



# COMMANDER'S CALL TALKING POINTS

## FEBRUARY 2020



### Understanding Anxiety and Depression

Everyone experiences anxiety and depression differently, and for individuals who live with both, managing these conditions can be a difficult challenge to overcome. Anxiety and depression are two invisible wound conditions that can affect our Airmen and can manifest individually or simultaneously, often sharing many of the same physiological symptoms.

Anxiety and depression can have a synergistic relationship—symptoms of one disorder may lead to or enhance the symptoms of the other. If left untreated both conditions have the potential to worsen significantly and can lead to negative behavior such as self-harm. It is important to identify these indicators well before our Airmen are at risk.

### Living with Anxiety and Depression

**Anxiety** is characterized by a general state of excessive worry or fear. Everyone will experience anxiety in their lifetime, for example, short-term symptoms of worry, fear, or nervousness. However, for an individual living with an anxiety diagnosis these symptoms are likely to occur on a daily basis or for a prolonged period lasting multiple day and can worsen if left untreated. Individuals with anxiety may exhibit the following symptoms:

- Constant nervousness, excessive worry
- Feelings of impending danger/panic
- Increased heart rate
- Rapid breathing, hyperventilation
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Panic attacks

**Depression** can also interfere with daily activities and affect an individual's quality of life. Depression is characterized by an extended state of sadness, hopelessness, or a general disinterest in life that lasts longer than two weeks. It is important to recognize individuals who may be withdrawing from their usual behavior as this may be an indicator that they need help. Symptoms of depression can include:

- Lack of interest in activities
- Social withdrawal
- Constant/excessive sadness
- Feelings of guilt and hopelessness
- Oversleeping or trouble sleeping
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Poor self-care, substance abuse
- Changes in appetite and weight

Although the two conditions each have their own set of symptoms, it is important to recognize that anxiety and depression can have shared symptoms and may be difficult to separate, too.

### Supporting Your Airmen

Depression and anxiety can improve with various types of treatment, including counseling, alternative therapies, or medication. Regardless of treatment, it is important to frequently check-in with your Airmen to ensure they feel supported throughout their healing and recovery process.

Encourage them to make lifestyle changes that can help them overcome the daily challenges of living with anxiety or depression, in addition to encouraging them to seek treatment. Share these options:

- Avoid drinking alcohol or smoking
- Avoid Isolation
- Create a sleep routine
- Exercise regularly
- Journal your thoughts
- Practice breathing exercises
- Reach out to supportive friends/family
- Try stress-relieving hobbies

### Resources

#### **inTransition**

**inTransition** is a free, confidential program that offers specialized coaching and assistance for any servicemember who need access to mental health care.

#### **NATIONAL HELPLINE**

**SAMHSA's National Helpline** is a free, confidential, 24/7 treatment, referral, and information service for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

Call: 1-800-662-HELP(4357)



**The Blue Grit Podcast** features conversations with military leaders, mental health experts, elite athletes, veterans and other individuals who have overcome adversity. Each podcast highlights techniques used to overcome profound challenges and how to help current Airmen deal with challenges.

#NationalCaregiverDay is February 21<sup>st</sup>. Be sure to take a moment and acknowledge military caregivers for their hard work and dedication in supporting our servicemembers.