SUICIDE PREVENTION WITH THE MILITARY AND VETERANS

There is a need for expanded suicide prevention among the military.

Only 50% of returning service members with mental health needs receive mental health services.¹

SUICIDE PREVENTION FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Teaching Communities to Help Veterans: How to Help Veterans at Risk of Suicide

- Signs of suicidal thinking should be recognized.
- Ask the most important question of all.
- Validate the Veteran’s experience.
- Encourage treatment and Expedite getting help.

Access the SAVE training here: psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/

Warning Signs—IS PATH WARM?

- Ideation
- Substance abuse
- Purposeless
- Anxiety
- Trapped
- Hopelessness
- Withdrawal
- Anger
- Recklessness
- Mood changes

It is important to ask directly: “Are you thinking about suicide?”

If someone is talking about death or suicide, showing self-destructive behavior, looking for ways to kill oneself, or unable to stay safe, they are at imminent risk and need help right away.

Services for Veterans and their Families

- Veterans Administration (VA) www.va.gov
- Vet Centers www.vetcenter.va.gov
  - Individual, group, couples, and family therapy at no cost to the veteran
- Cohen Veterans Network www.cohenveteransnetwork.org
- Maryland’s Commitment to Veterans 1-877-770-4801

Call 911 or take them to the nearest emergency department.
Unique Aspects of Military Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Guiding Ideal</th>
<th>Vulnerability</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Placing the welfare of others above one’s own welfare</td>
<td>Selflessness</td>
<td>Not seeking help for health problems because attending to personal health is not a priority</td>
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<td>Commitment to accomplishing missions and protecting comrades in arms</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Survivor guilt and complicated bereavement after losing friends</td>
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<td>Toughness and ability to endure hardships without complaint</td>
<td>Stoicism</td>
<td>Not acknowledging significant symptoms and suffering after returning home</td>
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<tr>
<td>Following an internal moral compass to choose “right” over “wrong”</td>
<td>Moral Code</td>
<td>Feeling frustrated and betrayed when others fail to follow a moral code</td>
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<tr>
<td>Becoming the best and most effective professional possible</td>
<td>Excellence</td>
<td>Feeling ashamed of (or not acknowledging) imperfections</td>
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

MAKE THE CONNECTION

www.MakeTheConnection.net

Make The Connection is an online community of veterans telling their stories about overcoming mental health challenges. In addition to the stories, the website allows veterans to connect with others that have had similar experiences.

STAND BY THEM

Confidential help for Veterans and their families

Available at: https://bit.ly/2F65Cqv

MEANS SAFETY WITH VETERANS

Veterans are more likely than the general population to use firearms as a means of suicide.

- Ensure firearms are safely stored in a gun safe or with gun locks and ammunition is stored separately. Vet Centers and VAs often provide gun locks for free to veterans.
- For medications or other substances, lock them away in a pill box/lock box. Other strategies include: asking family members to administer medications and getting a naloxone kit in case of opiate overdose.

Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM) Training

Learn how to ask a person who may be suicidal if he or she has access to items that they could use to harm themselves. Learn how to work with family members to reduce access to lethal means.

Available at: https://bit.ly/2F65Cqv

What is the national strategy for suicide prevention among veterans from 2018-2028?²

- Screen veterans for mental health issues and alcohol abuse.
- Routinely assess access to lethal means.
- Provide education on military culture, veteran specific issues, and suicide risk.
- Link veterans in crisis with appropriate services and support.
- Communicate and collaborate across multiple levels of care.