Voluntary Suicide Prevention Stand-Down

While there appears to be a recent uptick in deaths by suicide, the Coast Guard’s suicide numbers continue to trend downward compared to previous years. Nevertheless, one life lost to suicide, is one too many! We must actively work to support and protect one another. This must happen before a matter becomes a larger issue and when we find ourselves (or our shipmates) in a crisis. A voluntary Suicide Prevention stand-down provides an opportunity to focus on prevention as opposed to reacting to a tragedy.

Recommended venue:

* The discussion should be scheduled for 90 minutes, in a sound proof location, and should be “safe space” (free of judgment, no concerns of reprisals, ability to speak freely) for all members to express the effects of stressors and strategize on ways to combat daily issues from becoming seemingly insurmountable.
* If possible, cap group sizes to be no more than 20 participants (preferable size is 10 - 15).

Talking Points for Commands:

Planning

* The **main tone for the meeting should be** to reduce stigma and bias towards mental health, self-care, and suicide through your messaging, engagement, and outreach.
* Get to know your Service members on a personal level so you can recognize risk factors in individuals, assess life-coping skills, ask situational awareness questions, and seek opportunities to influence behavior positively.
* Saying “I hope you are taking care of yourselves” or asking people “how they are doing” is not sufficient (people will inevitably respond with “doing well/ok” or “living the dream"). The meeting is about doing a valued check-in.
* Keep in mind that more people, between the ages 10 - 34 die from suicide annually, than those who die by homicide. This equates to a third of our force.

During

* Many of our jobs require a high level of intensity, which leaves very little time for regrouping or processing challenging events.
* We must constantly work to support our fellow Coasties at every level, especially before an issue becomes a crisis.
* Create an inclusive environment for all Service members to promote positive coping skills in the face of adversity. Start by asking “how do each of you cope with stress?” and follow-up with “when time is more limited than usual, what are your outlets to sort things out”
* Promote connectedness through a buddy system or other peer support programs that promote protective factors. Start by asking “who are your top three people you lean on for support?” and follow-up with “if you cannot reach them, what do you do?”
* Highlight that everyone has a role to play in preventing self-harm, especially suicide. Mention that less than half of military suicide decedents had a current or past mental health diagnosis. Thus, we must keep a good pulse on ourselves and fellow service members.
* The goal is to solve any issues at the lowest levels possible (e.g. linking a friend to a financial counselor to start dealing with money better vs. reacting with letting them borrow money despite them consistently mismanaging their funds.).
* Encourage participants to ‘Connect them so that you can protect them, no matter how small the issue’!

Closing Meeting Reminders

* Physical activity releases high level of dopamine which directly improves people’s moods. It doesn’t necessarily have to be gym activity, but encouraging movement is key. Regardless of physical demands of the primary job, members should be encouraged to do other activities, outside of work.
* Research has shown that connection is key to longevity. Ensure that members are staying connected to healthy family and friends which is essential to mental health and a person’s outlook on life. If family is a stressor, friendships can be an outlet for discussion and a way to resolve issues before they escalate.
* For those who have expressed challenges that are beyond the command’s expertise, it is important to have a short list of providers to refer staff/colleagues to speak with (i.e., [Chaplain](mailto:https://www.uscg.mil/Leadership/Senior-Leadership/Chaplain-of-the-Coast-Guard/Locations/), [EAPC](mailto:http://www.cgsuprt.com/), [Behavioral Health Provider](mailto:https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Portals/10/CG-1/cg112/CG1121/docs/ppt/Regional%20Behavioral%20Health%20Provider%20Locations.docx?ver=vf-mONoskA4AcjhamPsxNg%3d%3d), [CG SUPRT](mailto:https://www.cgsuprt.com/portal/landing?a=1)).

**Chaplain**

<https://www.uscg.mil/Leadership/Senior-Leadership/Chaplain-of-the-Coast-Guard/Locations/>

**EAPC**

[Employee Assistance Program (EAP) | Office of Work-Life Programs (CG-111) (uscg.mil)](https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Assistant-Commandant-for-Human-Resources-CG-1/Health-Safety-and-Work-Life-CG-11/Office-of-Work-Life-CG-111/Employee-Assistance-Program-EAP/)

**Behavioral Health Provider**

[https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Portals/10/CG-1/cg112/CG1121/docs/ppt/Regional Behavioral Health Provider Locations.docx](https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Portals/10/CG-1/cg112/CG1121/docs/ppt/Regional%20Behavioral%20Health%20Provider%20Locations.docx)

**CG SUPRT**

<http://www.cgsuprt.com/>