



Medical/Mental Health

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

PTSD is an anxiety condition that can result when someone is exposed to an event they experience as traumatic, meaning their response to the event involves intense fear, a sense of helplessness, or horror. While combat exposure certainly can meet this definition, a wide range of non-combat events, such as assault, being in a motor vehicle accident, childhood abuse, or involvement in a natural disaster can also result in PTSD. The vast majority of individuals who experience high-stress events do not experience intense fear. Most people do cope well and experience no significant problems.

Signs Wingmen Should Know/Look For

- Re-experiencing the trauma (e.g., distressing thoughts or images of the trauma that they can't get out of their head).
- Avoidance and emotional numbing (e.g., avoidance of thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma).
- Increased arousal (e.g., difficulty falling or staying asleep).
- Alcohol and substance abuse.
- Depression.
- Risk for suicide.
- Marital/relationship problems.
- Negative impact on work/duty performance.

Recommended Wingman Action

- Encourage use of healthy coping mechanisms such as exercise, good nutrition, and use of social resources.
- Be vigilant for unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as use of alcohol or drugs.
- Ask how the individual is doing, and if needed, suggest they seek assistance.
- Encourage the individual to talk, and listen to their concerns.
- Ask directly about thoughts of suicide or of harming others.

Leadership Considerations

- Be aware of any safety issues and take steps to ensure the individual is not at increased risk for accidents at work.
- Encourage the individual to talk with a trusted, mature peer who can relate to their concerns.
- Discuss options for assistance (e.g., chaplain, Mental Health Clinic, primary care manager) if these normal and typically transient reactions persist or impair performance or functioning.
- Consider a Commander Directed Evaluation for those who decline to seek services voluntarily and who begin to have duty impairment or are believed to be at risk for harming themselves or others.
- Be aware of how PTSD is impacting the individual's family and provide support as appropriate.