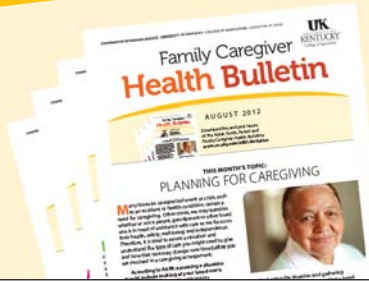


# Family Caregiver Health Bulletin



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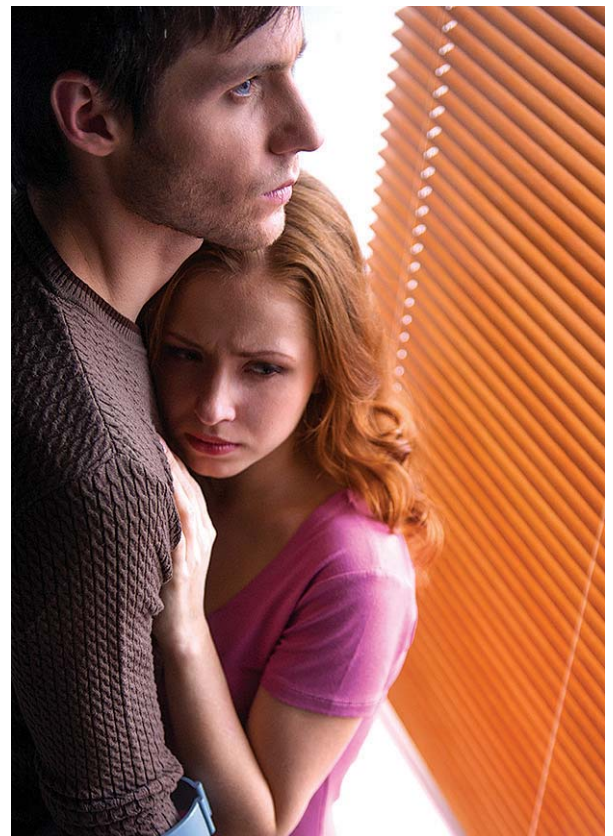
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Atchison County Office  
405 Main/PO Box 109  
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## THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

# SUPPORT MILITARY FAMILY CAREGIVERS

**T**raditionally, we think of military caregivers as those who provide support to older veterans with illness, injury or disability. But today, there are increasing numbers of caregivers who provide support to wounded soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines who fought wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. While there are many similarities between civilian and military caregivers, such as being female, balancing work and family and helping with activities of daily living, military caregivers differ in many ways. Military caregivers are often younger women who live with their care recipient in addition to their dependent children and likely share caregiving responsibilities with their children. It is also common for military caregivers to be parents of an unmarried veteran.

In addition to physical injuries, it is common for military caregivers to manage "invisible wounds," including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or traumatic brain injury (TBI), or a combination of physical and invisible wounds. Unlike caregiving for older adults, caregiving for youthful veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars can continue for decades and can include navigating both military and regular health care systems.



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# Support from family, friends, employers and the community can help military caregivers avoid becoming overwhelmed.

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As a result, military caregivers are prone to physical and emotional exhaustion in addition to financial stress. The role can also leave them at higher risk for chronic health conditions, struggles at work and social isolation.

To avoid becoming overwhelmed, it is important for military caregivers to access support from family, friends, employers and the community. According to eXtension military caregiving resources, there are some ways family, friends, employers and the community can support military family caregivers:

### What can family and friends do?

- **Support.** Offer companionship to the family caregiver. Listen carefully to what they are telling you. Be empathic by putting yourself into the caregiver's shoes.
- **Volunteer.** Help your family caregiver and others by volunteering through organizations that reach out to military families.
- **Brainstorm.** Contact various military and/or civilian service agencies, such as hospice, Area Agency on Aging and the health department to find out about support opportunities.
- **Network.** Put family caregivers in touch with other caregivers.

### What can employers do?

- **Develop Policies.** Employ policies, such as flexibility, use of sick and vacation leave and crisis management, which support military family caregiver employees.
- **Educate.** Provide workshops or trainings regarding family caregiving issues and resources.
- **Refer.** Connect military family caregivers to information regarding medical, legal and financial advice. In addition, provide information about family communications, counseling or bereavement services.
- **Encourage.** Encourage health and wellness efforts.

### What can communities do?

- **Support.** Offer support services, such as military family caregiver support groups, respite

care, in-home health and companion services and educational programs and information.

- **Publicize.** Make military family caregivers aware of available support services and resources.
- **Target audiences.** Make services for military family caregivers known throughout the community, including hard-to-reach audiences, such as immigrants and those staying/working from home.
- **Decrease barriers.** A variety of military and civilian agencies should work together to make services and resources known, available and easy to access.
- **Refer.** Refer military family caregivers to appropriate services and resources.

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#### SOURCE:

Amy Hosier, Extension Specialist for Family Life



Family Caregiver  
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**Written by:** Amy Hosier, Ph.D.  
Extension Specialist for Family Life  
**Edited by:** Connee Wheeler  
**Designed by:** Rusty Manseau  
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