



DEFENSE SUICIDE PREVENTION OFFICE

Defense Suicide Prevention Office Video Transcript

Fireside Chat: Military Community and Family Policy

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Dr. Liz Clark:

Hi. I'm Liz Clark, and I'm really excited to be here today with Ms. Lee Kelley, the principal director of Military Community and Family Policy. Lee, thanks so much for being here today. I'm really excited to learn about your role within the Department as well as a little bit about yourself and how you got here. So, with that, Lee, I'll just pass it over to you really quick for just a quick introduction.

Ms. Lee Kelley: Thank you. You know I wouldn't miss this opportunity to connect with you. You mentioned my name, I'm also an enlisted Army veteran and social worker, and I've been privileged to work in the office of Military Community and Family Policy for the past 12 years.

Dr. Clark: Thank you so much for your service, but if you could share a little bit about like your journey. How did you get to MC&FP?

Ms. Kelley: Yeah. I think, probably, like many career paths, mine was a little windy. So, when I was in the military, it was right after 911, and I served as a broadcast journalist, so communications background. And when I got out of the Service, I had a chance to work in various capacities in the communications field, one of which was the Army Wounded Warrior Program. And I met a great colleague there who recruited me because of my communications background to come to work for her in Military Community and Family Policy doing spouse employment work. So, I left public affairs and communications to join family policy, and I haven't looked back since.

Dr. Clark: Oh, thanks so much for that. I'm grateful for whoever brought you in, and a huge shout out to that person. If you could tell us about some of the programs across MC&FP that support community quality of life programs?

Dr. Kelley: You hit the nail on the head when you said community quality-of-life programs. So, when you think about MC&FP, you can really think about it through the lens of the military life cycle. So, we bring forth policies that oversee New Parent Support. So, if you're a first-time parent in the military community, we provide the policy for the home visitors who are available to come and support you in your journey in those first critical days/weeks/months as a new parent.

We provide the childcare policy. So, for our Child Development Programs, we work to provide non-medical counseling, both policy and programs. So, while we're predominantly a policy shop, we do have some of the Department's centralized programming, such as Military OneSource. I know we'll be talking more about that, but we also have the Military and Family Life Counseling Program.





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Also within MC&FP, we provide the policy overseeing our resale organizations. What are resale organizations? Well, if you're on base and looking to pick up a sweatshirt or a hat, you might stop by the APHIS Marine Corps Exchange or Navy Exchange, and so we provide the policy overseeing our resale organizations, and we work closely with Deca as well.

We also provide a service that not many people know about through our Defense State Liaison Office. These are regional liaisons who work across the country, and they work at the state level to bring forth best practices to enhance quality of life for military families. When we think about state law, we also provide casualty and mortuary support. So, we do the policy overseeing mortuary affairs and mortuary operations across the Services. And we also have a communications arm, resourcing arm, and do policies governing our family centers. So, whether your Army Community Service, Marine Corps Community Service, whether your Fleet and Family Support Airman and Family Readiness, we work closely with our Service counterparts to bring forth the policy and standards so that families are able to access what they need at the installation level.

Dr. Clark: Wow! It's phenomenal, amazing, and so critically important. We talk in my space about the sacred, important mission that we have, but I mean talk about the sacred, important mission that you all have and that critical mission space that that that you're serving. When I think about suicide prevention and I think about many of the things that I talk about, is how to not just focus in on preventing death but actually making life worth living. And I think many of the things that you talked about are truly those that support those resources to make life worth living. When you talk about the Military Family Life Counselors, when you talk about all the different services with Military OneSource, with Financial Readiness, there's lots of different things like that. And then one of the things that just really hit me was when you talked about the New Parent Family Support, and then I think about when I've been on a on a crisis line and many new mothers are or dads calling in saying that I should be really happy right now, but I'm having a really hard time. How do we talk about that? It's just what a critical mission space even that is. And talk about the opportunity to save lives and to also make life worth living. But when you think about the programs that you discussed and the support and resources that you all have, how do you see the intricacies and the interweaving of your all's programs and then preventing suicide?

Ms. Kelley: Liz, you know, I was thinking earlier on this topic, and I actually think that the relationship, and friendship that you and I have is a great metaphor between the quality of life programming that MC&FP over sees and the work that you lead in the Defense Suicide Prevention Office, because we really can't just be colleagues. We really have to care about each other, and we have to care about the success of our shared mission space. So, I see that intersection being so critical and necessitating, not just awareness, but care.

So, I think the areas that I've seen where we have done, I think, really good, shared work is on destigmatizing help-seeking, normalizing asking for help, making it easy to access resources, making it a little bit more normal to talk about safe storage of firearms. So, I think that intersection is a true and necessary intersection and one that I know that we pay attention to every single day.





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Dr. Clark: And Lee, I just so appreciate you even saying that too because of all of it, but how excited I was for this particular Fireside Chat because you know you're a phenomenal human being, you're a phenomenal professional, and the mission that you have you know I really do feel it is a sacred, important, critical mission, but we can't do it alone either. You all can't do it alone. So, how can we collaborate in partnership and work in synchrony?

There's never a time where I could go to MC&FP or Lee Kelley to say, hey, I have an idea. What are your thoughts about this? And it's always welcomed. It's energized. It's support, and say yes, let's look at strengthening that particular collaboration or partnership.

So, I'm very, very grateful for that, and with that, one of the things that I thought we could talk a little bit about is some of the services that Military OneSource has available, especially when we're looking at how to prevent a crisis. You know how to talk about how to have difficult conversations, how to actually have conversations and so if you could talk a little bit about the platter of options and the resources that Military OneSource offers.

Ms. Kelley: Well, you're asking me to talk about my favorite topic. Twist my arm. I'll do it. So, when we talk about Military OneSource, I think at this point most folks are aware of it. When I'm in the field and I say how many people know about Military OneSource, generally all hands go up in the audience, but I think where we get less hands going up are on the spectrum of options, like the breadth of options. People know it exists but maybe aren't quite so sure of everything that it can provide.

So, as far as normalizing help-seeking, I'll tell you right now that the top reason that anyone reaches out to Military OneSource is for our non-medical counseling. Non-medical is such a strange phrase. It essentially means day-to-day life stressors. So, you know, relationship challenges that's the top reason anyone reaches out for non-medical counseling. That's a totally normal thing to do, and I think that's really what I want to stress is: listen, everyone else is doing it. You can too.

So, that's one piece that we provide that I think is pretty well known, but some of the ones that I think can cause a great deal of stress in someone's life that they may not know that Military OneSource can help with is something as little known, but like really every day as elder care. So, if you're caring for an aging parent, an aging relative, that can cause some additional stress. You know you've got you may have your own family; you're trying to balance. You may not know everything that you can do to bring the support needed for that relative or parent. Well, you could reach out to Military OneSource for an elder care consultation, and so what does that mean? What can Military OneSource do?

Well, I'll give you an example. Service members stationed in one state looking to assist an elderly relative in another state but not feeling good about their own ability to do the research on what would be the best facility, so they basically outsourced that resource, that research to Military OneSource, who did the research and turned around and within just a few days provided that Service member with vetted options. Military OneSource called, got the questions that the Service member had answered, and provided it back to the Service member to provide that sense of confidence and decrease the stress, because anyone who's picked up the phone and tried to do that kind of research, we're not talking





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about something that can be done super quick. So, with that military schedule, sometimes it's hard to be able to break away to kind of take the intentional time that you want to do something this important. So, elder care is one that I that I want to mention, document translation, there should never be a Service member, family member paying to have documents, official documents translated out of their own pocket. Military OneSource will take that on. We can translate any formal document except for medical records.

Another service, because I'm really into coaching right now, I want to talk about is health and wellness coaching. So, maybe it's like, I don't need a counselor, but gosh you know like my stress is off the charts. I don't have time to eat well. I'm constantly grabbing that thing out of the vending machine. I just need somebody who can give me some new ideas and maybe help me to realize my own new ideas. Health and wellness coaching is a great option for that. So this, those are just three out of a plethora of resources that Military OneSource provides.

Dr. Clark: Thanks so much, Lee and then when one of the things that we talk about a lot in the Department recently, we've been doing lots of presentations about is the SPRIRC, so the Suicide Prevention Response Independent Review Committee, that the Department is now, has 83 enabling actions that are in five lines of effort. Those lines of effort is fostering the supportive environment, increasing access to care, to help, what type of help is out there, the appropriate level of help, making sure that we're reducing stigma.

The stigma is real. We know the stigma is real. How do we then modernize and revise suicide prevention training and then how do we promote a culture of lethal mean safety? And so when you've been talking, I think just through this entire time you've hit every single one of those lines of effort with the services supports and resources that you all provide. And I'm just beyond grateful for you and in my life. grateful for you in the Department, and just thank you for what you do for our military families and our Service members to make sure that they are healthy, they are safe, they are well and truly making life worth living. So, Lee, thank you so much for your time being here.

For those of you that may be in crisis or concerned about somebody who may be in crisis, please dial 988. If you press 988 and press one, then you'll reach the Veterans Crisis Line / Military Crisis Line. And just thank you so much Lee and Lee, can you put out there the Military OneSource phone number and contact information for them as well.

Ms. Kelley: Yeah, absolutely, Liz, and thank you thank you for inviting me to this space to talk about our shared space in support of our community. So, the Military OneSource number is 1-800-342-9647. If you're overseas, I highly encourage you to go to militaryonesource.mil and look up the international dialing instructions for the country that you're in. You can also live chat Military OneSource from anywhere in the world, and as a reminder, Military OneSource is a 24/7/365 resource. Thanks, Liz.

Dr. Clark: Thank you so much, Lee. I appreciate you.

