



Create cohesive, high-performing teams that foster trust & connection through small group discussions.



# BRIDGECHAT

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

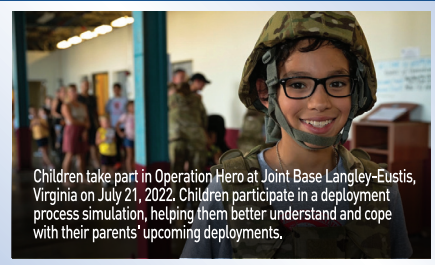
NOVEMBER 2024



Members of the 134th Security Forces Squadron embrace following the funeral of Master Sgt. Gabriel Griffin, at the East Tennessee State Veteran's Cemetery October 11, 2019.



50th Security Forces Squadron defenders participate in the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors Good Grief Camp at Cheyenne Mountain Resort, Colorado, April 1-2, 2017.



Children take part in Operation Hero at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Virginia on July 21, 2022. Children participate in a deployment process simulation, helping them better understand and cope with their parents' upcoming deployments.

### Unite through Activity

- ▶ Engaging in acts of service and giving back to the community as a team can be a powerful way to foster unity and belonging. Consider volunteering on the installation or local food bank. By investing time and energy into these activities, teams can strengthen their bonds and create a more cohesive and effective unit.

### Related Resources

- ▶ Air Force Wounded Warrior (AFW2) Invisible Wounds Initiative  
<https://www.woundedwarrior.af.mil/Airmen-Veterans/Invisible-Wounds-Initiative/>
- ▶ Going Through a Divorce as a Military Family  
<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/relationships/separation-divorce/going-through-divorce-military-family/>
- ▶ Who cares: a conversation on grief, communication, and community  
<https://www.dvidshub.net/news/473863/who-cares-conversation-grief-communication-and-community>
- ▶ Invisible Wounds: Positive Language Matter  
<https://www.dvidshub.net/video/845621/invisible-wounds-positive-language-matters>
- ▶ Resources for Veterans Experiencing Grief or Loss  
<https://www.va.gov/REACH/challenge/experiencing-grief-or-loss/>
- ▶ DAFI 36-3003, Military Leave Program (Bereavement Leave Policy)  
[https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af\\_a1/publication/dafi36-3003/dafi36-3003.pdf](https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_a1/publication/dafi36-3003/dafi36-3003.pdf)

## INVISIBLE WOUNDS Dealing with loss, divorce, grief or death

The concept of "invisible wounds" became more widely recognized in the early 2000s, particularly during and after the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. While the concept of "invisible wounds" is a challenging and often painful reality for many, it is important to remember that healing and hope are possible. As we recognize the prevalence of conditions such as traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among service members and veterans, as well as the broader impact of grief and moral injury, it is crucial that we come together as a community to support one another. In response to the need for awareness and care, the Department of the Air Force (DAF) launched the Invisible Wounds Initiative campaign in 2016. The Invisible Wounds Initiative campaign prioritizes care and awareness, engaging Airmen, Guardians, families, care providers, and leadership to eliminate barriers and promote a compassionate society.

In a broader context, invisible wounds also encompass cognitive, emotional, or behavioral conditions from trauma or adverse life events. These can arise from loss, divorce, grief, or death, stemming from various sources like relationship loss, unfulfilled dreams, or significant life changes.

Grief, a complex response to loss, is influenced by factors such as childhood experiences, previous losses, and support systems. Moral injury, on the other hand, arises when an individual believes they have acted against their moral or ethical principles, often due to actions they performed or observed. This can lead to intense feelings of guilt, shame, and a sense of betrayal. While moral injury is commonly associated with military personnel it can affect anyone.

Healing is a journey; it is okay to seek out support along the way. Whether through connections with friends, family, support groups, or through professional help from mental health providers, there are resources available to those who need them. In particular, Military and Family Life Counselors, True North, Religious Support Teams, Employee Assistance Programs, and Behavioral Health Optimization Program (BHOP) providers can provide valuable support to those in need. It is also essential to prioritize physical health through adequate sleep, nutrition, and exercise, as this can have a significant impact on mental and emotional well-being.

Military readiness, grief, and loss are deeply interconnected. The specific conditions of military life, such as prolonged separations and heightened risks factors, can amplify the impact of loss. Navigating life with invisible wounds is particularly challenging for Airmen and Guardians preparing themselves and their families to confront Great Power Competition operational imperatives. For those grappling with invisible wounds, strategizing for deterrence or managing uncertainties may seem overwhelming. Nevertheless, support and healing are possible.

### Connecting to grief and loss support:

- Military OneSource Non-medical Counseling, <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/non-medical-counseling/>
- Give an Hour, <https://giveanhour.org/military/> ■ Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, <https://www.taps.org/>
- Veteran Affairs Bereavement Counseling, <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/bereavement-counseling/>
- Grief Share, <https://www.griefshare.org/> ■ Cohen Veterans Network, <https://www.cohenveteransnetwork.org/>

\* Visit websites to review program eligibilities.

## WATCH...

In an attempt to de-stigmatize seeking help for mental health, former 99th Force Support Squadron commander, Lt Col Nicole Droney shares her story on how she sought help after losing a very important and prominent family member.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/video/807781/lt-col-nicole-droneys-encounter-with-grief> (5:56)

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors provides support and resources.

<https://www.dvidshub.net/video/661236/good-grief-camp> (1:32)

## DISCUSS...

1. What resources or strategies have you found helpful in recognizing and managing feelings of grief from loss?
2. What benefits can be gained from sharing experiences of grief or loss with others who have or are dealing with similar situations?
3. What are some effective ways to find volunteer and advocacy opportunities that support healing during grief and loss?
4. How can effective coping strategies and support systems improve mission readiness in the face of grief and loss?

**Candid conversations about personal challenges and providing access to support resources help to fight stigma and reduce barriers to help-seeking. It is essential that leaders foster supportive environments for everyone and in particular, those living with invisible wounds.**

– Lt. Col. Michael Shick, Director of Warrior Wellness and Policy Integration

**The wounds that cannot be seen are more painful than those that can be treated by a doctor.**

– Nelson Mandela

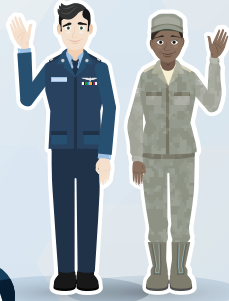


# INVISIBLE WOUNDS, VISIBLE CARE

## A ROAD TO CARE AND RECOVERY

### SEEK CARE

Are you or someone you know showing symptoms of an invisible wound?  
Seek care early and often.  
Various resources are available to support you and your family.



#### UNSEEN, BUT NOT IGNORED

- Roughly **93%** of Airmen who are diagnosed with posttraumatic stress (PTS) are able to return to duty
- A traumatic brain injury (TBI) can happen to anyone; **85-95%** recover from mild TBI within days or weeks
- The four major Evidence-Based Treatments (EBT) for invisible wounds have resulted in significant improvements for those who seek care: up to **80%** show improvement in symptoms with a full course of EBT
- Successful treatment and a positive outcome are greatly enhanced by early intervention for symptoms of PTS and TBI

### 2

### RECEIVE CARE

Connect with medical and non-medical services that will assist you throughout the care process, help you build a care management team, and support your recovery.

### 1

#### RETURN TO DUTY

- Participate in activities and programs that promote continued wellness
- Share your story and help others seek care

### CONTINUE CARE

Continue recovery while reintegrating to your unit or transitioning to civilian life.



### 3

#### RETIREMENT/SEPARATION

- Begin anew with ongoing support from available resources
- Participate in continuing care events with organizations like AFW2 and Military OneSource

<http://www.woundedwarrior.af.mil/Airmen-Veterans/Invisible-Wounds-Initiative/>

## AVAILABLE RESOURCES



#### MILITARY CRISIS LINE

Free, confidential support 24/7 for immediate assistance for those in crisis

1 (800) 273-8255



#### MILITARY TREATMENT FACILITY (MTF)

Visit these on-base facilities for direct health and wellness care for Airmen, Air Force veterans, and their families.

[www.tricare.mil/mtf](http://www.tricare.mil/mtf)



#### AIR FORCE WOUNDED WARRIOR PROGRAM (AFW2)

ANYONE may refer a recovering service member. The program utilizes Recovery Care Coordinators (RCCs) to aid service members, their caregivers, and their families in navigating the recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration process. RCCs can support Airmen in their care for up to six months after separation.

[www.woundedwarrior.af.mil](http://www.woundedwarrior.af.mil)



#### USAF CHAPLAIN CORPS

Provides confidential care and counseling, a listening ear, guidance, and religious support; contact the chaplain team at the base chapel or get connected with the 24/7 duty chaplain through the base command post



#### VET CENTER PROGRAM

Provide readjustment counseling post-deployment for Airmen, veterans, and their families; aid in successful adjustment into civilian life.

[www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov)



#### MILITARY ONESOURCE

A comprehensive DoD resource that provides health and wellness resources and confidential help, including connecting Airmen and their families to specialized peer support groups and Military and Family Life Counseling (MFLC)

[militaryonesource.mil/](http://militaryonesource.mil/)

1 (800) 342-9647



#### AIRMAN AND FAMILY READINESS CENTER (A&FRC)

Provides an array of services, such as crisis support and military family life counselors. Offers information and referrals to ensure Airmen and their families connect with on-and off-base resources for personal and work life success.



#### THE REAL WARRIORS CAMPAIGN

The campaign's online resources include psychological health and traumatic brain injury information customized for current and former military service members, their families, and the health professionals who serve them

[www.realwarriors.net](http://www.realwarriors.net)



#### COMMANDERS AND FIRST SERGEANTS

Communicate with your leaders. It's their role to support you.