

Military Suicide Epidemic

***May 2019, Ft Bliss Texas; 5 attempted suicides in 2 weeks-1 death.
A new recruit's induction into his company, his first activity along side his new brothers and sisters will be a memorial Ruck March. A ruck march for a fellow brother he will never know, a fellow brother he will never get to stand along side of, a fellow brother who died as a result of suicide 2 days earlier.***

Suicide in the military community not only happens to veterans, but also to active duty military men and women. An active duty service member commits suicide every day.

A total of 321 active-duty military members took their lives in 2018, including:

- 57 Marines
- 68 Sailors
- 58 Airman
- 138 Soldiers

68 Sailors in 2018 committed suicide, that is a dramatic increase among active duty personnel. When 5 years ago the suicide rate recorded for the Navy was at 41 suicides. That is 20 deaths per 100,000 sailors. The Corps 57 deaths represent a 25 percent increase from 2017.

(Active-Duty Military Suicides at Record Highs in 2018-Military.com)

Research has shown that the highest rate of suicide attempts were among active duty members who had never been deployed and those in their first year of service. Furthermore, it also shown that the most critical time for service members was during the first two months following the start of their military service. During these first 2 months service members are exiting basic training and transitioning into job specific training (AIT or A-Training) and into regular service. *(Military Suicides: Most Attempts Come Before Soldiers Ever See Combat-NBCNews.com)*



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Contributing Factors

Failing to protect their brothers (Survivor's Guilt)
Friendly Fire
Deaths of Civilians
Toxic Leadership
Isolation from family & friends
Homesick
Transitioning out of boot camp to job specific training

Current Resources

Military Crisis Line - connects those in need to a trained counselor with a single phone call

Battle Buddy Partnership or Chain of Command – Military members are paired with other soldiers/sailors/airmen. Each battle buddy is expected to assist his or her partner both in and out of combat. A battle buddy is not only intended for company, but also for the reduction of suicide; since each watches his partner's action, a battle buddy can save their fellow soldier's life by noticing negative thoughts and feelings and intervening to provide help.

Additional Formations – The addition of additional formations or musters during the day assists in assuring that all military personnel are accounted for and in good condition.

Chaplain - Many times the Chaplains are the first line of defense when it comes to suicide. This is due to the fact that military members know them and confide in them often. Information shared with the Chaplain is confidential and will not go on their record.

Education on suicide – Classes are held with military members discussing the importance of battle buddies and resources available to assist in situations.

Sailor Assistance and Intercept for Life (SAIL) - Sailor Assistance and Intercept for Life (SAIL) is a program available to active duty Sailors who experienced a suicide ideation or attempt (Suicide-Related Behavior). SAIL is an evidence-based intervention that provides rapid assistance, ongoing risk assessment, care coordination, and reintegration assistance. Risk is assessed at key intervals using the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale and managed using the Veterans Affairs Safety Plan through a series of contacts over 90 days following Suicide-Related Behavior.

DSTRESS Line - is an anonymous Marine-to-Marine phone and chat support service that operates 24



hours a day, 7 days a week. The line is staffed by
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veteran Marines, former Fleet Marine Force Navy Corpsmen, Marine spouses and family members, and licensed behavioral health counselors. The goal of the DSTRESS Line is to help callers manage stress in all forms, ranging from relationship and career issues to deployment and financial problems, and develop the necessary skills required to cope with the widely-varying challenges of life in the Corps.

Barriers to Accessing Resources

Fear of stigma

Fear of retaliation

Fear of being seen as weak/Not military material

Limited/No access to phone

Isolation from family & friends

Barriers in accessing services

Battle Buddy system

Proposed Approach/Best Practice

Research has shown that utilizing peers to assist in providing support and resources for accessing services is an effective factor in positive outcomes for individuals seeking help or experiencing suicidal thoughts.

A Hero's Heart program is proposing the utilization of peers who have been trained in military protocol and procedure to provide one on one support to active military personnel who are seeking mental health services or experiencing suicidal thoughts. These peers would be former military personnel who were medically discharged due to injury.

The use of these peers will increase the number of active duty members who seek and access mental health services, decreasing suicide rates. It will also decrease the members feeling of isolation, retaliation and stigma. All of this will in turn will increase the retention of soldiers/sailors/airmen/marines, build upon the funds already expended to train and relocate them and decrease expenses related to suicides.

"This year Alone, there have been 11 people on Fort Gordon who have committed suicide."- Lindsey Meagher, October 2018



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