COMMANDER'S CALL TALKING POINTS
September 2020

INVISIBLE WOUNDS INITIATIVE
WWW.READYAIRMEN.COM

September Is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

Identifying Airmen and Space Professionals who have invisible wounds is crucial to mission readiness and assisting members to get the care they need is critical to saving lives. In the first quarter of 2020, 25 Airmen lost their lives to suicide. This is a slight decrease from Q1 2019, but there is much work to do.[1] Take time this month to learn about invisible wounds, suicide prevention, and how you and your Airmen can maintain mental fitness and resilience.

> "It is imperative we each do our part by continuing to check in on our wingmen and care for each other during this time of increased stress and uncertainty."
>
> -Brig. Gen. Claude K. Tudor, Director of Air Force Resilience

Recognize the Warning Signs of Suicide

Leaders play a significant role in caring for their Airmen. Learn the warning signs of suicide to be better prepared to support any Airman who is having thoughts of suicide.[2]

Individuals who talk about:

- Wanting to die or having no reason to live
- Experiencing great guilt or shame
- Being a burden to others
- Feelings of emptiness, hopelessness, or being trapped
- Feeling extremely sad, anxious, agitated, or full of rage
- Emotional or physical pain being unbearable

Changes in an individual's behavior:

- Making a plan or researching ways to die
- Withdrawing from important relationships or saying good-bye
- Giving away important items or making a will
- Taking dangerous risks or showing no regard for safety
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Eating or sleeping more or less than usual
- Using drugs or alcohol more often than usual

Taking Action When an Airman May Be Considering Suicide

There are a number of steps you should take if you've identified an Airman who you believe is thinking about suicide. Use the Air Force's **Ask, Care, Escort Principles** below as a guide.[3]

Ask Your Wingman

Have the courage to ask the question, but stay calm.

Ask the question directly: Are you thinking of killing yourself?

And, do you have access to a firearm?

Care for Your Wingman

Calmly control the situation; do not use force; be safe.

Actively listen to show understanding and produce relief.

Remove any means that could be used for self-injury.

Escort Your Wingman

Never leave your buddy alone.

Engage Your Airmen and Create a Culture of Support

Leadership is a vital component of helping to prevent suicide. Leaders should create a supportive environment in which Airmen and Space Professionals are encouraged to seek help. Use the following guidance to have meaningful conversations with your Airmen, encourage them to speak up if they need help, and foster a culture of support:[4]

- **Talk with your Airmen**: Daily connections can have a big impact on someone's feeling of loneliness. Check in with your Airmen to see how they're doing.
- **Show Compassion and Understanding**: Show genuine concern for someone in crisis and empathy for anyone brave enough to mention their struggles. Listen with intent, acknowledge their feelings, and don't judge to ensure your Airmen are safe and get the care they need.
- **Encourage Mental Fitness**: Leaders should encourage Airmen to seek help when needed and prioritize their mental fitness and resilience.
- **Break Down Stigmas**: Share information with your Airmen about available resources and remind them that seeking mental health treatment will not automatically impact their careers.
- **Recognize Warning Signs**: Learn and look for signs of suicide risk in your Airmen.

[1] https://www.dspo.mil/Portals/113/Documents/QSR_CY2020_Q1.pdf
[2] https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/warning-signs-of-suicide/index.shtml
[3] https://www.resilience.af.mil/Tools/ACE/
[4] https://www.resilience.af.mil/Suicide-Prevention-Program/

Resources

Military Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1

Military Crisis Line
Call 911 or 1-800-273-8255 if you or someone you know is in crisis or has an emergency.

Air Force Resilience
Find tools and resources for leaders on suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention.

Wingman Online
Access a library of training videos that communicate an understanding of how to manage and intervene in suicide prevention scenarios.

Defense Suicide Prevention Office
DPSO offers a Suicide Prevention Month Guide to help you start a dialogue about suicide.