

## Relationships, connections and support critical to preventing suicide

By David Agan 14 September 2021



### RELATED ARTICLES

03 Sep 2021

[Army Suicide Prevention Program](#)

18 Jun 2021

[Study Estimates Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Risk Across Army Installations, Units, and Occupational Specialties](#)

ORT RUCKER, Ala. — Challenges created by the pandemic have left many feeling stressed and isolated. During times like these, relationships and interpersonal connections to family and friends are vital to a person's wellbeing.

As the Department of Defense and the Army observe Suicide Prevention Month this September, officials say it's critical for people to remember the role that social connections play in preventing suicide, and that help is always available.

This year's theme, "Connect to Protect: Support is Within Reach," emphasizes the importance of personal connections and encourages everyone to "reach" for support when in need, says Traci Waters, Army Substance Abuse Program manager.

"A person who is at risk for suicide has often isolated themselves from their loved ones," said Waters. "Our personal connections can help keep us from getting to a dark place that may cause us to contemplate suicide."

Connections, whether between friends or family, can be protective factors against suicide, continued Waters. “Building those connections and maintaining them is key to supporting our mental health.”

Raising awareness of suicide prevention and available support resources is only a part of the reason for observing Suicide Prevention Month. Equally important is the emphasis on recognizing when someone is in need and identifying ways to offer help. Sometimes, offering a helping hand can be as simple as lending an ear, says Waters.

“If you know someone who’s going through a difficult time, one of the ways you can support them is to simply offer a listening ear. Striking up a conversation is probably the easiest way to help them feel comfortable sharing their concerns,” said Waters. Sharing personal experiences can also help people establish common ground. Once someone feels comfortable enough to share their concerns, “hopefully, they will feel comfortable seeking help as well.”

How can people get help? “The easiest way is to start with your leader,” said Waters. Leaders can help guide people in the right direction to get the support they need. Individuals can also reach out directly to community agencies.

“There are numerous organizations on the installation who are available to assist, including the Department of Behavioral Health, chaplains, the Military Family Life counselor, Army Community Services, and the Employee Assistance Program, located within the Army Substance Abuse Program,” said Waters.

Another area of focus for this year’s observance is lethal means safety. “When we refer to lethal means, we’re talking about easy access to items that can be used to cause harm to oneself, like weapons, medications or sharp objects,” says Waters. “While everyone with access to these items is not necessarily a risk for suicide, a person who is at risk with easy access to such means could be at higher risk.”

While COVID-19 continues to create new challenges for everyone, the ASAP manager underscored the resources on post that remain available in spite of the pandemic. “There are a variety of ways that the pandemic has affected us all emotionally. We want everyone to know that we’re still here even though our services may be limited or adjusted. Please reach out and we will support you in every way we can.”

“Throughout September, it is important for each of us to focus on connecting to protect the servicemembers and military families in our lives. We have a moral duty to protect each other — now more than ever,” said Waters. “If you are concerned [for someone’s safety], or if they are at an imminent risk for suicide, do not leave them alone. Seek help immediately. Contact the Suicide Prevention LifeLine, 24/7, at (800) 273-8255 (press 1) or call a chaplain, a healthcare provider, an emergency room, or 9-1-1.”

People are reminded to utilize the following community resources for assistance.

- [Army Suicide Prevention Program](#)
- [Veterans Crisis Line](#)
- [Military OneSource](#)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-8255 (24/7)
- Fort Rucker Behavioral Health (334) 255-7028
- Fort Rucker Religious Support Office (334) 255-2989 or (334) 255-3100 (after hours)
- Fort Rucker Employee Assistance Program (334) 255-7678
- Fort Rucker Army Community Services (334) 441-9369
-