



Preparing Airmen, Guardians, and Families



BRIDGECHAT
DISCUSSION GUIDE

Have you found yourself wondering, “Are the thoughts and feelings I am experiencing normal? Am I the only one who is like this?”

INDICATOR LIGHTS

In vehicles, we are given indicators when something is not operating optimally, giving us direction on where to start looking for potential problems at the earliest possible point. As humans, we don’t get the benefit of colorful icons that warn which system needs to be investigated; however, we do receive warning signs. Here are some of the most common signs that our systems give, indicating we are not at optimal performance:

- Difficulty getting to or staying asleep
- Changes in appetite — more hungry or less hungry
- Decreased concentration
- Headaches
- Neck, shoulder and/or jaw tension
- Increased irritability
- Frequent or Constant Fatigue

DISCUSSION POINT: You now have to decide what to do regarding these stress indicators:

1. Ignore the warning and see if it goes away.
2. Decide that it isn’t a big problem today, putting off dealing with it.
3. Heed the warnings and act now.

What are the potential outcomes of each decision?

WHEN DISTRESS BECOMES SEVERE

If symptoms become more severe, an individual becomes “distressed”. Many individuals, post deployment or those deployed in place, have likely experienced “distress” for a brief period immediately or shortly following an event. These symptoms should decrease over 6-8 weeks post deployment/exposure. The following are warning signs that the distress has become severe and persistent (interferes significantly with your day-to-day functioning):

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| ■ Panic attacks | ■ Feeling numb, lost or out of control |
| ■ Unable to get to sleep or stay asleep | ■ Withdrawal from all relationships |
| ■ Intrusive thoughts or flashbacks | ■ Dependence on substances, food or other numbing activities to cope |
| ■ Easily enraged or aggressive | ■ Thoughts of self-harm or suicide |
| ■ Frequent careless mistakes | |

SEEKING SUPPORT

When the above symptoms are present, seek professional support. Active-duty members can access Mental Health, True North+, RST, and ART providers, while DoW civilians can utilize the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Additionally, anyone can call 988 option 1 for emergency services. If you are unsure how to access these resources, talk with your immediate supervisor, your First Sergeant, or an embedded resource (MFLC, Chaplain, TN/OST).

DISCUSSION POINT: What do you do if you notice these symptoms in someone else, but they haven’t talked to you about it?

AVOIDING COMPARISONS

It is important to recognize that symptoms are not based on comparison with others. Some individuals will dismiss or minimize their own symptoms thinking, "I didn't even have it as bad as...".

If the symptoms are present, your system needs a check-up. Many factors contribute to how an individual system responds to stress; **NONE** of which are related to "weakness". The symptoms are the driving factor for getting additional help.

DISCUSSION POINT: What are the barriers for you or your Wingman to receive the additional help needed? Who can help you to address these obstacles?

BUILDING RESILIENCE

Stressors can come from various sources inside and outside of work. Chronic stress can also lead to active "distress" as the system is not given the opportunity to power down and reset. Taking time to clear out the daily accumulation of stress can prevent this buildup and strengthen your skills so they are at peak performance when you need them most.

Resilience is like a muscle that takes daily training to strengthen and maintain. Rotate practicing your top 2 resilience skills; if one isn't working, then you have a backup plan.

SUGGESTED APPS



Breathe2Relax

Hands-on breathing exercises to rapidly lower the body's stress response.



Mindfulness Coach

Step-by-step training to reduce intrusive thoughts and practice grounding.



Chill Drills

Easy audio exercises designed to relieve physical tension and assist with sleep.



Virtual Hope Box

Personalized coping cards, relaxing activities, and quick support contacts.



Moving Forward

Practical tools for problem-solving and overcoming daily obstacles.

YOUR NEXT STEP: PICK ONE APP AND USE IT 3 TIMES THIS WEEK

Have at least 2 local support resources entered into your phone. Don't wait until a crisis to find the contacts. This can not only help you, but also your fellow Airmen.