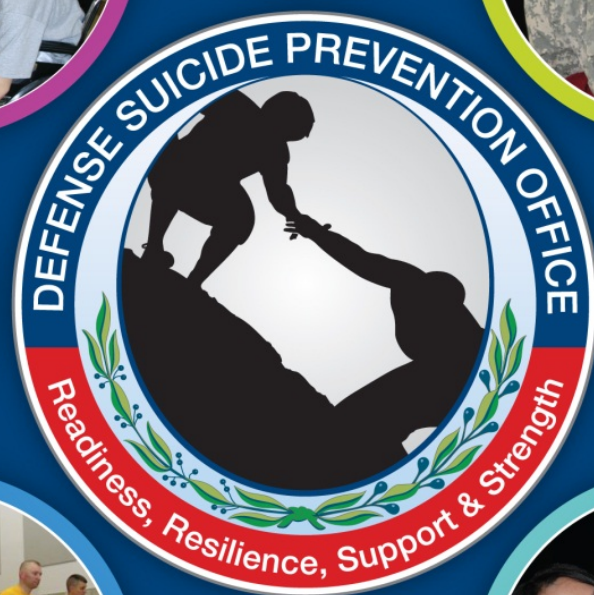




SUPPORTING

MILITARY FAMILIES IN CRISIS

*A **Guide** to Help
You Prevent Suicide*



Frequently Asked Questions

Will asking for help negatively impact my loved one's military career?

No! Asking for help is considered a sign of strength. The Secretary of Defense has established and enforced guidance that offers protections for Service members who proactively seek help. Many of the resources in this guide are completely confidential—this is a private matter between the Service member and the provider. Finally, you need to understand that the converse is true—not getting help certainly will make things worse. Commands often find out if a Service member is struggling when it is too late for them to help, such as after a positive drug test, arrest, or other infraction of military rules, which will certainly damage a career.

Shouldn't my loved one be able to cope with the problems him/herself?

No, not necessarily. Service members are not expected to treat their own broken arms, are they? Nor should they hesitate to get the assistance they need—whether it be related to financial, spiritual, behavioral, medical, or other issues. As this guide points out, being part of the military family affords you, your family, and your loved one a number of valuable resources. Be aware of these benefits and put them to use! Remember, being part of the military does not separate Service members from the difficulties of everyday life. For some, trying to cope completely on their own often makes things worse. There is no need to go it alone!

What if my loved one feels that seeing a counselor means he/she is weak or broken?

We cannot stress this enough: The Department of Defense considers seeking help a sign of strength. However, we do understand that Service members may feel there is a stigma that prevents them from asking for help. As a family member, you know your Service member best, and this is one of the opportunities for you to step in. By learning the warning signs and understanding the Department's positive views regarding help-seeking behavior, you can help your loved one overcome any barriers to wellness. For many, just knowing they can get confidential assistance may be enough to get them to ask for help.

Is help free?

Yes! The resources presented in this guide are available at no cost to you and will be delivered by experienced professionals who are familiar with the situations facing military families.

I don't know much about the military. Whom should I contact if I am worried about my loved one?

If your loved one is in crisis, he or she should seek help immediately by contacting the Military Crisis Line for 24/7 confidential support by phone, online chat, or text. Call 1-800-273-8255 and then press 1; chat online at www.militarycrisisline.net; or text 838255. If you or your loved one would just like to talk to someone who has shared similar experiences, contact Vets4Warriors. Anytime you call the toll-free, confidential number, you will be linked to a peer who is trained to assist you in overcoming your obstacles. Call 855-838-8255; email info@vets4warriors.com; or chat online at www.vets4warriors.com.

I am the one feeling stressed and depressed. May I use these services, too?

Yes! These resources are available not only to Service members, but also to their dependents and other family members. If you need some help, don't hesitate to reach out! Remember, you are not alone!



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Introduction

Why Do People Die by Suicide?

Unfortunately, there is no easy answer to this very difficult question. Were they trying to escape from a situation that seemed impossible to deal with or to get relief from really bad thoughts or feelings? Did, at that particular moment, dying seem like the only way out? Were they trying to escape feelings of rejection, hurt, or loss? Did they lose a sense of purpose or feel that they simply did not belong?

Remember!

**Help is ALWAYS
available for you and
your loved ones!**

You are not ALONE!

Some people may have felt angry, ashamed, or guilty about something. Others may have been worried about disappointing friends, or felt like a burden to their commands or family members. Some may have felt unwanted, unloved, victimized, or like they were a burden to others.

We all feel overwhelmed by difficult emotions or situations sometimes, and most people can find a way to carry on. But at times, there are people who seem to be unable to see another way out of a bad situation, and they believe ending their life is the only solution. Suicide is not a

solution. These people need your support to help them see another way. It can be difficult to know when someone is experiencing these overwhelming emotions. As a family member or close friend, you may be in the best position to help given that you know your loved one best.

Although the reasons why people decide to die by suicide are many, and they may be different for each person, we do know that there are a number of factors associated with suicide. Likewise, as a family member or close friend, you may be able to recognize these signs and see changes in your loved one's behaviors. These signs may not be noticeable to others, like co-workers, commanders, or friends, but your relationship may provide you with an opportunity to observe your loved ones in a less-guarded state. This guide will introduce you to the warning signs of suicide and show you that you can make a difference.

Remember: Help is ALWAYS available to get you and your loved ones through the difficult times. While it may not answer all of your questions, this guide will provide you with many useful tools to help better understand what you are experiencing, and it will help you find assistance to help you through a crisis or to address your concerns. Your interest in this guide already demonstrates you are willing to take those difficult first steps to get the help you or your loved one needs!

Stress on Military Families

Suicide is not just a problem for Service members and their families; it is a problem that has both national and global impacts. However, military life does introduce particular factors that can add stress to our daily life: our loved one's deployments, re-assignments, irregular work shifts, and the simple fact that Service members may be in harm's way. Dual military couples may experience an even greater number of challenges, because both individuals are in the military. Even after the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," Service members in same-sex relationships may face stigma based on their sexual orientation. While Service members demonstrate a remarkable ability to deal with these and other stressors, we all need help or support. It is critical that you understand these stressors and how to obtain resources for both you and your Service member.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE!

"The Department of Defense has no more important responsibility than supporting and protecting those who defend our country, and that means we must do everything possible to prevent military suicide.

"The entire DoD community—Service members, civilians, members of our families and leaders at every level—must demonstrate our collective resolve to prevent suicide, to promote greater knowledge of its causes, and to encourage those in need to seek support. No one who serves this country in uniform should ever feel they have nowhere to turn."

— Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, September 3, 2013

Is Suicide a Concern for Military Families?

Suicide is a national public health problem. In 2010, it was the 10th leading cause of death among all Americans.¹ It is also a global problem. More than one million people die by suicide each year, accounting for more deaths than wars and murders combined. This corresponds to one death by suicide every 40 seconds.² The number of suicide attempts each year is 20 times higher than the number of suicides.³ Although the rate of suicide among Active Duty members of the U.S. Armed Forces has typically been lower than that of a comparable civilian demographic, the military suicide rate has increased over the past decade. Military families must also carry the weight of war. Recent research has pointed out that the children of Service members may be more likely to think about suicide than their non-military peers.⁴

Lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) adolescents and young adults may also be at an increased risk of



suicide, although accurate data detailing these rates of suicide are not currently available. However, it is known that LGB individuals may be at an increased risk of nonfatal suicidal behavior and other problems.⁵ It is important that efforts aimed at promoting greater inclusion continue so that LGB Service members and LGB family members feel comfortable receiving help if it is needed from the military health system.

Of course, suicide is about more than the numbers. Behind all the numbers are individual Service members who bravely defend our country. ***A single self-inflicted death by a Service member or family member is one too many.***

Suicide, in many instances, is mistakenly perceived as the only option available. After a suicide, we often discover that the person who died was suffering in silence for a long time.

Looking back, there may have been signs that, if noticed and understood, may have provided an opportunity to intervene and offer help. What makes these scenarios even more difficult to accept, especially for the military family, is that no one ever has to go through these difficulties alone, and help is always available—always. Furthermore, the residual effects of a suicide, although difficult to

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013). Ten leading causes of death by age group, United States. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/LeadingCauses.html>

² World Health Organization. (2014). Suicide prevention. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suicideprevent/en/

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). Suicide: facts at a glance. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/suicide-datasheet-a.pdf>

⁴ Cederbaum, J.A., Gilreath, T.D., Benbenishty, R., Astor, R.A., Pineda, D., DePedro, K.T., . . . Atuel, H. (2013). Well-being and suicidal ideation of secondary school students from military families. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 1-6.

⁵ Haas, A.P., Eliason, M., Mays, V.M., Mathy, R.M., Cochran, S.D., D'Augelli, A.R., Silverman, M.M., et al. (2011). Suicide and suicide risk in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations: Review and recommendations. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58(1), 10-51.

measure, can be devastating to those left behind—including family, friends, and command. Family members and military leaders need to work together to address the needs of our Service members and get them the help and care that will restore their hope and relieve their stress.

This is why, although suicide is a difficult topic to discuss, it is vitally important for military families to be aware of the factors associated with suicide and the resources available to help.

“We must continue to fight to eliminate the stigma from those with post-traumatic stress and other mental health issues....

“Commanders and supervisors cannot tolerate any actions that belittle, haze, humiliate, or ostracize any individual, especially those who require or are responsibly seeking professional services.”

—*Department of Defense Memo*

Although the Department of Defense (DoD) has made it clear that it views help-seeking behavior as a sign of strength, Service members often cite career concerns as a reason for not getting help.⁶ However, the Department clearly affords protection to the Service member seeking help. Again, this is where the family can help by fully understanding the Department’s stance and by being able to reassure the Service member. One thing is certain: not getting help when needed often means the problems will get worse. Commands eventually find out about issues when someone gets arrested for drunk driving, has a positive drug test, or by some other disciplinary problem leading to a Service member being unable to deploy. Left alone, problems rarely get better with time.

What Should I Be Looking For?

Suicide Warning Signs/Risk Factors

You have already taken the first step. There is a reason you are reading this guide. You know by now that the path is different for every suicide. However, family members should be alert to the risk factors and warning signs that indicate their loved one may be more vulnerable than others to suicide or self-harming behaviors. Risk factors refer to those characteristics or life experiences that make a person more vulnerable to suicide. Warning signs refer to specific actions or behaviors that may raise red flags. These include:

Risk Factors

- Prior suicide attempt
- Family history of suicide or mental disorder
- Unresolved trauma
- Relationship problems
- Family violence, neglect, or abuse

⁶ Farmer, C.M. (2012). Stigma reduction programs could help those with post-traumatic stress disorder, but the evidence is weak. *The RAND Blog*. Retrieved from <http://www.rand.org/blog/2012/07/stigma-reduction-programs-could-help-those-with-ptsd.html>

- Major financial difficulties
- Unresolved anger
- Pending legal actions
- History of mental health issues, particularly depression
- Alcohol and substance misuse
- Physical illness
- Easy access to lethal means

General Warning Signs

- Threatening or talking about wanting to hurt/kill oneself
- Making a plan for suicide
- Withdrawing from people
- Obtaining means to kill/hurt oneself (e.g., obtaining a firearm, pills)
- Conveying thoughts of death, such as “My family would be better off without me” or “I never want to wake up again”
- Increasing alcohol intake or other substance use
- Hopelessness (e.g., does not see a way the situation will change)
- Helplessness (e.g., feeling trapped, “There is no way out of this”)
- Worthlessness (e.g., feeling that he/she is not valued, “No one would miss me”)
- Withdrawal (e.g., from family, friends, or unit)
- Giving away treasured possessions or changing insurance beneficiaries
- Loss of pleasure in the things he/she enjoyed (e.g., sex, food, hobbies, church)
- Changes in mood or personality—becoming extremely irritable or angry or suddenly joyous (which could indicate a sense of peace that comes with deciding to die)
- Aggressive behavior, including use of abusive language or hostility towards loved ones or others

There are several other factors to be aware of. In the general U.S. population, men are four times more likely than women to die by suicide.⁷ However, two to three times more women than men attempt suicide. Across the nation, suicide rates are relatively high among young people and those over age 65.⁸ Additionally, research among civilian populations has shown that LGB individuals may be more at-risk of suicide.⁹ Among U.S. Service members, those who die by or attempt suicide tend to be young, Caucasian, enlisted males who are single with no direct combat experiences.¹⁰

⁷ Office on Women’s Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2011). Men’s health: Suicide. Retrieved from <http://www.womenshealth.gov/mens-health/top-health-concerns-for-men/suicide.html>

⁸ Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (2012). Suicide prevention basics: About suicide. Retrieved from <http://www.sprc.org/basics/about-suicide>

⁹ Haas et al. (2011)

¹⁰ Luxton, D.D., Osenbach, J.E., Reger, M.A., Smolenski, D.J., Skopp, N.A., Bush, N.E., & Gahm, G.A. (2012). Department of Defense suicide event report: Calendar year 2011 annual report. T2 National Center for Telehealth &

This information is provided to increase your awareness of the risk factors associated with suicide. But it cannot account for every factor in every situation. Bottom line: You know your Service member best. If you have any concerns or need help, GET IT!

Suicide and Other Conditions

Research has shown some connections between suicide and other conditions including depression, substance misuse, sleep disorders, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and chronic pain. These conditions can exist in isolation or may occur at the same time. Many of these symptoms are common and temporary. As a family member, you may notice that the conditions are becoming more frequent, more persistent, and more severe. The table below lists these conditions and their associated signs and symptoms.

Technology, Defense Centers of Excellence. Retrieved from
http://www.t2.health.mil/sites/default/files/dodser/DoDSER_2011_Annual_Report.pdf

<u>Condition</u>	<u>Signs and Symptoms</u>
Depression	• Feelings of sadness, hopelessness, pessimism, helplessness, or numbness • Inability to enjoy pleasurable activities • Increased irritability, agitation or restlessness, or aggressive behavior (towards you or others) • Feelings of shame, worthlessness, or guilt • Fatigue and loss of energy • Trouble thinking, making decisions, or concentrating • Disturbed sleep, insomnia, or oversleeping • Changes in appetite or weight • Physical aches and pains, including headaches, stomach aches, and joint pains • Thoughts of death or suicide, suicide attempts
Substance Use Disorder	• Excess daily consumption (more than 2 drinks per day) • Loss of control—drinking excessively, and an inability to cut down or quit • Tolerance—the need for greater amounts of alcohol to feel the same effect • Unintended consequences from drinking, including getting hurt, having an accident, or engaging in unplanned, unsafe sex • Cravings for a drink or drugs • Physical dependence—withdrawal, nausea, sweating, shakiness, anxiety, trouble sleeping, restlessness, racing heart, or a seizure after stopping drinking; mood swings related to use • Blackouts, hangovers, and headaches • Trouble with family relationships or an inability to fulfill obligations
Sleep Disorders	• Sleep apnea (snoring) • Insomnia—inability to fall or stay asleep • Sleepiness—trouble staying awake, napping • Sleep deprivation • Nightmares or night terrors • Restless legs syndrome • Daytime fatigue
PTSD	• Re-experiencing, flashbacks, or intrusive thoughts of a traumatic event memory • Hypervigilance to safety and environment (home, crowds, or driving) • Anxiety or jitters • Nightmares or night terrors • Survivor guilt, shame • Alienation, isolation, withdrawing from family or friends • Depression, loss of interest in pleasurable activities • Anger, rage, irritability • Foreshortened sense of future, emotionally numb • Difficulty concentrating, memory loss

Chronic Pain	• Body aches—headaches, backaches, etc. • Joint, nerve, or muscle pain • Chronic, persistent, deep, shooting pain • Fibromyalgia (widespread pain, heightened response to pressure) • Chronic fatigue • Pain related to an injury or illness (e.g., amputee “phantom pain”) • Emotional pain
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REMEMBER: *Be aware of these warning signs. If you have any concerns, don’t hesitate to reach out for the help you or your loved one need. You are not alone!*

What Should I Do?

In an Emergency: Call 911!

If there is any chance of someone getting injured—or someone has attempted suicide:

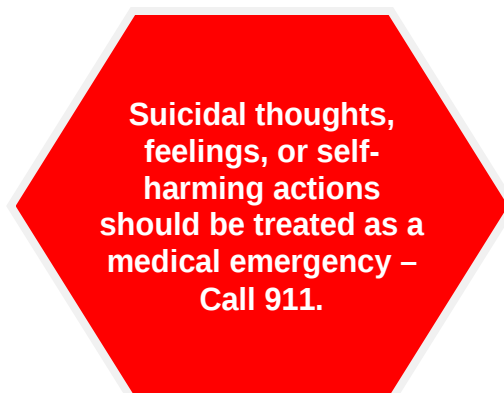
- Remain calm
- Remove yourself from any danger
- Call 911

Contact the Military Crisis Line

Regardless of the problem, you can help yourself or your loved one by contacting the Military Crisis Line for support. The crisis line is a toll-free, confidential resource that connects Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve members, as well as their families and friends, with qualified, caring responders at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. The Veterans Crisis Line¹¹ remains available after military discharge to all Veterans, retirees, and their families.

There are three ways to get help from the Military Crisis Line:

- Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1
- Chat online at www.militarycrisisline.net
- Send a text message to 838255



¹¹ The Veterans Crisis Line is VA’s name for what DoD calls the Military Crisis Line. The crisis lines are one and the same, and they have the same contact information.

The professionals at the Military Crisis Line are specially trained and experienced in helping Service members and veterans of all ages facing many different circumstances. They can talk you through problems and find additional resources to help you or your loved one cope with behavioral health or relationship issues.

Many Crisis Line responders were in the military and understand what Service members have been through and the challenges they and their loved ones face. Since its launch in 2007, the Crisis Line has answered thousands of calls, playing a critical role in saving many lives. **They can help you too!**

Europe and Korea

U.S. Service members and their families in Europe or Korea can also receive free, confidential support. Callers in Europe may dial 00800-1273-8255 or DSN 118 to receive crisis support from responders at the Military Crisis Line in the U.S.¹² In Korea, Service members and their families may call 0808-555-118 or DSN 118.

Contact Vets4Warriors

If you are an Active Duty, National Guard, or Reserve member, or a family member and want to connect to someone who has shared similar experiences, contact Vets4Warriors. When you call the toll-free, 24 hour-a-day, 7 day-a-week confidential number, you will be linked to a peer who is trained to assist you in overcoming your obstacles. The peer responders, who are veterans or military family members, understand the sacrifices made by families and can talk through any issue, any time, and connect you with other critical resources to help you build a plan for the future.

Vets4Warriors aims to increase the readiness, coping skills, and resilience of Service members and their families. And when you call, they aim to match you with a peer based on your family relationship or branch of service. Vets4Warriors can help you and your loved one chart a path to success.



There are three ways to contact Vets4Warriors:

- Call 1-855-838-8255
- Email info@vets4warriors.com
- Visit www.vets4warriors.com, where you can chat online

Vets 4 Warriors
Set your course with a military connection
855-838-8255 **vets4warriors.com**

¹² The toll-free service in Europe may not be available through all carriers or in all countries.

Take Action

If you recognize that you or your loved one is experiencing any suicidal signs or symptoms, please seek help. If you think someone is suicidal, do not leave him or her alone, and if you are on the phone with this person, try to keep them on the phone. Try to get them to seek immediate help from a personal doctor, bring them to the nearest hospital emergency room, or call 911. If you are on the phone, offer to call a resource for the person. If possible, try to eliminate access to firearms or other potential means for self-harm.

DO NOT attempt to disarm the person if they are carrying a weapon. Your safety and the safety of others must always be the priority during any crisis situation.

The following ACE/ACT Checklist will help guide you in a crisis situation:

A sk your family member	Have the courage to ask the question, but stay calm and be direct • Are you thinking of killing yourself? • Do you have a plan? Do you have actual means to kill yourself? • How can I help?
C are for your family member	• Calmly control the situation • Listen patiently and express care and concern • Remove any means that could be used for self-injury
E scort your family member/get them.... T reatment as soon as possible	• Never leave your loved one alone and if on the phone, keep them on the phone • Escort them to the Emergency Room or clinic • Contact their chain of command, chaplain, behavioral health professional, or primary care provider; call 911 • Call the Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, press 1

Offer Support

Just being there for your loved one can be a tremendous help. It can be comforting and reassuring to him or her.

You can show support by:

- Asking the tough questions about suicidal thoughts or intentions to do self-harm (*this will not give the idea of suicide to someone who hasn't already thought about it*)
- Addressing risky behavior, such as drinking too much or driving too fast
- Listening when your loved one wants to talk



- Letting him or her talk about the traumatic event or what is bothering them at their pace
- Believing what your loved one tells you. Don't dismiss what he or she has been through and don't judge
- Resisting the temptation to try to solve your loved one's problems or telling them what to do
- Reassuring your loved one, saying you care about him or her
- Helping find resources and referrals that can address the issue
- Encouraging your loved one to get help, to stay in touch with other family members and friends, or to join a self-help group
- Going together to obtain help

Promote a Healthy Lifestyle

Self-Care

Are you taking care of yourself? It's easy to neglect yourself when you're taking care of others. Be kind to yourself. Eat healthy foods and get enough exercise. Take time to relax, rest, and get enough sleep. Also, keep in touch with friends and do things you enjoy. This is all crucial to building and maintaining resilience and improving your ability to cope with the stresses of everyday life.

Remember, you are better equipped to help others if you are taking care of yourself. Here are some specific actions you can take:



- **Counseling**
- **Meditation and Breathing Exercises**
- **Spirituality**
- **Cooking**
- **Fitness and Exercise**
- **Relaxation**
- **Seeking Support from Peers and Community Groups**
- **Artistic or Creative Activities**
- **Volunteering**

For volunteer opportunities within your community, visit www.volunteermatch.org, which connects volunteers to non-profits and volunteer groups. Opportunities to support the White House's Joining

Forces Initiative can be explored at

www.whitehouse.gov/joiningforces/get-involved.

You may also check with your local base Family Center or Volunteer Office to see what is available.



What Does “Getting Help” Look Like?

Now that you’ve decided to take action and get yourself or your family member the help that they need, what can you expect? “Getting better” means different things for different people, and as you can imagine, help comes in many forms. For the most part, therapy and medication, or a combination of the two, are the most common forms of treatment. The idea of being able to solve problems by taking a pill each day sounds appealing, but it’s not that simple. Some behavioral health problems have multiple causes, and medication simply is not enough. Medication may help ease some symptoms, but it most likely cannot provide a cure. This is why therapy is so important in many cases. Therapy, simply put, is a form of treatment for someone that involves talking or asking them to do things in order to help overcome their problems.

Choosing a Therapist

The relationship between you and your loved one and the therapist (e.g., social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist) is very important. Helping a loved one or yourself find the right “fit” will ensure positive results. It’s also okay to shop around for a therapist who specializes in your issues so that you can feel confident that they will understand how to work with you and your loved one. The most important thing to remember is that you get help. The therapist will work to help answer questions, ease tensions, and continually evaluate progress throughout the process.

After selecting a therapist that you and your loved one feel comfortable with, the therapist will conduct an initial intake to learn more about your challenges and concerns. Sometimes, the therapist may conduct or refer you for an additional assessment or screening. Once all information related to the problem is gathered, the therapist will suggest a course of treatment. This could include several options.

Treatment Approaches

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy** aims to help clients understand how their negative thoughts or beliefs influence their behaviors. It is usually a brief intervention that identifies and focuses on a specific problem.
- **Prolonged Exposure (PE)** involves revisiting traumatic memories and reprocessing the feelings attached to those experiences. It involves a safe re-telling of the experience accompanied by education about managing traumatic stress reactions.
- **Cognitive Processing Therapy** can be done individually or in a group setting by identifying bad thoughts related to an event and learning skills to reframe negative beliefs to relieve feelings of shame, guilt, fear, or anxiety.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing** is conducted in eight phases that integrate mind and body reactions to relieve stress and anxiety about an event. It capitalizes on reproducing eye-movement while revisiting traumatic memories.

- **Virtual Reality Exposure** is similar to PE and uses some of the same techniques, but enhances the imagery portion by introducing the use of a virtual simulator that can replicate combat zones, such as Iraq or Afghanistan.
- **Psychodynamic Psychotherapy** is probably the most commonly known form of therapy dating back to the late 1890s and popularized by Sigmund Freud. Its approach is based on the alliance formed by the patient and therapist in an effort to talk through life experiences and resolve negative beliefs that have resulted in poor coping skills.
- **Group Therapy** can incorporate a variety of the therapeutic approaches and can focus on combat operational stress first aid, anger management, addiction recovery, parenting, or problem-solving skills.
- **Couples and Family Therapy** focus on the dynamics of the relationship and the role individuals play in responding to stressful events or demands and how that affects the overall functioning of the family. It offers education and coping strategies.
- **Psychopharmacological Treatment** involves the use of medications. There are different classes of medications that can target anxiety, depression, or hallucinations, or relieve pain to improve coping. Medication is sometimes used to manage nightmares and other sleep disturbances. It can also be used for smoking cessation.
- **Psychosocial Rehabilitation** offers Service members support and case management while they seek career and other lifestyle changes. It takes a holistic approach in making sure that all of a person's needs are met. This approach sometimes relies upon peer counselors who can assist in problem solving and adjustment.
- **Retreats** are intensive experiences at a safe location for individuals or couples that allow for exploring issues and relationships in a group atmosphere with a qualified facilitator.
- **Hospitalization** may be utilized in emergency situations when a person reports or acts in a way that indicates that they can harm themselves or someone else.



It is important to note that therapy or the use of medications does not have to be a life-long commitment. Everyone's treatment will be different and depends on many factors. Determining the length of treatment is an important item to discuss with the therapist in the beginning and should be revisited throughout the process.¹³ Finally, there are other complementary alternative therapies such as meditation, acupuncture, yoga, or massage that may provide benefits when included in a program of care.

¹³ National Center for PTSD, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2011). Understanding PTSD treatment. Retrieved from http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/understanding_tx/Understanding-TX.asp

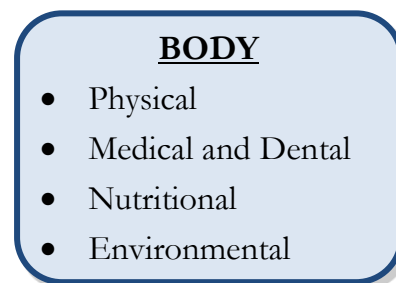
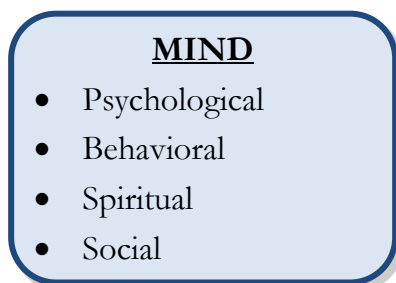
Building a Resilient Family

Total Force Fitness

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued Total Force Fitness guidance to help Service members maintain their well-being and foster mental and physical fitness. Total Force Fitness can benefit not just the Service member, but the entire family as well. Keeping fit requires a comprehensive approach that focuses on the mind, body, and spirit working together. Excessive stress and associated symptoms, such as headaches or anxiety, can reduce one's ability to maintain appropriate weight, wellness, and nutrition. Stress increases the likelihood of developing chronic pain or impairing your body's normal functions. As a military family, familiarity with stress management skills and maintaining a healthy lifestyle will help you build a resilient family!



The concept of Total Force Fitness encompasses eight domains:



Total Force Fitness involves seamless integration of the mind, body, and spirit. Achieving total fitness is a state in which you and your family can sustain optimal well-being and performance even under difficult conditions.

Psychological Fitness: Keep Your Mind Fit

Coping with the stressors and realities of life takes a fit mind, not just a fit body. Psychological fitness is about strengthening your performance and resilience. It involves the way you:

- Think and process information
- Feel about yourself, others, and your environment
- Act in response to your thoughts and feelings

Understanding what makes up psychological fitness and how to develop a healthier mental state can improve your ability to confront the challenges of life—both military and civilian. Learning stress management tips to build coping skills is an important part of strengthening your psychological health.



Behavioral Fitness: Build Resilience through Coping Skills

Being behaviorally fit means controlling your actions to the benefit of your health. There are three primary components of this domain, which are:

- Substance misuse prevention
- Risk mitigation
- Hygiene promotion

Spiritual Fitness: Tap into Faith-Based Communities and Values

However you rely on your spirituality, ethics, or beliefs, it can promote positive connections with others, healthy lifestyle choices, and the inner strength to endure hard times. Research links spirituality to increased optimism, decreased anxiety and depression, fewer suicides, and greater marital stability. Spirituality can help you and your loved one cope with the stress of a military lifestyle and can help create a supportive environment.



Social Fitness: Have a Sense of Belonging

Social fitness involves building and maintaining healthy relationships with others. It is multi-dimensional and includes not only family and friends, but all of your relationships, such as those which exist at work, on base, at worship and in your neighborhood. Through active management of your social activity, you can relieve stress, foster relationships with others and ease the strain of military life.

Physical Fitness: Train Year-Round

Physical fitness improves your quality of life. Year-round exercise can help you build and maintain your psychological health and resilience, and some studies have shown that it may improve your mood and attitude. It is important to engage in:

- Cardiovascular exercise such as running, dancing, or kickboxing
- Strength training with resistance machines or free weights
- Flexibility training through stretching or yoga

Medical and Dental Fitness: See the Doctor

Make regular appointments with primary care physicians, specialists, and dentists who can provide check-ups and treatment. Determining your medical fitness involves running blood tests, immunizations, periodic health assessments, hearing and vision assessments, dental check-ups, and behavioral health assessments. Sleep is also an important aspect of medical fitness, as it improves your judgment and reduces your risk of obesity, cardiovascular disease, and depression.¹⁴

Environmental Fitness: Be Aware of Your World

For the military, environmental fitness means that Service members are able to perform their duties well in any environment, such as in high altitudes or contaminated areas, and to withstand multiple stressors associated with certain military missions. Families have environmental challenges also, such as the distance from their home to a military installation or to support services. Use the resources in this guide to map out your community.

Nutritional Fitness: Eat Your Way Healthy

Healthy foods are fuel for the body, which are important to your physical and mental performance, and they improve your ability to deal with stress and depression. It is common to eat when you are stressed, but consuming more calories than you need leads to excess weight, which can negatively affect your self-image and esteem—leading to a downward spiral. A diet rich in whole grains, lean proteins, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products also delivers the added benefit of lowering the risk of heart disease, certain cancers, diabetes, and chronic pain.

Resources for Suicide Prevention and Family Support

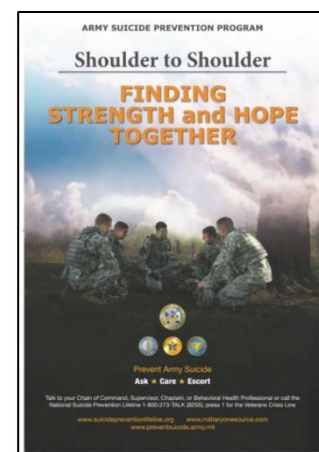
Service Branch Resources

Air Force — www.afms.af.mil/suicideprevention/index.asp

The Air Force Suicide Prevention Program is a comprehensive, population health program that seeks to reduce the risk of suicide for all Air Force members. The site provides information about suicide prevention through interactive videos, public service announcements, printable tools, and helpful agencies.

Army — www.preventsuicide.army.mil

This site provides information about suicide prevention through interactive videos, such as The Home Front, Beyond the Front, and the Shoulder to Shoulder series. Locally, suicide prevention and resilience programs and services are provided at the installation through the Behavioral Health Clinic, Military Family Life Consultants, Army Community Services, and the Chaplain's office.



¹⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). Sleep and sleep disorders: Sleep and chronic disease. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/chronic_disease.htm

Coast Guard — www.uscg.mil/worklife/suicide_prevention.asp, www.cgsuprt.com

The Coast Guard provides a counseling program (CG SUPRT) for Active Duty members, civilian employees, members of the Selected Reserves, and their family members. In addition to counseling, CG SUPRT offers specialized programs to assist with issues that may contribute to suicidal behaviors. These programs include health coaching, personal financial management services, assistance with balancing issues at home (such as eldercare location), and legal assistance. The corresponding website provides thousands of articles, webcasts, self-assessment tools, and links to helpful agencies.

Marine Corps — bit.ly/1mGQPji

DSTRESS — www.DSTRESSLINE.com, 1-877-476-7734

The Marine Corps' DSTRESS line provides anonymous, 24/7 counseling services to any marine, attached sailor, or family member, who can speak with a peer about everyday stress or their heaviest burdens in life. The line is staffed by veteran marines and Fleet Marine Force corpsmen, marine family members, and civilian counselors specifically trained in Marine Corps culture.

The Marine Corps Family Advocacy and General Counseling Program provides intervention, education, and counseling in domestic abuse and child abuse and assists marines and their families in learning how to foster healthy relationships and cope with deployment stress, relocation adjustment,



and grief and loss. Marines can access these services through their local installation Family Advocacy and General Counseling Program. Additionally, the Military and Family Life Consultant program provides short term non-medical and financial counseling that may address life skills, as well as military lifestyle and financial issues.

Navy — www.suicide.navy.mil

The Families Overcoming Under Stress program is designed to train sailors and marine families, couples, and children to use strength-based resilience skills to meet many of the challenges and stressors commonly experienced in military life. This non-medical program builds family cohesion, care, and communication. Check the Navy's website for additional resources.

National Guard Bureau (NGB) — www.nationalguard.mil/features/suicide_prevention

The National Guard Bureau's Suicide Prevention program seeks to reduce the risk of suicide for all National Guard members. The NGB's site provides useful information about suicide prevention through Senior Leadership interactions, a powerful six-part series designed to increase Service members' resilience, along with videos, articles, and links to additional resources.

Other Helpful Resources

Defense Suicide Prevention Office (DSPO) — www.suicideoutreach.org

The DoD takes suicide prevention very seriously and considers any measure that saves a life as one worth taking. It established DSPO to oversee, centralize, and standardize Department suicide prevention activities. Playing a critical role in preventing suicide, reducing risk, and building resilience in our military, DSPO has a website that is designed for ALL Service members and their loved ones. It includes general information about military suicide, links to resources, including the Military Crisis Line and Service-specific suicide prevention websites, and other valuable suicide prevention materials that are free to download, including this guide.

TRICARE

TRICARE is the health care program for 9.7 million eligible Service members, retirees, and their families worldwide. TRICARE offers various benefits, including mental and behavioral health counseling for anxiety, depression, stress, substance abuse, and PTSD.

For beneficiary questions, call your TRICARE Regional Office's mental health point of contact.

North (all plans except TRICARE For Life and the US Family Health Plan)	1-877-874-2273 www.hnfs.com
South (all plans except TRICARE For Life and the US Family Health Plan)	1-800-700-8646 www.humana-military.com
West (all plans except TRICARE For Life and the US Family Health Plan)	1-877-988-9378 www.uhcmilitarywest.com
TRICARE For Life (U.S. & U.S. Territories)	1-866-773-0404 www.tricare4u.com
TRICARE Reserve Select	1-800-477-8227 http://www.tricare.mil/TRS
US Family Health Plan	1-800-748-7347 www.usfhp.com
Overseas (all overseas health plan options)	For country-specific toll-free numbers: www.tricare-overseas.com

Spiritual Leaders

Chaplains offer religious services, counseling, and moral support to Service members and their families. You are encouraged to contact a military chaplain or civilian clergyman about your concerns. Each unit has a chaplain listed on the installation's home page.



- Faith can be a lifesaver whether it's through prayer, meditation, or yoga
- Faith can change the way you feel about life
- Faith can change the way you experience life
- Faith can give you the courage to heal

Partners in Care (PIC) — www.suicideoutreach.org

PIC coordinates support and promotes resilience by offering hope and providing assistance to military Service members and their families through partnerships with local faith-based organizations. Participating PIC organizations offer support free of charge to all referred Service members and their families within the limits of the organization's resources and abilities. This support is offered

without regard to the recipient's religious background, beliefs, or affiliation. Contact your installation's chaplain for more information on PIC.

Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA)

DoDEA offers "Signs of Suicide," a 2-day intervention program for students attending DoD schools that includes screening for suicidal behavior and education about suicide prevention. The program has different components for middle- and high-school students, and is presented in a manner that is appealing to teenagers. Ask your child's teacher about the availability of this program at his or her school. For more information on the Signs of Suicide program:

www.mentalhealthscreening.org/programs/youth-prevention-programs/sos/.

Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (DCoE) — www.dcoe.health.mil

DCoE's vision is to improve the lives of our nation's Service members, families, and veterans by advancing excellence in psychological health and traumatic brain injury (TBI) prevention and care. This site provides information about topics such as PTSD and TBI and contains blogs, newsletters, videos, and podcasts. The DCoE Outreach Center, 1-866-966-1020, is a 24/7 call center staffed by health resource consultants to provide confidential answers, tools, tips, and resources about psychological health and TBI.

DCoE's **Real Warriors** Website provides learning tools on gathering important documents and identifying community and military resources, preparing a pre-deployment checklist, watching Service members overcome behavioral health issues, and obtaining tips on helping children cope with a parent's separation. For more information and help, visit: www.realwarriors.net, or call 1-866-966-1020.

Military OneSource — www.militaryonesource.mil, 1-800-342-9647

Military OneSource offers non-medical counseling programs that provide confidential, short-term counseling to Active Duty members, National Guard and Reserve members, and their families.

Non-medical counseling is designed to address issues such as improving relationships at home and work, stress management, adjustment issues (e.g., returning from a deployment), marital problems, parenting, and grief and loss. Visit the Military OneSource website for information on family programs and available resources.



After Deployment — www.afterdeployment.org

After Deployment's mission is to help Service members, veterans, and their families overcome common adjustment problems following a deployment. Its resources address post-deployment challenges such as PTSD, conflicts at work, depression, and promoting health and wellness.

National Resource Directory (NRD) — www.nrd.gov

The NRD is a partnership among the Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs. Information within the NRD is from federal, state, and local government agencies; Veteran and Military Service Organizations; non-profit and community-based organizations; academic institutions; and professional associations that provide assistance to Service members, veterans, and their families. Users can find more than 15,000 resources and information on disability benefits and compensation, education and training, health, employment, caregiver support, homelessness, and other programs and services.

Human Performance Resource Center (HPRC) — www.hprc-online.org/family-relationships

The HPRC is an online, one-stop clearinghouse of evidence-based information and resources to help Service members and their families. The Family and Relationships domain has information and resources on family resilience, family stress management, communication, and problem solving. There is also information about relationship enhancement and parenting, military-specific information on relationships and stages of deployment, and other information that helps bolster family resilience.

Weapons Safety Resources — www.projectchildsafe.org

The National Shooting Sports Foundation has a Department of Justice grant to distribute information and gun locks to VA and DoD. DSPO makes gun locks available to Service members and their families. You can order free gun locks by emailing osd.DSPO@mail.mil.

Moving Forward — www.startmovingforward.org

Moving Forward is a free, online educational and life coaching program that teaches problem solving skills to help you to better handle life's challenges. It is designed to be especially helpful for veterans, Active Duty Service members, and their families. However, Moving Forward teaches skills that can be useful to anyone with stressful problems.

Parenting for Service Members and Veterans — www.militaryparenting.org

This is an anonymous, online self-help course that provides Military and Veteran parents with tools and practical advice to help them reconnect with their families after a separation, strengthen relationships with their children, and build upon their existing parenting skills. Using stories from real veteran and military families, interactive activities, and a curriculum developed by leading experts, MilitaryParenting.org helps parents address both everyday parenting problems and family issues unique to their military experience.

Military Kids Connect (MKC) — www.militarykidsconnect.org

This award-winning website helps children prepare for the challenges faced during significant family transitions. Through participation in MKC's monitored online forums, children can share their own ideas, experiences, and suggestions with other military children, helping them to know they are not alone in dealing with the stresses of military life. MKC's focused parent and educator tracks provide information to help them understand what it takes to support military children in home and school settings. There are different versions for children 6-8, 9-12, and 13-17.

Smartphone Applications

You can download applications that DoD or VA created specifically for those seeking to overcome the challenges associated with a military lifestyle. Apps are available for free—just download them from the Apple App Store or Android Market.

National Center for Telehealth & Technology (T2) — www.t2health.org

T2 designs and builds applications employing emerging technologies in support of psychological health and TBI recovery in the military. T2 also works to reduce barriers that can deter Service members from seeking help. It has created mobile apps for Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve members, along with their loved ones.

Application	Apple Mac Site	Google Android Site
PE Coach	bit.ly/QbgxzF	bit.ly/QTxv5x
Breathe2Relax	bit.ly/VScmuJ	bit.ly/14nkWkZ
LifeArmor	bit.ly/Z41Yva	bit.ly/14bmGxv
PTSD Coach	bit.ly/RAJMsw	bit.ly/ZwBmDh
T2 Mood Tracker	bit.ly/SCTNIL	bit.ly/10sPbVC
Tactical Breather	bit.ly/VshB0A	bit.ly/16fmYUa
Positive Activity Jackpot	n/a	bit.ly/1ai9Y5W
BioZen	n/a	bit.ly/1iJs1o3

- **PE Coach** is the first mobile app designed to support the tasks associated with prolonged exposure that is a proven treatment for PTSD. PE works by helping you approach trauma-related thoughts, feelings, and situations that you have been avoiding due to the distress they cause. Repeated exposure to these thoughts, feelings, and situations help reduce the level of distress. Providing hip-pocket access to the necessary tools for successful PE participation, the app includes audio recording capability for easy playback after sessions; tools to support tasks between sessions; and visual displays of symptom reduction over time. In addition, PE Coach is integrated with Smartphone calendar functionality to encourage recall and session attendance.
- **Breathe2Relax** is a portable stress management tool that guides you through a deep breathing exercise done by contracting the diaphragm. Breathing exercises have been documented to decrease the body’s “fight-or-flight” (stress) response and help with mood stabilization, anger control, and anxiety management. Breathe2Relax can be used as a stand-alone stress reduction tool or in conjunction with clinical care directed by a healthcare worker. Capitalizing on touch-screen technology, users can record their stress level on a “visual analogue scale” by simply swiping a small bar to the left or right. Breathe2Relax uses state-of-the-art graphics, animation, narration, and videos to deliver a sophisticated, immersive experience for the user.
- **Life Armor** is a touch-screen technology that allows the user to browse information on 17 topics, including sleep, depression, relationship issues, and PTSD. Brief self-assessments



help the user measure and track symptoms, and tools are available to assist with managing specific problems. Videos relevant to each topic provide personal stories from other Service members and military family members. After selecting a topic area, information is organized into four main menu items:

- **Learn:** Comprehensive information on the causes, characteristics, and potential solutions to emotional, relationship, and other common mental health problems that face the military community
 - **Assess:** Brief self-assessment tools to help the user measure and track symptoms relevant to the topic area
 - **Tools:** Information and guidance on techniques to self-manage problems relevant to the topic area
 - **Videos:** Testimony from members of the military community about their struggle to overcome problems relevant to the topic area
- **PTSD Coach** is intended to be used as an adjunct to psychological treatment but can also serve as a stand-alone education tool. Key features of the app include:
 - **Manage Symptoms:** Coping skills and assistance for common kinds of post traumatic stress symptoms and problems, including systematic relaxation and self-help techniques
 - **Find Support:** Assistance in finding immediate support. The app enables individuals to identify sources of emotional support, populate the phone with those phone numbers, and link to treatment programs. In an emergency, users can quickly link to the Military Crisis Line
 - **Learn about PTSD:** Education about key topics related to trauma, PTSD, and treatment
- **T2 Mood Tracker** allows users to self-monitor, track, and reference their emotional experience over a period of days, weeks, and months using a visual analogue rating scale. Users can self-monitor emotional experiences associated with common deployment-related behavioral health issues like post traumatic stress, brain injury, life stress, depression, and anxiety. Self-monitoring results can be a self-help tool or they can be shared with a therapist or health care professional, providing a record of the patient's emotional experience over a selected time frame.
- The **Tactical Breather** application can be used to gain control over physiological and psychological responses to stress. Through repetitive practice and training, users can learn to gain control of their heart rate, emotions, concentration, and other physiological and psychological responses to their body during stressful situations. Although these techniques were developed primarily for the warfighter during intense combat situations, anyone can benefit from the ideas taught in this application to help with nearly any stressful situation in life.
- The **Positive Activity Jackpot** uses a professional behavioral health therapy called pleasant event scheduling, which is used to overcome depression and build resilience. This app

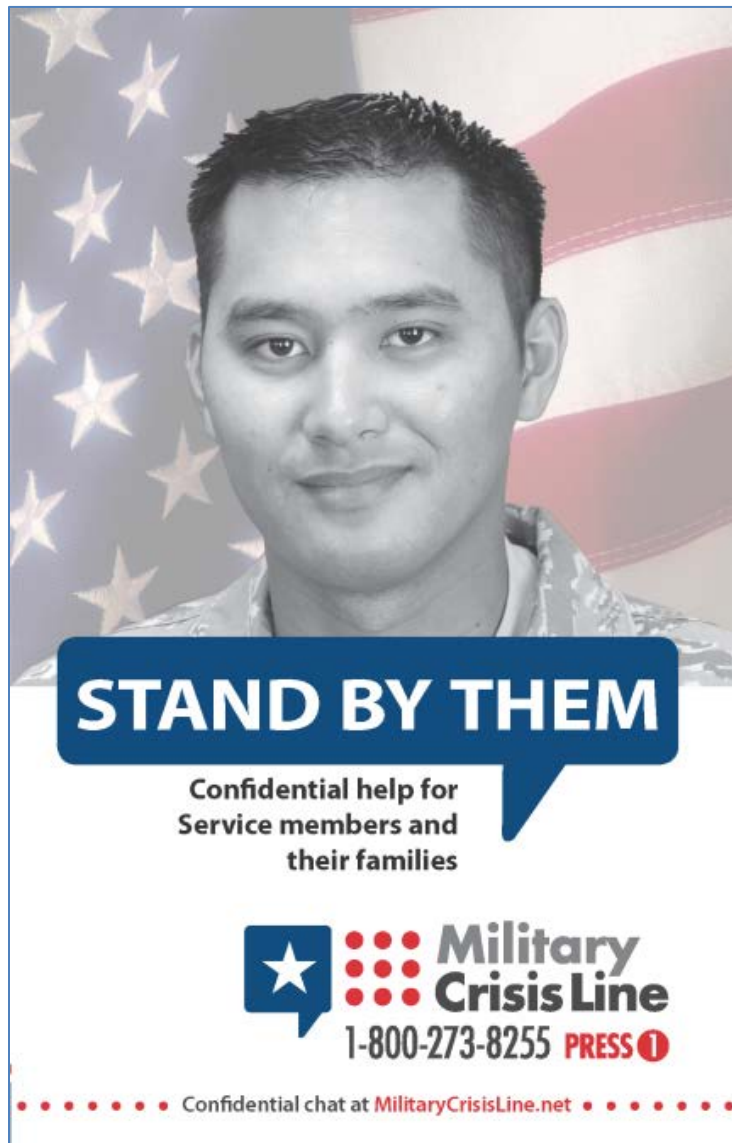


features augmented reality technology to help users find nearby enjoyable activities and makes activity suggestions with local options and the ability to invite friends.

- **BioZen** was developed by the DoD to help Service members use the therapeutic benefits of biofeedback. BioZen is the first portable, low-cost method for clinicians and patients to use biofeedback in and out of the clinic. This app takes many of the large medical sensors in a clinic and puts them in the hands of anyone with a smart phone, making it easier to get started with biofeedback.

My Important Numbers to Know:

Commanding Officer/Commander	_____
Executive Officer	_____
Senior Enlisted	_____
Installation Duty Office	_____
Command/Unit Duty Office	_____
Family Readiness Group Representative	_____
Medical Treatment Facility	_____
Family Physician	_____
Family Dentist	_____
Child Care	_____
Health Counselor	_____
Nutritionist	_____
TRICARE	_____
Bank/Credit Union	_____
Legal	_____
Chaplain/Spiritual Leader	_____
Academic Advisor/School Counselor	_____
Partners In Care	_____
Base Housing	_____
Base Police	_____
Base Operator	_____
Base Morale, Welfare, and Recreation	_____



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**Booklet
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