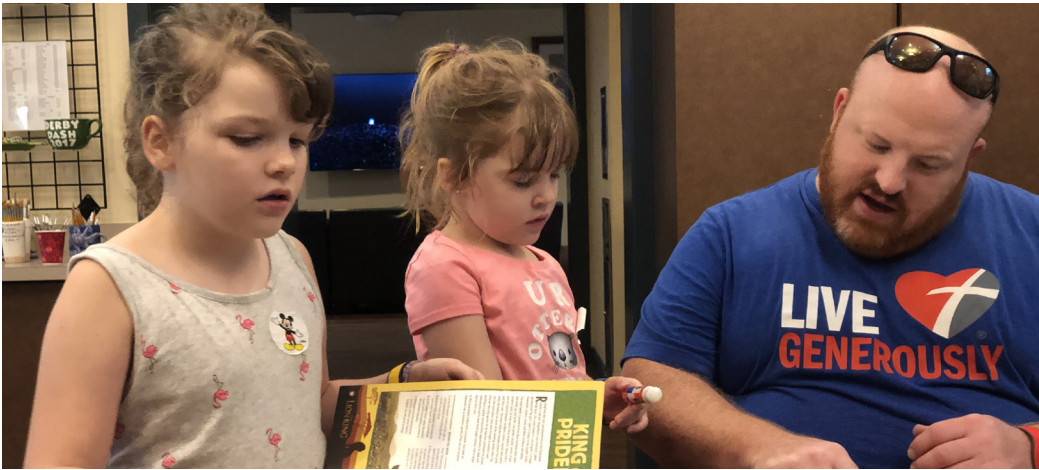




# What You Need to Know About Hidden Helpers



## 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 Afterschool, Sports Teams, and Summer Camp

**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, understanding what it means to join the armed forces and life after service, especially if a veteran is injured is important. Many veterans and their adult caregivers are eager to share their experiences. Invite them to talk to your group.

**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.

**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.



### Hidden Helpers in Afterschool, Sports Teams, and Summer Camps

Afterschool programs, sports teams, and summer camps offer a range of age-appropriate learning and fun. In these settings, it is incumbent on instructors, coaches, and counselors to recognize and support Hidden Helpers. Hidden Helpers welcome the opportunities to be with other kids exploring the world or their community with the support of caring adults. This is not a charge to treat Hidden Helpers differently than other kids, it is a call to be aware of underlying issues that may be resulting in disruptive or isolating behaviors.

### 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!