



# COMMANDER'S CALL TALKING POINTS

## DECEMBER 2020



### What Is Seasonal Affective Disorder?

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD), or seasonal depression, affects millions of Americans each year. SAD is a type of depression related to changes in seasons—often starting in the fall, then going away when there is more daylight in spring. SAD is a real concern and, if left untreated, can interfere with mental fitness.

While the exact causes of SAD are unknown, the lack of sunlight in fall and winter impacts your body's internal clock (circadian rhythm) and creation of chemicals in the body (serotonin and melatonin) that affect mood and sleep. Airmen and Space Professionals living and operating at extreme northern or southern latitudes, where the days are shorter, may feel this impact more.

Learn to recognize the following signs and symptoms of SAD:

- Changes in appetite or weight
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling hopeless, worthless or guilty
- Feeling sluggish or agitated
- Lack of interest in enjoyable activities
- Low energy
- Sleeping issues
- Thoughts of death or suicide

For additional information about SAD, visit the [National Institutes of Mental Health](#).

### SAD + COVID-19 Restrictions + Holidays = Bigger Risk for Depression

Your Airmen and Space Professionals, regardless of seasonal depression, may struggle during the holiday season. Given the potential stress or loneliness during holidays, combined with the isolation of COVID-19, it's vital that you keep a pulse on their wellbeing.

You should talk to them regularly to assess any changes in mood or behavior. Use the list above and the [Airmen Readiness](#) fact sheet to help you determine whether they may need additional support. Stay in contact with them, whether virtually or in-person, via a combination of meetings, calls, video chats, email, text, or any of your other regular communication channels.

Having conversations on mental wellbeing can be uncomfortable and challenging, but using resources like the [Wingman Discussion Guide](#) to engage your Airmen and Space Professionals, can help make the conversation easier for them.

### Maintaining Resiliency this Winter

There are many resources available for Airmen to combat feelings of seasonal depression and maintain mission readiness. Here are tips you can suggest:

- Keep a regular sleep schedule, optimize nutrition, take vitamin D supplements, exercise, and get outside in the sun
- Check out resources on [maintaining mental fitness](#), created as part of a series of [Air Force's COVID-19 Products](#)
- Talk to trusted resources, such as Military Family Life Counselors and Chaplains
- If they are experiencing several or severe symptoms, encourage them to go to the MTF primary care or mental health clinic and consider other options, such as light therapy (phototherapy), medications, or psychotherapy

*"2020 has been a challenging and difficult year to say the least. We have been tried, we have been tested, and we are still going through, which is why now more than ever, we've got to take care of us."*

-Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force  
JoAnne S. Bass

### Resources



[AF Resilience](#) offers tools for Airmen and Space Professionals to maintain resilience.



[Military OneSource](#) offers mental health information, a list of providers, and resources that have been vetted by the DoD.



A 24/7 hotline that offers confidential, immediate help and connects military service members and their families who are experiencing a crisis with trained counselors.



The [IWI Leadership Fact Sheet](#) features available care-seeking resources to be used and shared with your Airmen.