



# What You Need to Know About Hidden Helpers

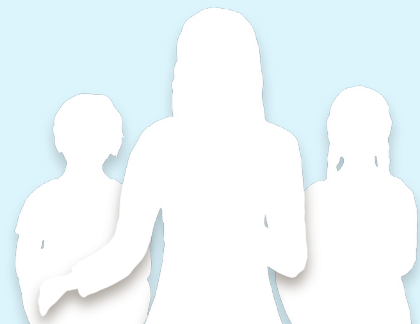


## What you need to know about Hidden Helpers

- 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:** Not every child or parent will disclose their family's military service or veteran's illness or injury. Asking about military service invites further conversation. You may consider adding a question about a parent or family members service to your intake form, including questions about any disabilities (visible and invisible).

**UNDERSTAND:** With less than one percent of eligible Americans connected to military service, there are fewer people truly familiar with the challenges and opportunities of military service. Many veterans and their family members are often eager to share their experience.

**TALK:** Hidden Helpers often avoid seeking out support or deprioritize their own needs because of their needs of their care recipient at home. Talk to Hidden Helpers who may be struggling about what might be going on at home and when necessary, make a warm referral to a child or adolescent mental health professional. Whenever possible, especially for adolescents, talk to them without the presence of a parent.

**CONSIDER:** Not all injuries suffered by service members are physical. For veterans of America's post 9/11 conflicts, many more veterans are suffering from the invisible wounds of war like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injury. These injuries require a different type of attention by family members, which can be emotionally taxing and distressful. If someone is having a PTSD-induced reaction or trigger, take steps to consider the physical environment and address any elements to help reduce the stress reaction by eliminating triggers.



## Hidden Helpers in Healthcare Settings

Healthcare providers are in a unique position to identify and address behavioral and medical issues related to the stressors experienced by Hidden Helpers. Attention to these issues necessitates an understanding of what the child or adolescent's home life is like – and if necessary, connect the child and family to additional supports. Be mindful that some adolescents considering a future of military service may be reluctant to share any mental health challenges fearing disclosure as a barrier when seeking to enlist. It is important to engage in supportive dialogue to ensure that stigma is not a barrier to care.

## 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](mailto:HiddenHelpers@elizabethdolefoundation.org) with any questions!