

Army Suicide Prevention Month
September 2013
Suggested Activities

Theme: “Shoulder to Shoulder: Standing Ready and Resilient”

National Suicide Prevention Week and World Suicide Prevention Day are observed annually in the month September. Army senior leaders recognize the importance to pause from our day-to-day efforts and consider some additional preventive actions.

1) Topics/Themes

Promote/advertise local sources of help, i.e., Suicide Prevention Program Managers, Chaplains, Military Family Life Consultants, Behavioral Health providers, off-post community services, churches, medical centers, crisis centers, welcome centers, schools, Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255), and the greater Army Community.

Assemble company or battalion leadership, from squad leader on up in a Non-Commissioned Officer Professional Development (NCOPD) and/or an Officer Professional Development (OPD) training session. Provide a listing of local and national resources pertinent to suicide prevention or risk factor/warning sign mitigation. Supervise the group while all present load the phone numbers of these organizations into their government or private cell/smart phones. At a minimum, the list will include phone numbers for the local hospital emergency room, an ambulance service, the Military Police (MP) emergency point of contact, the chaplain, and the nearest Suicide Prevention Program Manager (SPPM). Most personnel will not have these phone numbers in their lists of contacts and will not have time to find them in a moment of crisis.

Ensure and promote access to quality physical, behavioral, and spiritual care. Include addresses, phone numbers, websites, and hand-outs. Use media outlets - local radio stations, newsletters, newspapers, sign boards, and bulletin boards.

Disseminate and promote information about national and local resources; 24x7 hot lines; websites; faith-based organizations; non-profit Veterans' organizations; services; clubs; and private, public, and non-profit organizations in the community. Invite local resource providers to set up booths/tables and provide hand-outs.

Ensure programs are in place to identify risky behavior. Incorporate suicide risk screening at the primary health care level.

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Promote community and individual awareness of risky behaviors, warning signs, and triggering events (ex. anniversary of the death of a Family member or close friend).

Take the opportunity to ensure suicide prevention and awareness, along with positive life coping skills, is included in town hall meetings, Family Readiness Group meetings, and Welcome Centers.

Publicize availability of resources to include Family members' access and awareness.

Promote the value of enhancing individual resilience skills and maintaining one's personal health along with self care. Behavioral health care is as important as physical health. Suicide is preventable.

Develop processes for reaching out to geographically dispersed Soldiers and their Families.

Reach out to public/private schools and colleges - include them in activities as appropriate.

Collaborate with nonprofit organizations within your community to leverage educational materials on suicide prevention and deliver comprehensive suicide prevention activities.

Ensure all leaders publicly and privately in one on one counseling sessions promote help-seeking behaviors.

Build activities to reduce stigma associated with seeking help for behavioral health concerns. Engage local foundations to promote activities associated with behavioral illness awareness week, suicide prevention month, and mental health month.

Promote community crisis management services and suicide survivors groups such as Survivor Outreach Services (SOS), National Military Family Association, and Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors.

Improve suicide prevention education and training for health care professionals, counselors, clergy, teachers and other key "gatekeepers."

Conduct activities that involve Soldiers, Army Civilian, and Families, work centers/services or commands.

Develop and coordinate a crisis response plan for your organizations. Test it to gauge its effectiveness.

2) Activities

You make a difference – Pass it on! (www.blueribbonmovie.com) - Small seeds of hope or a sense of effectiveness and belonging can grow to form the threads that sustain us through tough times.

Let three people in your life (family, friends, battle buddies, people who you cross paths with routinely) know that they make a difference to you. Be specific about how and why you appreciate who they are and what they do that makes a difference in your life. Ask them to pass it on by honoring three people in their lives this way. To see a real life example of this process in action, see www.blueribbonmovie.com.

Run a “fire” drill - While we may not expect to be in a fire, we go through drills to learn the escape routes in case we ever need them; even if they are hard to see because of smoke or darkness. However, it is not often that we consider or practice what to do if our brains or hearts are “on fire” (when we encounter a personal crisis or have a chance to help another person in crisis).

Consider what you would do in a personal crisis within yourself or someone else. Run a drill to practice your plan. It may feel awkward to practice saying “I am so upset, I am thinking of hurting myself,” “I have so many problems piled up and am so overwhelmed that I am desperate and need to talk so I can think straight,” or “I am feeling suicidal and need help;” but, it also feels awkward doing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) on a mannequin or jumping into a sawdust pit to learn how to land properly for a parachute jump. The bottom line is that you do not want to have to figure out how to do chest compressions with a person unconscious in front of you; you don’t want to figure out how to land right on the way to the ground; and, you don’t want to figure out how to reach out when you or someone else is already in the middle of the darkness of a personal crisis.

Conduct a suicide prevention “terrain walk” - Arrange bus or other group transportation; assemble company, battalion leadership from squad leader on up; drive to and physically visit the location of each to suicide prevention or risk factor/warning sign mitigation site at each camp, post or station (CPS). Visits should include at a minimum the chaplains’ offices, the MP station, the nearest emergency room, the behavioral health facilities, Staff Judge Advocate (SJA) offices, Family Readiness Group offices. Personnel new to the CPS and many of the more junior personnel will have never visited many of these sites and will not know where they are located in a time of crisis. If possible, arrange for a brief orientation at each site, explaining the services provided and what to do in the event of a threatened, attempted or completed suicide.

Conduct Resilience Training/Implement CSF2 initiatives - Provide Resilience Training. Have your Master Resilience Trainer provide all members of the Army Family -- Soldiers, Family members and Army Civilians with the skills needed to build their resilience and enhance their performance. Encourage members of the Army Family to

re-take the Global Assessment Tool, and watch follow-on Comprehensive Resilience Modules.

Organizational Level – Conduct climate assessment and evaluate results for appropriate action.

Publish good news stories in suicide prevention successes.

Talk to Family and friends about this issue and raise awareness. Encourage open dialogue and talk about how each of you will help one another in a crisis.

Compile a Hope Chest of items that elicit positive emotions (happiness, hope, spirituality) to use when you or someone you know might be feeling down.

3) Conduct a self-assessment - <http://www.militarymentalhealth.org> - Stress affects us all and health problems like sleep difficulties, depression, and anxiety are extremely common. For example, one in five people will have at least one episode of major depression. Sometimes impacts from challenges or illness creeps up on us slowly and we do not feel quite right but really do not understand that anything is wrong until it really takes a toll. The link above leads to an anonymous online self-assessment tool. Take a few minutes and see where you are. If you can recognize a concern early, there are many resources to address it before it starts to impact your work performance, relationships, and health in negative ways. Seek help when needed.

4) Training

a. Ask-Care-Escort (ACE). Invest a couple of hours in the ACE program. Develop and use scenarios and practice ACE with a partner or small group.

Ask – If someone is thinking of suicide.

Care – Listen, offer hope, and don't judge.

Escort – Take action, don't leave the person alone, and escort them to assistance.

ACE is a suicide prevention training course that provides an excellent opportunity to discuss and role-play realistic scenarios and practice communication and intervention skills.

b. Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST). The ASIST workshop is for caregivers who want to feel more comfortable, confident and competent in helping to prevent the immediate risk of suicide. Thousands of gatekeepers have participated in this two-day, highly interactive, practical, practice-oriented workshop in the Army throughout the years...Be part of the experience, get involved.

c. Test your crisis response plan. Have someone call the duty office and have the duty section practice going through their plan to talk, gather information, use intervention skills, and access support. Practice your plan to assist someone who is at acute risk. Check your safety considerations. Update the recall roster. For emergency

responders or medical commands, run a drill to practice your protocols for suicide risk and response.

5) Engage in Fellowship, Meditation, or Prayer

In keeping with beliefs, work with the local chaplain, faith group, or community to hold a breakfast or lunch in which suicide awareness (warning signs, risk and protective factors) and benefits of behavioral health care are discussed. Set aside time for meditation or prayer on behalf of those struggling with personal crisis. Use the opportunity to discuss the benefits of communication, helping one another, and the importance of taking care of one's emotional well being. Share stories of success, positive coping skills; give life a chance.

6) Good Grief

Surveys show that upwards of half of our personnel knew someone personally who lost a struggle to suicide. The pain caused by suicide loss does not heal quickly or easily and some studies estimate that the effects of suicide on a family last for generations. Grieving a loss (or putting off even thinking about it for years), may take some time to sort out and facilitate healing.

7) Resources

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
1-800-273-TALK (8255) - www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- Military Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255, Press 1
- Military OneSource: 1-800-342-9647 - www.militaryonesource.com
- Military Pathways: 1-877-877-3647 - www.militarymentalhealth.org
- Signs of Suicide (SOS) Military Program :
<http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/military/index.aspx>
- Chaplains: <http://www.army.mil/info/organization/chaplaincy>
- Office of the Chief of Public Affairs: <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/page/216363>
- Army Family Medical Life Counselors
- Family Readiness Groups
- Real Warriors Campaign: 1-866-966-1020 - www.realwarriors.net
- Wellness Resources for the Military Community - www.afterdeployment.org
- TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors):
1-800-959-TAPS (8277) - www.taps.org
- TRICARE (now offering remote and web-based counseling in CONUS):
1-800-600-9332 (CONUS) - www.tricareonline.com
- Warrior and Family Assistance Center (WFAC):
1-800-436-6290 - www.arfp.org/WFAC
- National Guard's Director of Psychological Health Program:
<http://www.realwarriors.net/guardreserve/treatment/NGPHP.php>
- Vets4Warriors – 1-855-838-8255: www.Vets4Warriors.com
- Give an Hour: www.giveanhour.org
- DCoE Outreach Center For Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury Information and Resources: 1-866-966-1020 Connect with the Community

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Suicide affects every state, community, and demographic group. Don't go it alone. Identify organizations and opportunities in your community. Organizations that can give you ideas and information on local activities include:

- American Association of Suicidology - www.suicidology.org
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - www.afsp.org
- Suicide Prevention Resource Counsel - www.sprc.org

8) Share your Story

Every day, people find hope and strength amidst adversity and reach out to help one another. If you have overcome a personal crisis or helped someone through a crisis and assisted in saving a life, we invite you to email us your story at www.preventsuicide.army.mil. Submissions can be anonymous. We will share them throughout the year (with no names or identifiers).

We also welcome emails about successful suicide prevention program practices that can be highlighted as "best practices."