



# The Department of Defense Wants You To “Connect to Protect” for Suicide Prevention Month

September 16, 2021

The battle to prevent suicide reaches far beyond an awareness month for the Department of Defense (DOD). It is a top priority for the DOD all year. This September, DOD observes Suicide Prevention Month (SPM) by spotlighting initiatives to educate our military community about suicide prevention and connecting them with resources. The Department continues to advance prevention efforts, track and evaluate progress, educate on lethal means safety, and promote resilience while working to eliminate stigma. This year's SPM campaign focuses on connectedness, which highlights the critical role relationships and connections to family, friends, the community, and resources can play in preventing suicide. Leaders across DOD are joining SPM efforts and echoing the slogan, “Connect to Protect: Support is Within Reach.” Connectedness is a protective factor that can reduce the risk of suicide. Building and strengthening social connections one can count on as well as developing a sense of belonging – while connecting with resources – can help prevent a crisis.

There is no question that the number of suicide deaths among Service members and veterans is concerning. Every death by suicide is a tragedy and we will not relent in our efforts to prevent suicide among our service members, veterans, and their families.

“We tragically lose brave men and women to suicide. And I personally take these losses seriously,” said Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III. “Reaching out for help isn't a sign of weakness. It's actually a sign of strength. Unfortunately, there's still a lingering stigma around asking for help. But I'm personally committed to doing everything that I can to change that,” said Secretary Austin during the joint 2021 DOD and Department of Veterans Affairs suicide prevention conference, focused on the military and veteran communities.

As part of the SPM awareness campaign, leaders across DOD, service members, military families, and DOD civilian employees are asked to connect with one another and with resources to prevent suicide. Seeking help may have traditionally referred to mental health counseling, however, the campaign highlights the variety of support services available to the military community. Seeking help means turning to someone, or a service, in assisting you with a challenge to help manage a stressor before it becomes overwhelming. For example, seeking support may mean reaching out to a financial counselor to assist with financial questions or speaking with a chaplain – regardless of whether you are religious or spiritual. Military OneSource offers a variety of non-medical counseling resources and can connect you to someone who understands your needs, to mitigate suicide risk.

“Suicide is a nationwide public health issue and DOD is committed to providing the support and care our Armed Forces and military families need and deserve,” said Dr. Karin A. Orvis, Director of the Defense Suicide Prevention Office. “This September, we want to reinforce how



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‘Support is Within Reach.’ Your leaders, other service members, friends, family, and resources such as [Military OneSource](#), chaplains, and financial counselors are valuable avenues for support and are critical in protecting our loved ones from suicide,” said Orvis.

For more information on SPM and resources available, check with your service installation and local military serving organizations. To view SPM resources from the Defense Suicide Prevention Office, visit [www.dspo.mil/spm](http://www.dspo.mil/spm).

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*Service members and veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a service member or veteran in crisis, can call the Veterans/Military Crisis Line for confidential support available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255 or chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat).*

*Because suicide is a public health issue and scientific research indicates that certain types of reporting can negatively impact vulnerable individuals, reporters covering this topic can visit [ReportingOnSuicide.org](http://ReportingOnSuicide.org) for important resources on communicating about suicide.*

