



What You Need to Know About Hidden Helpers



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- There are approximately 2.3 million children under the age 18 living with a disabled veteran in communities across the U.S.
- Military and veteran families experiencing high levels of disruption because of the veteran's and service member's illness, or injury are more likely to report high levels of child distress.
- Hidden Helpers are more likely to experience isolation and have fewer opportunities to interact with peers; have difficulties expressing emotion and learning in school; experience health problems such as stress, burnout, and fatigue.
- Some Hidden Helpers may develop an increased sense of personal strength and self-efficacy, as they are taking on more responsibilities at home.
- Not all injuries incurred in military service are visible. Invisible injuries like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury also require attention and management by family members. A responsibility unseen and often unacknowledged by individuals unfamiliar with these injuries.
- It is important to recognize the stigma around help seeking, especially amongst military and veteran families for whom self-sufficiency is a prized attribute.

Who are Hidden Helpers?

Hidden Helpers are the children and youth who live in homes with wounded, injured, or ill service members and veterans. Based on census data analysis, we estimate there are approximately 2.3 million Hidden Helpers who everyday provide an unseen, unrecognized, and unsupported national service. Often these individuals are taking on monumental responsibilities within the family unit whether assisting a warrior in performing Activities of Daily Living, taking care of other children in the household, or helping to manage finances. As part of our efforts to support and celebrate military and veteran families, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and Wounded Warrior Project's Hidden Helpers initiative seeks to uplift the voices of military caregiver kids, better understand the unique challenges they face, and enhance the support services available to them.



Quick Tips for Healthcare Professionals

ASK: Check in regularly with your children and ask them how they are doing. Ask them open-ended questions (those that don't require one-word responses). With an open mind and heart, give them the time and space to respond and thank them for sharing their worries. You don't have to solve every challenge they put in front of you. Asking and listening goes a long way to let kids know they are being heard.

UNDERSTAND: Children and adolescents are always in the process of growth and development. Try to be the adult you needed when you were growing up; someone who would listen, affirm your feelings, and love you deeply.

TALK: Sharing your experience or feelings with your children is okay. Too much sharing can be a burden on your children. Try to avoid random venting and remarks spurred by frustration or anger. You got this – be mindful of how they might respond and temper your conversations appropriately.

CONSIDER: You are trying your best to make complicated situations. As children age into adulthood, they will begin to understand more and with that understanding, appreciate and value your commitments as a caregiver. While still young, children do understand, and the depth of this understanding will grow as they age.

Encourage establish healthy rituals as a family. Preparing and eating regular meals with one another. Daily walks, watching a favorite TV show together. These low stress activities with the entire family can create safe places to talk and/or help create a sense of normalcy.



Hidden Helpers in Your Home

As a military and veteran caregiver, you have a lot on your shoulders. You care for your ill, wounded, or injured veteran, while managing a household, looking after your children, and trying to find time each day to practice healthy self-care. We hope you find these tips helpful on your journey to acceptance and wellbeing with your children and veteran.

Connect with EDF

Need help getting started? The Elizabeth Dole Foundation team is here to help! Please reach out to us at HiddenHelpers@elizabethdolefoundation.org with any questions!