

A Health Campaign of Uniformed Services University, www.usuhs.edu, and the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Bethesda, Maryland, www.CSTSonline.org

SUICIDE FACTS: What Military Families Should Know to Help Loved Ones Who May Be At Risk

Suicide has increased dramatically in the military since the start of the global war on terrorism. Family members and military leaders are all working together to address the needs of our service members and to get them the help and care that will restore their hope and relieve their stress.

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Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death among Americans. While suicide is a difficult topic to discuss, it is an important one for military families because the number of suicides is rising within the military population. The increased operational tempo, redeployment, combat exposure to injury, and the impact on marital and family relationships create extreme stress and are contributing

factors. Additionally, the reluctance of service members to seek treatment plays a role in the delay in getting care.

Suicide, by definition, is fatal — a loss to the family and the nation.

Those who attempt suicide and survive can be left with serious injuries such as broken bones, brain damage, organ failure, and permanent physical disability. Suicide affects one's family and community and leaves feelings of despair, grief, and anger. Like any health problem, it is important to educate oneself about suicide. *The more you know, the more likely you are to identify warning signs and to help prevent the loss or injury of a loved one.*

Warning Signs

Thinking about suicide and making suicide plans are the most serious signs and require immediate assistance. These include:

- Talking about, threatening, or wanting to hurt/kill self
- Obtaining means to kill/hurt self (e.g., obtaining firearm, or pills)
- Conveying thoughts of death (e.g., “others are better off without me,” “I never want to wake up again.”)

Other warning signs include:

- Increase in alcohol or other substance use
- Hopelessness (i.e., does not see way the situation will change)
- Helplessness (i.e., feeling trapped, “there is no way out of this”)
- Worthlessness (i.e., feeling that he/she is not valued, “no one would miss me”)
- Withdrawal (i.e., from hobbies, family, friends, and/or job)
- Irritability, anger

Risk Factors

Men are 4 times more likely than women to die from suicide. However, women are 3 times as likely as men to attempt suicide. In addition, suicide rates are high among young people and those over age 65.

Several factors can put a person at risk for attempting or completing suicide, but having these risk factors does not always mean that suicide will occur.

- Prior suicide attempt
- Family history of mental disorder
- Alcohol or other substance abuse
- Family history of suicide
- Family violence, including physical or sexual abuse
- Firearms in the home, the method used in more than half of suicides

Continued

Action Steps

If you are experiencing any of these signs/symptoms, please seek help. If someone you know is experiencing these symptoms, please offer help. If you think someone is suicidal, *do not leave them alone*. Try to get the person to seek immediate help from their doctor, bring them to the nearest hospital emergency room, or call 911. If possible, try to eliminate access to firearms or other potential means for self-harm.

Resources

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center:
www.sprc.org
- American Association of Suicidology:
<https://suicidology.org/>
- Military OneSource:
1-800-342-9647
<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/>

Courage to Care is a health promotion campaign of Uniformed Services University and its Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS). CSTS is the academic arm and a partnering Center of the Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.



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