



Australian Government
Department of Defence

Suicide

Defence Mental Health & Wellbeing





*'Mental health and wellbeing is the state in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stress of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'**

Defence's vision is that our people – military and public servants – experience positive mental health and wellbeing. *They are Fit to Fight – Fit to Work – Fit for Life.*

*World Health Organization

One thing that may save a human life is a human relationship

Suicide is a tragic loss of life with devastating consequences for families, work mates/colleagues and Defence in general.

The idea of engaging with someone who is considering suicide, or who has displayed suicidal or self-harming behaviour, often frightens people because they fear that they will do or say something wrong if they interfere and possibly make the situation worse. However, any action is better than no action.

Suicide is a difficult subject but it is everyone's business. For every known suicide, many more people are considering suicide, and all those who are considering suicide are 'at risk'. As suicide can be an impulsive act, it's important to be able to recognise the warning signs and know what to do.

Why do people consider suicide?

Everyone has different levels of tolerance to stress and pain and we all try to cope as best we can during significant and sometimes painful changes in our lives. However, sometimes the burden of pain and suffering can be so great that an individual is overwhelmed to a point where suicide is considered as a means to end the emotional pain, not necessarily to end life.

What are the risk factors?

While there is no typical profile of someone who might contemplate suicide, there are some common risk factors and warning signs that when acted upon, can save lives. These factors include, but are not limited to:

- significant losses (death of a loved one, pet, loss of a relationship)
- significant changes (relationships, work, living conditions, personal wellbeing)
- feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- lack of current and accessible social supports that the person is willing to use
- mental health concerns
- past history of suicide related behaviour
- emotional pain that does not seem to have an end.

Do not joke about suicide

This will contribute to the stigma surrounding suicide and mental health, and make it harder for an individual who is thinking about suicide to seek help. Joking about suicide can also be a warning sign.

It is mandated in Defence policy that an individual's commander, manager or supervisor must be notified if you witness any comment or gesture implying self-harm or suicidal thoughts or behaviours. It is the responsibility of all Defence personnel to respond to the risk of suicide.

What should I look for?

Signs are simply those things that alert us to the possibility that someone may be thinking about suicide. If we see or hear signs, they are an opportunity for us to ask if the person is thinking of suicide. Asking does not increase the likelihood of suicide.

There are many different warning signs and there is no set pattern that defines an 'at risk' person — the key is recognising changes or behaviours that are unusual for that person.

Signs may appear as changes in a person's situation, their behaviour(s), physical state, thoughts, and/or emotions/feelings. These may include:

- talk or hints of suicidal behaviour
- preoccupation with death
- giving away possessions
- isolation or withdrawal
- increased alcohol and/or drug use
- lack of interest in hobbies or appearance.

What should I do?

The first thing to do when you encounter someone you think may be at risk of suicide is to start talking to them. One of the great things about asking 'Are you OK?' is that you don't have to know the answers to someone's problems.

Stay calm and remember to Go *SLOW*.

S Suicide. Ask clearly, 'Are you thinking about suicide?'

L Listen without judgement.

O Options. Discuss options, including professional support and reporting it to their boss.

W Walk them (literally) to the nearest health facility or their chain of command. Stay with them until they are in a safe place with access to assistance.

<http://www.defence.gov.au/health/healthportal/>

Supervisor's role

The supervisor's role in suicide prevention and intervention is to:

- be familiar with policy regarding management of Defence personnel at risk of suicide
- be suicide aware so that you can identify personnel at risk
- actively support suicide intervention efforts and recognise that suicide prevention/intervention requires effort from all members of Defence
- be aware of the resources that can assist your people
- encourage participation in Suicide Prevention Program training
- take all suicide related behaviour seriously
- enhance the development of 'esprit de corps' in the workplace by:
 - building a work unit culture that fosters both a sense of belonging and 'looking after your mates'
 - offering social support
 - developing a culture that encourages early intervention and supports those seeking help.

Where to seek help

If you or someone in your workplace is in crisis and you think immediate action is needed, call **Emergency Services 000**, contact your doctor or local mental health crisis service, or go to your local hospital emergency department.

Emergency contact information – 24 hours

If you or someone you know needs help, call:

- Emergency on **000**
- Lifeline on **13 11 14**
- Suicide Call Back Service on **1300 659 467**.

ADF

Contact your local on base Health Centre, Mental Health Professional or the Duty Officer/Officer of the Day for immediate assistance and referrals.

The ADF Health and Wellbeing Portal is an online health information resource tool for ADF members and their families **www.defence.gov.au/health/healthportal/**

Your chain of command is a primary resource that can provide advice, referral and support.

Military Chaplains are connected to all ships/units/bases around Australia and on Operations. They can provide all-hours support and appropriate referral. To access Defence Chaplaincy support, call **1300 333 362** and ask to speak to the Duty Chaplain from your area and service.

The ADF Mental Health All-hours Support Line (ASL) is a confidential telephone service for ADF members and their families available 24/7 on **1800 628 036** or if calling from overseas **+61 2 9425 3878**.

If you are away from base, or for out-of-hours assistance, you can call **1800 IMSICK (1800 467 425)** to locate the nearest support.

Defence Family Helpline (1800 624 608) The Defence Family Helpline is available 24/7 for ADF Members and their families, and is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists. Defence Community Organisation website is: **www.defence.gov.au/dco**

The National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC)

Serving Families of Deployed Australian Defence Personnel.

As part of the Headquarters Joint Operations Command, the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC) provides a 24 hour support, referral and information service for families of Defence personnel deployed on operations and exercises.

1800 801 026 or + 61 2 6127 1812.

Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Office (SeMPRO)

SeMPRO offers advice, guidance and support to current and former Defence personnel who have been affected by sexual misconduct, whether the incident is current or historical.

This includes support to ADF cadets, officers and instructors of cadets, APS personnel, commanders, managers, supervisors, support people and families affected by sexual misconduct. **1800 736 776 (1800SeMPRO).**

Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling (formerly WCS): is a national mental health service that provides 24-hour free and confidential counselling, group programs and suicide prevention training for current and ex-serving ADF members, and their family. To get support or to find out more, call **1800 011 046** or visit **www.OpenArms.gov.au**

APS (and Reservists)

Defence Employee Assistance Program (EAP) (including the Reserve Assistance Program – RAP). The EAP provides short term confidential counselling and support for employees and immediate family members (if eligible). It is easily accessible, voluntary and can provide support on a range of personal and work related issues. The Defence EAP can be accessed by calling **1300 687 327.**