



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 Wounded Warriors

ASK: Check in with your Hidden Helper and ask them how they are doing. 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. Think back to when you were a kid or teenager. Nothing was perfect, there were good times and bad. Recognize and appreciate the developmental milestones they are making.

TALK: Sharing your experience or feelings with your children is okay. Too much sharing can be a burden on your children. 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 the best. As children age into adulthood, they will begin to understand more and with that understanding, appreciate and value you and your role in the family.



Hidden Helpers in your home

Warriors have selflessly served our country, and many have people at home who also go above and beyond to help care for them. It may be hard to understand the unique experiences your family has caring for you, especially your children, grandchildren, or younger siblings. As you are recovering and finding your new normal, please know there are tips and resources available to you and your family.

Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) Resources for You and Your Family

WWP is committed to helping warriors like you face the future with confidence and would like to partner with you on that journey. It's why WWP provides a variety of programs and services to you and your family. WWP believes in supporting the whole family unit. Below find a list of a few of WWP's program offerings, to find the entire list visit: <https://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/media/ie2enyin/wounded-warrior-project-program-directory.pdf>

- WWP's Alumni and Connection team creates meaningful opportunities through face-to-face, virtual, and gaming engagements for you and your family to meet other veterans and their families within and outside your local communities.
- WWP's Triage team helps warriors, and their families navigate through WWP's mental health programs, as well as external resources available. Through our developed partnerships with available providers, WWP offers mental healthcare and counseling sessions to children of WWP Alumni.
- Benefits Service puts a team of certified Veterans Affairs (VA) representatives in charge of helping you navigate the VA claims process and receive the benefits you have earned.
- The Independence Program provides long-term support to catastrophically wounded veterans living with injuries that impact their independence, such as a moderate to severe brain injury, spinal cord injury, or neurological condition.
- WWP Talk is a nonclinical telephonic emotional support and goal-setting program that connects you and/or your family, via a weekly call, with dedicated team member who can help with developing an individualized plan to promote a path toward personal growth.

Connect with EDF & WWP

Need help getting started? Connect with Wounded Warrior Project. Additionally email HiddenHelpers@elizabethdolefoundation.org with any questions about supporting your Hidden Helper.