

## Health & Fitness Tips

### Suicide - A Social Tragedy

*In the lead-up to World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10, MAJ Kelly Gall, Directorate of Mental Health, explains about suicide's effects.*

Suicide is often thought of as an individual issue, an individual act, yet the links we have to others ensure the impact extends to friends, family and colleagues.

For those close to those who suicide, the act often leaves a legacy. Emotional reactions can range from anger, resentment, confusion, remorse, apathy and guilt to feelings that things have been left unresolved. These feelings can be directed at the person who committed suicide, towards themselves, or towards others within the member's social networks and may affect current and future relationships.

A suicide can change the way people act towards a friend, family member or acquaintance in need, making them more caring or even causing them to back away. A suicide can lead a supervisor to be overly cautious in managing people with mental health conditions.

Even when we think that a suicide does not affect us, it often does. Seeing how others react to a suicide of a person we don't know can influence our reactions to suicides in the future, our attitudes towards mental illness, or our inclination to seek help for mental health problems.

We are almost always unable to fully appreciate what the person who suicided was experiencing, and unable to justify their course of action. When we don't understand others, we find it difficult to identify with them and tend to focus on ways in which we are not alike.

We each play a role in creating our social environment and, although it might not be our instinctive reaction, we can choose to focus on the ways in which we are all alike. We each can choose not to perpetuate or listen to rumours and gossip about members who may not be coping so well. We can choose to make the ADF an environment where people are encouraged to seek help for mental health concerns, negative life events and problematic relationships.

Raising awareness of suicide and mental health issues is a good first step. We all have to sit through mental health training, so use this time to think about how what is discussed relates to you, your partner, your family, your friends and your workmates. Think about how you would like these people to be treated when they are not coping well.

The [ADF Suicide Prevention Program](#) offers two further courses specific to suicide: the Keep Your Mates Safe – Suicide Prevention Training (KYMS-SPT) is a two-hour course for all unit members that aims to provide personnel with a greater ability to identify when someone is at risk and to refer them to first aid and health care. Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) is the next level of training and is aimed at those in supervisory or leadership roles, members of the health services and chaplains. ASIST teaches people how to identify those at risk and provide an initial "first aid" response. To be panelled on these courses, apply through your chain of command.

#### WHERE TO GET HELP

Who can you contact when you or a workmate needs help? Your chain of command, your local medical or psychology personnel or your chaplain can all help to link people with appropriate support. The All-Hours-Support Line operates 24/7 and is able to help you link with appropriate support in your location. Phone **1800 628 036** (free call within Australia) or (02) 9425 3878 (outside Australia).

