- [National Center for PTSD](#)
- [Veteran Affairs Self Help Resources](#)

The following page includes a Wellness Checklist to share with your Airmen. The tool is a good way for your Airmen to stay on target as it relates to their overall fitness.

⁴ Real Warriors. Using Social Media to Stay Connected. <https://www.realwarriors.net/transitions/mil-socialmedia>

⁵ CDC. Stress and Coping for COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html#community>

WELLNESS CHECKLIST

Print and use this wellness checklist to help maintain and improve your Comprehensive Airman Fitness (i.e., physical, mental, social and spiritual fitness), relationships, and productivity during this time. Set a daily reminder to conduct wellness checks.

Daily Wellness Checklist

Did you...	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Wake up at your designated time (same time each day)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get at least 6–8 hours of sleep	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eat well-balanced meals and snacks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drink 7-8 glasses of water throughout the day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Avoid skipping meals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stay socially connected with friends and family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cross one item off your to-do list	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take time for self-care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Say aloud or journal one thing for which you are grateful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do an activity you enjoy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Avoid screen time in the evening/before bedtime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stretch for a minimum of 5 minutes, three times per day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Get 20–30 minutes of moderate exercise	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spend time with pets, if applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Avoid continuously sitting for more than 55 minutes at a time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clean and organize a space in your home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spend time outdoors or get fresh air	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other Wellness Tips

1. Become knowledgeable by researching nutrition and supplements
2. Research and take up daily stress-busting practices such as meditation, mindfulness, and affirmations
3. Avoid information overload. Stay current, but limit news exposure
4. Stay socially connected with friends and family through communication apps, phone calls and email
5. Increase your skills and education from home during this unexpected downtime
6. Pay attention to your emotions and feelings throughout the day. Keep a journal to capture your thoughts
7. Listen to your body! If your body hurts or you feel off, talk to someone or seek medical support
8. See this time as an opportunity to slow down, enjoy the silence and refocus your goals

Resources

For information on resilience, invisible wounds, and staying mentally fit, visit:

- [Air Force Resilience](#)
- [Invisible Wounds Initiative](#)
- [Military OneSource](#)