

WHAT TRIGGERS THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE?

The Causes of Military-related Depression

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a leading cause of suicide among military personnel. PTSD is a serious disease that affects many troops who've returned from combat. It is born from recent traumatic experiences, and causes one to have recurring memories of the terrible event, over and over. The symptoms of PTSD include anxiety and confusion, as well as a sense of "not fitting in." It can appear months after a traumatic event, or even years later. In many cases, it has led to suicide.

But what about active servicemen? Many Soldiers currently deployed suffer from severe depression due to a multitude of causes, including:

- Financial stress
- A divorce or breakup with a girlfriend/boyfriend
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Recent loss of loved one
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Discharge from military
- Trauma due to witnessing death
- New, prolonged deployments
- Being away from loved ones for extended time
- Loss of a job
- Humiliation in front of peers

These experiences can lead to depression, lowered self-worth, and in extreme cases, thoughts of suicide. The high stress of combat only intensifies these insecurities, greatly increasing the risk of a suicide attempt.

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS

Suicide is a tragedy, but it can be prevented if you know the warning signs:

- Random anxiety attacks
- Can't sleep, or feel there is no reason to get up
- No self-esteem
- Can't concentrate
- Severe change in weight, gaining OR losing
- Loss of energy or motivation
- Change in mood, less social

If you notice any of these behaviors or changes in a fellow Soldier, then it is extremely important to tell someone as soon as possible. Suicide can be prevented, but only if someone notices the warning signs.

THE FACTS ABOUT MILITARY SUICIDES

Test your knowledge by answering the following questions:

1. The worst thing you could do to a severely depressed Soldier is talk about suicide.
a. True b. False
2. Suicide rates in the military have dropped in the last few years due to reduced presence in hostile areas.
a. True b. False
3. If you tell a military health official that you have had suicidal tendencies due to prolonged deployment, you will lose your security clearance status and most likely be discharged.
a. True b. False
4. If you suspect a fellow Soldier is contemplating suicide, the first thing you should ask them is, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"
a. True b. False
5. Most suicides are impulsive acts, and are virtually impossible to predict.
a. True b. False

Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. False; 4. True; 5. False



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MILITARY SUICIDE



FALLEN HEROES

NEVER LEAVE A MAN BEHIND

Preventing a Suicide

You've known James since you went on active duty in Afghanistan and you've become good friends. But lately, James isn't acting like himself: He stops waking up with the other Soldiers. He's stopped talking to you. He begins to disobey orders and he's dropped 20 pounds from not eating. One day, he tells you he's thinking about "ending it all". What should you do?

1. **Remain calm.** Your fellow Soldier is highly reactive, and a cool temperament from you is just what he needs right now.
2. **Be direct.** Ask him, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" This will probably come as a shock to him, and it may be what he needs to open up to you.
3. **Show concern.** Talk to him and ask him about the cause of his feelings, and listen. Let him know that he's not alone.
4. **Get professional help.** But DO NOT leave him alone. Make sure he is accompanied at all times.
5. **Reassure him.** Make sure he understands that getting help will not affect his standing in the military whatsoever, and that his feelings are not a sign of weakness.



MORE CASUALTIES THAN THE AFGHAN WAR

It's hard to believe, but military-related suicides have claimed more lives than the actual war in Afghanistan. Although veterans make up a large portion of overall suicides, active personnel aged 19 – 29 are taking their own lives at an unprecedented rate. In 2009, the armed forces attributed 334 deaths to self-inflicted wounds, compared to the 319 casualties suffered by insurgents.



THE TRUTH OF IT ALL

The Facts and Myths of Suicide

The truth is, suicide can be prevented, but only if you know the facts. There are many myths and misconceptions about suicide – especially suicide involving Soldiers or veterans.

Here are some of the most common myths about suicide:

1. **Myth: Talking to someone about suicide will give them the idea to do it.**
Fact: Suicidal people already have the idea in their minds, whether you talk about it or not. Talking to a Soldier about depression or suicide can actually be the first step on the road to recovery.
2. **Myth: People who talk about committing suicide are less likely to actually go through with it.**
Fact: According to the US Army Medical Department of Behavioral Health, nearly 80% of Soldiers who commit suicide talk about their plans. The problem was, no one took them seriously. If someone talks to you about suicide, NEVER blow it off as a joke or an empty threat. Get help right away.
3. **Myth: Telling an officer that you have had suicidal thoughts will affect your standing in the military.**
Fact: A lot of Soldiers fear that by telling an officer about their situation, it will damage their potential to get into a good school, or get a promotion in the military. It's simply not true. In fact, consulting a health official or officer about thoughts of suicide won't even affect your security clearance status.
4. **Myth: Suicide is an impulsive act.**
Fact: Actually, most suicides are carefully planned, sometimes weeks in advance. Most people who commit suicide make some sort of cry for help first. That's why it's critical to know the warning signs and seek help if you suspect that a friend, loved one, or fellow Soldier is suicidal.

ONE SOLDIER'S GRIEF

A Preventable Tragedy

Many troops return to their families with a battlefield of memories, violent flashbacks, and feelings of grief or deep depression. And many Soldiers don't know where to turn, or they feel too ashamed or afraid to speak out. Military-related depression claims over 6,400 lives a year in the U.S. alone, both active servicemen and veterans, and that's not including failed suicide attempts and severe substance abuse. Suicide hurts everyone: One Soldier's suicide can turn a whole community upside down, causing lifelong misery for family and friends, and a collective sense of trauma for their town or city.

WHERE TO TURN FOR HELP

Finding Support

The only true way of conquering your depression is sharing it with those who understand your situation. Millions of Soldiers have gone on to establish a perfectly happy and normal life, all because they were open with their depression and suicidal tendencies.

The US military has a great network of support groups across the world, specifically designed for Soldiers suffering from severe depression. To learn more about military suicide prevention, visit any one of the following websites:

<https://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov/health>

<http://www.behavioralhealth.army.mil/>

<http://www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/suicide/>

Or call them directly:

Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

For those grieving over a fallen Soldier, visit the TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors) website: <http://www.taps.org/>

