



INVISIBLE WOUNDS. KNOW YOUR OPTIONS.

An invisible wound is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); traumatic brain injury (TBI); or other cognitive, emotional, or behavioral conditions associated with trauma experienced by an individual.



What to Look for in Your Airman

Everyone is susceptible to developing an invisible wound, including you, your family, or your Airman.

Common Causes

An invisible wound can occur from a single traumatic event or a series of events.

- ▶ Physical or emotional abuse
- ▶ Serious accident
- ▶ Sexual Assault
- ▶ Blow to the head
- ▶ Blast exposure
- ▶ Combat exposure
- ▶ Exposure to death

Signs And Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of invisible wounds differ for every person and may not appear immediately, sometimes emerging years after an incident.



Trouble sleeping, insomnia



Fatigue



Chronic Pain



Poor self-care



Irritable, frustrated, angry



Feeling anxious



Headaches, migraines



Flashbacks



Sensitivity to light and sound



Feeling depressed



Trouble with memory and attention



Your Airman's Invisible Wounds Can Affect Home Life

If your Airman develops an invisible wound, your daily life and relationship with them may change.

If your Airman is... → You might notice or experience...

- Feeling irritable or angry → An increase in arguments or angry outbursts
- Practicing poor self-care → Increased substance use or financial irresponsibility
- Struggling with sleep → Difficulty paying attention and focusing on tasks
- Feeling depressed or withdrawn → A lack of communication or trust



Identifying Triggers around Your Airman

Every Airman experiences their invisible wounds differently. Any situation, noise, smell, sound, or feeling could be a trigger.

Common Triggers

Triggers can cause emotional, physical, or mental stress and differ for each individual.

- ▶ Crowds, unfamiliar places, uncertain situations
- ▶ Inadequate sleep
- ▶ Major life changes
- ▶ Scenes in TV shows, movies
- ▶ Smells reminiscent of trauma
- ▶ Sounds reminiscent of trauma
- ▶ Substance use
- ▶ Unexpected schedule changes



A "trigger" is an internal or external reminder of a traumatic event.

An increased heart rate or other symptoms of anxiety are common responses to triggers. Reactions are often brief and do not interfere with everyday activities. *If your Airman is experiencing a prolonged reaction to triggers, encourage them to seek help or support from any of the many resources provided.*



TAKING ACTION AS A CAREGIVER.

Apply your knowledge of risk factors, signs and symptoms, and common triggers of invisible wounds to take action. Explore your options to best support your Airman and family.



Helping My Airman Stay Resilient

Your Airman is unique and their preferred coping methods will vary based on their personality and invisible wounds. The following are examples of potential coping methods to discuss or try with your Airman.

- ▶ Attend individual, family, or group therapy
- ▶ Create a signal to indicate when to leave a stressful situation
- ▶ Leave immediately if your Airman signals. Ask questions later
- ▶ Maintain a regular schedule
- ▶ Meditate and/or practice yoga
- ▶ Practice a relaxing form of art, like painting or coloring
- ▶ Seek medical, spiritual, or additional support as needed through various providers



Recovery is a process. It will take time for your Airman's treatment to help them feel normal again. Your patience and understanding are crucial to supporting your Airman through their recovery.



of Airmen who have received PTSD treatment **continued to progress in their career.**



Supporting Yourself and Your Family

Taking care of yourself is just as important as taking care of your Airman. As part of the Air Force family, you can seek help for yourself or a family member at any time; even when your Airman is deployed.

- ▶ [Air Force Wounded Warrior \(AFW2\) Caregiver Support Program](#)
- ▶ [Air Force Key Spouse Program](#)
- ▶ [Trusted Advocates](#) (family, friends, Command, etc.)
- ▶ [Department of Defense Caregiver Resource Directory](#)
- ▶ [Military & Family Life Counseling \(MFLC\) Program](#)
- ▶ [Military OneSource](#)
- ▶ [Military Treatment Facility](#)
- ▶ [National Center for PTSD](#)
- ▶ [Air Force Office of Integrated Resilience](#)
- ▶ [Chaplains](#)



What about my Airman's Career?

You may be worried about negatively impacting your Airman's career by encouraging them to ask for help, but the Air Force takes mental health confidentiality seriously. Be sure to ask your providers for specifics regarding their confidentiality policies.

Did You Know?

- Medical and mental health providers are required to adhere to the [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act \(HIPAA\)](#), where health information is protected from unauthorized disclosures
- Authorized disclosures to Command are only required if there is risk of self-harm, harm to others or the mission, or acute medical conditions interfering with duty requirements. Providers release only the minimum amount of information necessary when disclosure is required
- Non-medical counseling services, such as MFLC or Military OneSource, are only reported to Command when there is suspected family maltreatment or risk of harm to self or others