

Voluntary Suicide Prevention Stand-Down

Direct Talking Points

What the topic is? How much time is each? Who will be conducting the discussion?

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.

Meeting preparation:

- 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).
- To the greatest extent possible, all participants should be physically present.
- A trained crisis professional (i.e., Chaplain, Regional Behavior Health Provider, Behavior Health Technician, EAPC, etc.) should be involved in the discussion, in case emotions arise from the group discussion that warrant additional support.
- The conversation should be initiated by a commanding officer, even if they do not plan to stay for the entire discussion. This will show that there is concern yet buy-in from leadership.

Talking Points for Commands:

Important reminders for discussion leader

- 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.
- The meeting should help all get to know your Service members on a more 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.

Agenda

- Start by acknowledging that many of our jobs require a high level of intensity, which leaves very little time for regrouping or processing challenging events. (1 min)
- We must constantly work to support ourselves and fellow Coasties at every level, especially before an issue becomes a crisis. (1 min)

- Start by asking “how do each of you cope with stress?” Follow-up with “when time is more limited than usual, what are your outlets to sort things out” (35 min)
- Encourage participants to find 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?” (35 min)
- 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. (2 min)
- 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). (2 min)
- Encourage participants to ‘Connect them so that you can protect them, no matter how small the issue’! (1 min)

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. (1 min)
- 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. (2 min)
- Distribute Tri-fold handout and encourage 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](#), [EAPC](#), [Behavioral Health Provider](#), [CG SUPRT](#)).
- Discuss ACE on Tri-fold handout and encourage members to download DHS-Columbia Protocol App. (10 min)
- Thank them for their honesty and willingness to share.

Chaplain

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

EAPC

<https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Portals/10/CG-1/cg111/docs/eapcs.xlsx?ver=2017-05-17-125710-810>

Behavioral Health Provider

<https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Portals/10/CG-1/cg112/CG1121/docs/ppt/Regional Behavioral Health Provider Locations.docx>

CG SUPRT

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

Draft Agenda

Suicide Prevention Stand-down		
When		
Where		
Why:		
Opening Remarks		
Intro		
	Discussion Question #1	How do each of you cope with stress?
	Discussion Question #2	when time is more limited than usual, what are your outlets to sort things out?
	Discussion Question #3	who are your top three people you lean on for support?
	Discussion Question #4	If you cannot reach your typical supports, what do you do?
Importance of self-care and looking out for each other	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Everyone's role2. Solving issues3. Connecting to services	
Distributing trifold handout of local resources	Discuss resources available	
Closing		