

SUICIDE INDICATORS:
RECOGNIZING RISK FACTORS, TRIGGERING STRESSORS, AND WARNING SIGNS

DISCUSSION LEADER'S OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

Good morning my name is _____. Today we will be talking about suicide indicators.

The **ground rules** for this discussion are:

- (1) No personal attacks on anyone's opinions
- (2) Allow each participant to express themselves
- (3) Make head calls at your leisure, just don't interrupt the group
- (4) Keep your language clean as not to offend others
- (5) PARTICIPATION BY ALL!!!!!!

Gain Attention

Sometimes those considering suicide will only display very subtle signs; we have to be alert to see them. Friends, family members, and leaders may see different signs or only a few of the signs. You should be alert if you recognize any signs or identify risk factors that may lead to suicide. Watch out for behavior change and take action.

Key points for this discussion will be:

- (1) Define risk factors and warning signs of a potential suicide.
- (2) Discuss the R.A.C.E. method
- (3) Discuss ways to engage and refer a Marine you suspect may be experiencing issues

Learning Objective: After this guided discussion, you will have a better understanding of how to identify potential risk for suicide in yourself or a fellow Marine, define risk factors and warning signs of a potential suicide, know when to intervene and how to identify appropriate referral resources.

DISCUSSION

LCpl Brown, an all-star athlete in high school led his team to an undefeated season ranking second in his district. Always wanting to be a Marine, LCpl Brown joined the Marine Corps right after high school despite being offered a scholarship to play college football. After boot camp and MOS school, LCpl Brown is assigned to a unit with a few Marines from boot camp and is pumped to find out his unit will be deploying in 30 days. During Pre-Deployment Training he is injured in a flag football game, preventing him from deploying with his unit. He is assigned to a new unit. Disappointed and fearful his injuries may end his Marine Corps career, he rehab's diligently hoping to be ready for the next deployment. After 45 days, LCpl Brown is cleared to deploy with his new unit. A week before he is scheduled to deploy a second time, LCpl Brown suffers a broken leg and fractured hand in an automobile accident. Unable to PT, he begins putting on weight and is very distant from everyone in the unit. LCpl Brown just doesn't seem like himself lately.

KEY POINT 1

What are the issues here? *(before sharing the list, ask Marines for input)*

- Injuries
- He is sent to a new unit; loss of connection

- Feeling isolated
- Change in appearance
- Emphasis on feeling unfit
- Change in attitude towards self
- Unable to deploy; loss of meaning
- Fear of being put out of the Marine Corps
- Shame

LCpl Brown has many factors contributing to his mood/ emotional state. These are called risk factors. Risk factors are characteristics, circumstances, history, and/or experiences that are associated with an increased risk of behavioral health problems. Risk factors are increased by a triggering stressor/event. A triggering stressor is a negative event that can put a Marine into crisis. Knowing how to identify these stressors/ events and warning signs, knowing when to intervene and when to make appropriate referrals is crucial. It is ok to ask questions and take action if you suspect a Marine is in distress. Use the RACE method.

Let's talk about the acronym RACE. What does the letter R stand for and mean? OK good. What does the A stand for? Great. What does the C stand for? Excellent! What does the E stand for?

Let's discuss the elements of RACE. Which component is most challenging for you as a Marine? Why?

Recognize distress in your Marine

Note changes in personality, emotions or behavior.

Ask your Marine

Calmly question and if necessary ask directly, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"

Care for your Marine

Don't judge, control situation peacefully and keep everyone safe.

Escort your Marine

Stay with your buddy and escort to chain of command chaplain, medical, or behavioral health professional.

KEY POINT 2

The most important thing to do if you are concerned or recognize warning signs is to TAKE ACTION. If a buddy is suicidal you may not get a second chance to save the Marine's life.

- Ask open-ended questions, i.e., "How are things going?"
- Lend support/willingness to listen
- Share your concern for their well-being
- Employ the RACE method

Interim Summary: We just finished discussing RACE and how to identify warning signs in a fellow Marine; now let's talk about what resources are available.

KEY POINT 3

What resources are available?

- Peers
- Chain of Command

- Chaplain
- Medical/ MCCC (such as Community Counseling Center)
- DSTRESS Line (1-877-476-7734)

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Sometimes those considering suicide will only display very subtle signs; we have to be alert to see them. Friends, family members, and leaders may see different signs or only a few of the signs. You should be alert if you recognize any signs or identify risk factors that may lead to suicide. Watch out for behavior change and take action.

Almost everyone who dies by suicide gives some clue or warning. Do not ignore suicide threats. It is not up to you to judge whether the person is "serious" or not; it is up to you to act using the principles of R.A.C.E. Suicidal behaviors are indicators of serious issues that require immediate help. Our responsibility is to get the at-risk person to help.

Closing Statement: The Marine Corps sees suicide prevention as the responsibility of the entire Marine Corps community. Each of us, as fellow Marines, family members, and friends, are responsible for encouraging those who are troubled to seek help while their problems are still small, before they affect their relationships, work performance, career, mental health, or desire to live. Thus, suicide is prevented in your unit by addressing quality of life concerns and watching for "red flags" on a daily basis. Watching out for each other helps keep us ready to serve.

END OF DISCUSSION

RESOURCES

1. MCO 1720.2; MARINE CORPS SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAM (MCSP)
2. MCRP 6-11B W/Ch 1, Marine Corps Values: A User's Guide for Discussion Leaders
3. MAPIT Guide. Retrieved from http://bhin.usmc-mccs.org/uploads/MAPIT_Guide.pdf.