

AIRMAN

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE



RESILIENCE

How can Airmen transform **RESILIENCE** from a buzzword into a practice?



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EDITOR'S Note

Thousands of briefings, PSA's, social media posts and stand down days are organized and executed every year, with the goal of inspiring Airmen to become more resilient. Airmen often feel disillusioned by the monotony of annual training and become desensitized to what it genuinely means to BE or lean on a wingman.

For this issue, we talked to a licensed clinical social worker, a first sergeant from a guard unit, three doctors who study suicide and resilience and the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force.

We asked how Airmen can transform resilience from a buzzword into a daily practice. We've found that the quest to wellness is as unique, personal, demanding and fulfilling as every Airman and Guardian's path to service.



Steffanie Sargeant



Master Sgt. Jonathan Fiore



Dr. Mary Bartlett



U.S. Air Force special tactics Airmen with the 320th Special Tactics Squadron conduct a buddy carry during Monster Mash, an operational readiness and resilience training, at Kadena Air Base, Japan, May 5, 2023. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Jessi Roth)

RESILIENCE

The glue of the forces

Story by
Tech. Sgt. Charles Dickens

If you want to understand how the Air Force instills resilience into every uniformed member, think back to your time at basic military training, basic cadet training, field training or officer training school. Through grit and determination, you overcame many challenges to become an Airman, and developed coping skills and techniques to help you stay focused.

This is a large part of the ethos built into the Air Force's Spectrum of Resilience program, but it will take every Airman continuously improving in each of these tenets to infuse wellness into the culture.

"While the Spectrum of Resilience is a great program, what we know is programs do not save lives; people save lives," Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force JoAnne S. Bass emphasized. "It's really important that we create a culture and an atmosphere of connectedness; of purpose. It's that culture that, perhaps, is something somebody will need when they're having some of their worst days. They'll know they can call on their brother or sister that's right next to them."

Throughout the years, the Air Force has implemented and replaced numerous programs, directed diverse campaigns and altered doctrine to emphasize the importance of instilling and maintaining resilience within Airmen. However, even with those developments, the Defense Department recorded 384 active component suicide deaths in 2020. This represented an alarming 33.5% increase since 2016 and prompted the United States Government Accountability Office to conduct a **study**.

"One suicide is one too many," Bass stressed. "Preventing suicide matters every single day. This isn't about a month, an observance or a public announcement. This is about ensuring that there are NO suicides in our Air Force, because every time one of our brothers or sisters completes suicide, it hurts us all."



Airman Magazine interview with Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force JoAnne Bass covering her accomplishments, priorities and the need to increase the capabilities and resilience of Airmen for a potential future fight with peer adversaries. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Janiqua P. Robinson)

“It’s really important that we create a culture and an atmosphere of connectedness; of purpose. It’s that culture that, perhaps, is something somebody will need when they’re having some of their worst days. They’ll know they can call on their brother or sister that’s right next to them.”

- Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force JoAnne Bass

The analysis of the study examined the extent to which DoD and military services had collected required suicide incident data, and what is known about the incidence of suicide and related risk factors among service members between 2016 and 2020.

From this study, 14 recommendations were given to the DoD, and in 2021, the number of active component suicides declined to 328. In 2021, the Air Force active component reported 51 suicides, which was a drop from the 82 suicides reported in 2020.

“When you think about it, some of the core reasons our Airmen and Guardians are dying by suicide, are relationship issues,” explained Dr. Mary Bartlett, Air War College associate professor at the Leadership and Innovation Institute at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. “Resilience, largely, is about dealing with emotions, which are a huge part of any relationship you have.”

Bartlett played a key role in developing a new course being offered at the Air Command and Staff College and the Air War College, that teaches service members how to create healthy, connected communities and build skill sets to cope with adversity.

“It was identified that we cannot rely exclusively on our mental health system to build robust Airmen and Guardians, and, in fact, we shouldn’t wait until it gets to that point,” Bartlett emphasized. “The essence of this is we need to start to help people understand their emotions and how that dictates their actions and outcomes, particularly when they’re in adverse situations, long before they get to the other side of the spectrum, which is needing professional mental health support.”

Although courses and programs are being built to help Airmen and Guardian better process their emotions and experiences, Bartlett stressed that these ordeals are pivotal in self-improvement and sustainment.

“Resilience isn’t about training people to not experience or express emotion,” Bartlett stressed. “In fact, I would submit that it’s the opposite. It’s about helping people understand that there’s an emotionality in everything that we do. Every bit of information that you receive is assigned an emotion. We are emotional, psychological creatures, so you cannot separate that out. Resilience is about helping people understand their emotions, identify their emotions, manage their emotions, and then utilize their emotions in a constructive way that helps them to grow and become better people.”

Bass pointed to the Spectrum of Resilience as a ladder of care, asking Airmen to use all the rungs to maintain their individual wellness. First, Airmen can develop healthy coping skills and lean on family members or loved ones, then their wingmen and peers.

“The Spectrum of Resilience is really important on multiple levels because what it highlights is that there is an entire spectrum that impacts my resilience as well as yours, and it starts with self,” Bass explained. “I’ve got to take care of myself so that I can be able to be the full round that I need to be for myself, for my family members and for our Air Force.”



Dr. Mary Bartlett, associate professor for Air War College at the Leadership and Innovation Institute, poses for a photo, Aug. 8, 2023, at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. Bartlett’s principal areas of research are suicide and resilience. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tyler Prince)



Steffanie Sargeant, 37th Training Wing lead True North clinical social worker, poses for a photo at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas, March 1, 2023. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Janiqua P. Robinson)

If the issue is still mentally taxing, the Air Force provides support entities such as Military and Family Life Counseling Services, chaplains and counselors that can provide lower-level assistance.

“If we all, as Airmen, tap into the Spectrum of Resilience, perhaps we don’t go from being refined to the clinical piece right away,” Bass emphasized. “Perhaps we can tap into some of the spectrum where I can call a friend, wingman or chaplain before I get to that opposite end of the spectrum and absolutely need clinical help.”

Airmen serving in high-tempo career fields, deployed locations and training units don’t always have access to their loved ones or wingmen to talk through stressors and navigate life adjustments. In some of these locations, Airmen are provided an additional resource: **True North.**

“Our mission in True North is to help give commanders the tools they need to help keep their forces and families mission-ready,” said Steffanie Sargeant, 37th Training Wing lead True North clinical social worker, Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.” We do that by intervening early and in the unit if we can, or by connecting them with services close by and trying to keep them as mission-ready as possible.”

“Our greatest strength is our people, and we are committed to their well-being. Therefore, I firmly believe that seeking mental health treatment is a sign of strength and resilience.”

- Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness
Gilbert Cisneros, Jr.

True North is an alternative treatment program designed to help those who don't currently need clinical assistance. Since it's embedded into the unit, it's easier to access than the local military treatment facility and often has hours that cater to the population it's serving.

“Access to care is really challenging across the Air Force; when people call for care at the military treatment facility, we're having to route them through the BHOP [Behavioral Health Optimization Program] to get them access to services before they go into the mental health clinic,” Sargeant explained. “All of that time takes members away from their unit and there's a lag time. The benefit of having True North embedded in the unit prevents members from having to go through that wait, through several different appointments, and we can vector them to the right place if we're not able to help them.”

The Air Force and DoD continue to introduce new programs, campaigns and procedures aimed at streamlining to handle mental health services. Gilbert Cisneros, Jr., the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, signed a policy in May 2023 to implement the Brandon Act across the DoD. This introduces an avenue to self-refer for mental health evaluation confidentially, intending to encourage service members to get the help needed.

“Our greatest strength is our people, and we are committed to their well-being,” Cisneros said. “Therefore, I firmly believe that seeking mental health treatment is a sign of strength and resilience. This policy, spurred by the passage of the Brandon Act, is an important step in ensuring that our service members are able to seek mental health treatment when and how they need it. We honor Petty Officer Brandon Caserta's memory by ensuring that our Military Services have procedures and processes in place that allow service members to seek help confidentially, for any reason, at any time, and in any environment, and aim to reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health care.”



Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Gilbert Cisneros, Jr. signed a policy in May 2023 to implement the Brandon Act across the Defense Department. This introduces an avenue to self-refer for mental health evaluation confidentially, intending to encourage service members to get the help needed. (U.S. Army photo by William Pratt)



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OPENS IN BROWSER

RESILIENCY RESEARCH TASK FORCE

studies issues
affecting Airmen

Story/Video By
Staff Sgt. Mikayla Daly

The Research Resilience Task Force at the Air Force Culture and Language Center is led by Associate Professor of Cross-Cultural Communication Dr. Susan Steen and studies the ways in which the Air Force can improve force-wide resiliency.

In this video, Dr. Steen, Dr. Mary Bartlett, associate professor for Air War College at the Leadership and Innovation Institute and Dr. Amy Baxter, director of research for the Global College of Professional Military Education discuss a new class that teaches Air Force leaders about the importance of a resilient force.





CLICK TO PLAY VIDEO
OPENS IN BROWSER

Steffanie Sargeant, 37th Training Wing lead True North clinical social worker, poses for a photo at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas, March 1, 2023. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Janiqua P. Robinson)

TRUE NORTH

clinic and caring
for military training
instructors

Story/Video By
Tech. Sgt. Janiqua Robinson

Steffanie Sargeant is a licensed clinical social worker at Basic Military Training's Human Performance Squadron.

In this video, she explains the mission of the True North clinic and the challenges they face while caring for military training instructors.





CLICK TO PLAY VIDEO
OPENS IN BROWSER

Tech. Sgt. Nigel Cotton, 326th Training Squadron military training instructor trainer. Cotton shared with Airman Magazine the challenges he faced while acclimating to the new environment and the experience he had seeking mental health services from the military consult service. (U.S. Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Christopher Griffin)

UNEXPECTED

mental health challenges

Story/Video By
Staff Sgt. Mikayla Daly

Tech. Sgt. Nigel Cotton trains military training instructor's at the 326th Training Squadron at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas.

In this video, he shares the challenges he faced while acclimating to the new environment and the experience he had seeking mental health services from Maj. Elise Ocelnik, the 737th Training Group military consult service chief.





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OPENS IN BROWSER

Master Sgt. Jonathan Fiore, 149th Fighter Wing first sergeant, poses for a photo, June 6, 2023, during an Innovative Readiness Training in Dayton, Tennessee. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Janiqua P. Robinson)

CHALLENGES

being in a new
environment

Story/Video By
Tech. Sgt. Janiqua Robinson

Master Sgt. Jonathan Fiore, 149th Fighter Wing first sergeant, discusses the challenges of being in a new environment during an Innovative Readiness Training in Dayton, Tennessee.

While the job can be challenging and stressful, he finds it rewarding to have an impact on taking care of Airmen and their families.





CLICK TO LISTEN

OPENS IN BROWSER

Podcast by

Staff Sgt. Mikayla Daly

Joseph Eddins

Tech. Sgt. Janiqua Robinson

Delano Scott

Airman magazine interview with Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force JoAnne Bass covering her accomplishments, priorities and the need to increase the capabilities and resilience of Airmen for a potential future fight with peer adversaries.

U.S. Air Force photo by

Tech. Sgt. Janiqua P. Robinson

Spectrum of RESILIENCE



Self



Family and Friends



Peer/Social



Support Entities



Medical Health

Visit the following links for more information or assistance about some of the mental health options available to Air Force personnel

One of our greatest sources of strength to meet the unique challenges of military life comes from our connection with others across a Spectrum of Resilience. Ourselves, our family and friends, our peers and social networks, as well as support agencies and clinical/medical health professionals all influence and contribute to our personal resilience.



Spouse/Family Support Resources



Resilience



Suicide Prevention



Domestic Violence/Abuse



Sexual Assault/Harassment



Crisis Quick Guides "How to Help"



Civilian Workforce Resources



National Directory Search by Zip Code



Leadership Link Checklists, Guides (CAC)



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