



September is National Suicide Prevention Month

Airmen are the beating heart of our Air Force. As Leaders, we help Airmen build and foster an understanding of invisible wounds and how it ties into resilience. Resilience is a critical enabler for suicide prevention.

September is National Suicide Prevention Month, bringing awareness to suicide prevention. It is critical that all leaders are educated on the signs and symptoms of invisible wounds, available resources for Airmen, and available tools to assist leaders in taking care of our Airmen and their families. Suicide prevention begins well before an Airman has suicidal thoughts, and it is our job to foster a supportive culture where Airmen feel safe asking for help.

“We must do better with our discussion around the issue of suicide. One life lost is too many.”

– CSAF David Goldfein,
[@GenDaveGoldfein \(August 1, 2019\)](#)

Educate Yourself on Invisible Wounds

Air Force leaders and Airmen are highly-trained to identify physical danger, and it is equally important to understand how to identify mental stressors as well. Knowing the signs and symptoms of an invisible wound and [available resources](#) is critical to recognizing and supporting each other during a time of need or crisis. Knowledge is power and is pivotal to recognizing when to encourage someone to seek care.

Signs and symptoms of invisible wounds include:

-  Flashbacks
-  Sensitivity to light and sound
-  Poor self-care
-  Feeling depressed
-  Irritable, frustrated, angry
-  Headaches, migraines
-  Feeling anxious
-  Chronic pain
-  Trouble with memory and attention
-  Fatigue
-  Trouble sleeping, insomnia

Fostering a Caring and Trusting Culture

Leaders at all levels build trust and confidence with their Airmen. After an Airman has experienced a stressful, distressing or traumatic event, regularly ask, “How are you coping?” and “How can I support you?” Creating an open line of communication promotes a caring and trusting culture within your team.

The Resiliency Tactical Pause (RTP) kicked-off a cultural shift toward becoming a more engaged and connected Total Force, by breaking down the barriers associated with seeking support. The Air Force Chief of Staff General David Goldfein and the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth Wright recently highlighted, on [Facebook](#), other social media platforms, and the Air Force website, the importance of discussing resiliency, mental health, and suicide prevention.

“Let’s take a moment and breathe and spend a little time on our Airmen and their resiliency, and make sure we’re not missing anything when it comes to suicide and suicide awareness.”

– CMSAF Kaleth Wright, *Airman Magazine*



Engaging Airmen Where They Are

The Air Force RTP is providing a starting point to engage Airmen about resilience. The RTP is not a “one-off” event, but should be put into regular practice. Starting the dialogue may be uncomfortable, but it must be done. When talking with your team, provide a supportive and positive environment toward invisible wounds, treatment, and recovery. Share your story and encourage empathy within your team. Connect your Airmen to resources that enable their resilience and recovery.

The RTP has spurred a lot of conversation, specifically across social media including Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit. Similar to the Air Force Chief of Staff General David Goldfein and Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth Wright, you are encouraged to join into the conversations on social media and to connect with your Airmen during this vital time.

Sample Social Media Messages

Airmen, YOU ARE the beating heart of the @usairforce! I am committed to taking care of you and your families. If you or a peer is struggling, encourage them to seek support from me and available resources: <https://www.woundedwarrior.af.mil/Programs-and-Initiatives/Invisible-Wounds-Initiative/Resources/>

Caring for invisible wounds is as important as physical wounds. If you have an invisible wound, let me support you. Together, we will find the right support for you: <https://www.woundedwarrior.af.mil/Programs-and-Initiatives/Invisible-Wounds-Initiative/Resources/>

The @usairforce's mission is vital to protecting our nation, but keeping you safe is an equally high priority for our leadership. When I visit you in your workspaces, I want to hear your stories and how I can support you and your families.

Resiliency is more than just physical fitness. Resiliency means caring for your overall being—physically, spiritually, emotionally and mentally fit. If you or a friend is struggling, come to me for support and available resources: <https://www.woundedwarrior.af.mil/Programs-and-Initiatives/Invisible-Wounds-Initiative/Resources/>



Mental Fitness and Suicide Prevention Resources

The Air Force provides a variety of resources, tools, and programs to arm leaders with mental fitness and suicide prevention knowledge, including:

[Air Force Resilience](#)

Offers comprehensive tools and resources to leaders for suicide [prevention](#), [intervention](#), and [postvention](#). The tools help leaders identify challenges and help guide them through reintegration and the aftermath of a crisis.

[Air Force Medical Service](#)

Offers guidance on its **Ask, Care, Escort** suicide prevention program, which helps leaders identify how to help their Wingmen during a time of need. Leaders, this resource should also be provided to your Airmen to help each other through stressful situations, and harsh environments.

ACE Principles

1. **ASK your Wingman:** Stay calm and have the courage to say, "I am worried about you. Tell me what is going on."
2. **CARE for your Wingman:** Calmly control the situation, do not force, actively listen, and remove any means that could be used for self-injury.
3. **ESCORT your Wingman:** Never leave your Airman alone. Call 911 or the Military Crisis Line (800-273-8255) and escort your Airman to a hospital.

[inTransition](#)

Free and confidential services to ALL service members needing access to mental health care during a transition, e.g., returning from deployment, transitioning from active duty to reserve component or any other time an Airmen needs a mental health provider.

[Military Crisis Line](#)

A 24/7 hotline that connects Airmen and their families who are experiencing a crisis with trained counselors.

[Military OneSource](#)

A comprehensive resource that provides health and wellness resources and 24/7 confidential help, including connecting Airmen to specialized peer support groups and military and family life counseling.

[Wingman Online](#)

A library of training videos that communicate an understanding of how to manage and properly intervene in various suicide prevention scenarios.

Every Airman Matters

In honor of National Suicide Prevention Month, take the time to educate yourself and your Wingmen on the signs and symptoms of invisible wounds and available resources to cultivate a supportive and help-seeking culture. Every Airman is important, and it is vital to keep them safe, healthy, and #MissionReady. Our Airmen need to know each of them matter.