

**Army Suicide Prevention Month  
September 2012  
“A HEALTHY FORCE IS A READY FORCE”**

National Suicide Prevention Week is observed in September. It is important 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.

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 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.

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 maintaining one's personal health and 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.

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

Ensure all leaders publically 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, DA 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](http://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](http://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 CPR on a mannequin or jumping into a

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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.

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 wear and tear or illness creeps up on us slowly like a cancer 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](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)
- Military Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255, Press 1
- Military OneSource: 1-800-342-9647 - [www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com)
- Military Pathways: 1-877-877-3647 - [www.militarymentalhealth.org](http://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](http://www.realwarriors.net)
- Wellness Resources for the Military Community - [www.afterdeployment.org](http://www.afterdeployment.org)
- TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors):  
1-800-959-TAPS (8277) - [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org)
- TRICARE (now offering remote and web-based counseling in CONUS):  
1-800-600-9332 (CONUS) - [www.tricareonline.com](http://www.tricareonline.com)
- Warrior and Family Assistance Center (WFAC):  
1-800-436-6290 - [www.arfp.org/WFAC](http://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](http://www.Vets4Warriors.com)
- Give an Hour: [www.giveanhour.org](http://www.giveanhour.org)

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- DCoE Outreach Center For Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury  
Information and Resources: 1-866-966-1020 Connect with the Community  
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](http://www.suicidology.org)
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)
- Suicide Prevention Resource Counsel - [www.sprc.org](http://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](http://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.”

### **9) Mandatory Stand Down**

The VCSA has directed a mandatory suicide prevention Stand Down for all three Army components, commencing 27 Sep 12. It will consist of 3 phases, for further details contact your local Suicide Prevention Program Manager (SPPM), Health Promotion Office (HPO), or your S3/G3, EXORD will be released soon.