

Be the Example

Leaders at every level of the Air Force are expected to be engaged in their Airmen's care and recovery. A smooth recovery process from injury or illness requires a team approach with leaders, Wingmen, and care providers operating together to provide the best quality of care and support to our Airmen. Air Force leaders are working together to demonstrate their support to the front lines and provide a solid foundation for all Airmen.

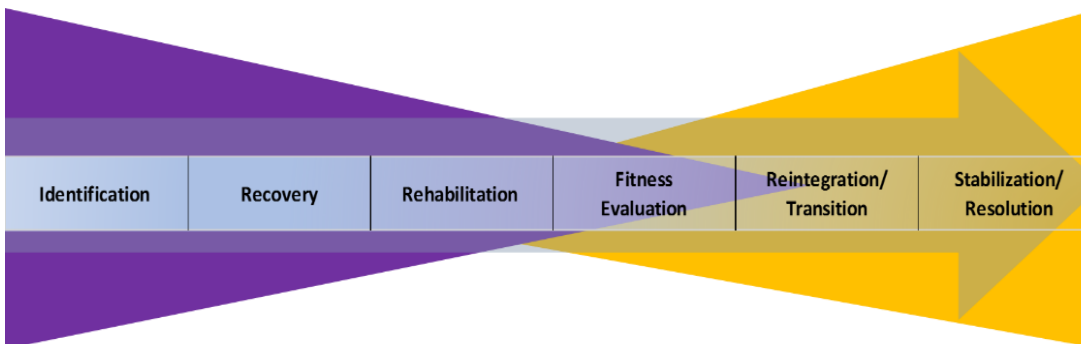
It falls to the Commander to promote and safeguard the morale, general welfare, and physical and mental well-being of Airmen under their command. To ensure that Airmen suffering from invisible wounds are appropriately cared for, leaders at all levels must encourage healthy, help-seeking behavior and foster the Wingman culture.

Providing Support to our Airmen

To ensure Airmen and their families are provided proper care, it is important for Commanders to understand the care process the Air Force has developed. The Continuum of Care process is for Airmen who are wounded, become ill, or are injured. It is comprised of independent, yet concurrent, processes that begin when an injury is identified, continues through treatment to the fitness evaluation, if necessary, and finally goes into reintegration or separation from the Air Force.

Airmen going through this process need positive support from their leadership along the way. Unit leadership represents the first line of communication for Airmen and families to ensure their needs are addressed as completely as possible.

The Continuum of Care Process includes the following phases:



- **Identification:** An Airman with an invisible wound identifies something is wrong, seeks help, and receives a diagnosis. This typically takes place when the condition begins to have significant impacts on their home or work lives. Commanders should proactively look for [the signs and symptoms of invisible wounds](#) and encourage Airmen to seek help.
- **Recovery and Rehabilitation:** Treatment and care for invisible wounds takes place during these two phases. Airmen need leadership support and flexibility to receive care. Commanders should provide them with adequate time away from work to go to treatment and check-in with them regularly to offer support.
- **Fitness Evaluation:** Airmen may be referred to the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES), sometimes referred to as the Medical Evaluation Board (MEB), to have their diagnosis reviewed and a determination made regarding their fitness for continued service. The MEB is the first step of IDES. An Airman's case then may be referred to the Physical Evaluation Board (PEB), where the fitness determination is made. Commanders should collaborate with Airmen and health care providers to understand the Airman's medical condition and its impact on accomplishing missions.
- **Reintegration or Transition:** At this phase, Airmen are reintegrated into units or transitioned out of the military based on their PEB findings. A Commander's role at this phase includes helping to ease the Airman through the change.
- **Stabilization and Resolution:** Airmen return to their units or are assisted as they transition into civilian life. A Commander should show empathy to an Airman going through either of these resolutions. It allows them to know that they have support and their Commander cares about them as they heal from their wounds.

Lead with Integrity

Commanders set the standard for the Airmen they support. Airmen observe and are motivated by those who exude positive attributes and exemplify the Air Force Core Values. Recognizing the importance of the example that they have been called to set will allow Commanders to become true leaders that Airmen want to follow into battle.

Effective and engaged leaders are:

Selfless



Leaders prioritize the well-being of their Airmen and put their needs first. They also remember to manage their stress levels to remain grounded for the men and women they serve.

Engaged



Leaders maintain regular and consistent communications with their Airmen. They schedule time to speak and listen to their members. The better they know their Airmen, the better they can recognize when they need help.

Empathetic



Leaders strive to understand others and put their biases aside. When this happens, they can see how the other person will most likely receive a message or react to a situation. Airmen need to be recognized and accepted individually.

Optimistic



Leaders find and focus on the opportunities in every challenge. Having a positive attitude during tough times helps them take the stress off their Airmen. They train their Airmen to focus on what they can control.