



OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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July 16, 2021

MEMORANDUM FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR
MILITARY COMMUNITY AND FAMILY POLICY
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY FOR
MILITARY PERSONNEL/QUALITY OF LIFE
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY FOR
MILITARY PERSONNEL POLICY
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE FOR
RESERVE AFFAIRS AND AIRMEN READINESS
DIRECTOR OF MANPOWER AND PERSONNEL FOR THE
NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU
DIRECTOR OF MANPOWER AND PERSONNEL FOR THE JOINT
CHIEFS OF STAFF

SUBJECT: Use of the Evidence-Based “Simple Things Save Lives” Video

References: (a) Department of Defense Strategy for Suicide Prevention, December 29, 2015
(b) Department of Defense Instruction 6400.09, “DoD Policy on Integrated Primary
Prevention of Self-Directed Harm and Prohibited Abuse or Harm,” September
11, 2020

The Department embraces a comprehensive public health approach to suicide prevention that acknowledges the interplay of individual-, relationship-, and community-level risk factors. As part of the public health approach -- and pursuant to Reference (a), which encourages implementation of research-informed communication efforts that prevent suicide by changing knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors -- we are intent on implementing efforts that help identify and support people at risk in accordance with Reference (b).

The Defense Suicide Prevention Office, in partnership with the Office of People Analytics (OPA), and in close collaboration with the Military Services, produced a brief, 6-minute training video – *Simple Things Saves Lives*. This video educates Service members and families about the warning signs of suicide on social media, practical steps for intervening in a crisis, and referring someone who is at risk for suicide to appropriate care. The video also provides an understanding of why individuals should or should not take specific actions. The video content is based on a Department-funded research study that identified evidence-based patterns of social and behavioral risks on social media platforms preceding a military suicide.

DoD pilot-tested the training video with the Military Services, collecting survey evaluation data from nearly 1,500 participants, from March 1, 2020 to January 31, 2021. Pilot evaluation results indicated that most participants found the video effective. For example, a majority indicated the video was useful (85%), helping them to learn to how to recognize when

someone's social media posts indicate life stress and risk for suicide (80%), as well as how to respond (84%), including specific resources to share with them (84%).

Given the positive evaluation findings, this memorandum provides guidance on using the *Simple Things Saves Lives* video as tool to educate military personnel and families about warning signs of suicide on social media and teach them how to assist those who might be experiencing stress.

I ask leaders and commanders throughout the Department to ensure that all Service members and their families are aware of and know how to access this important evidence-based resource. Please use and promote this video throughout your organizations, with particular focus on sharing through social media platforms such as Facebook, as Service member feedback from the pilot indicated Facebook as the best platform to engage with Service members online.

Note that the Department highlighted this new training pilot effort, originally titled *Recognizing the Signs of Intent to Die by Suicide on Social Media Training Pilot*, in the Annual Suicide Reports for Calendar Years 2018 and 2019. This was a key action item for DoD to aid in identifying and supporting people at suicide risk, particularly focused on our population of greatest concern - young and enlisted Service members.

The *Simple Things Saves Lives* video and the short accompanying evaluation survey is available at www.dspo.mil/SimpleThings. For questions, or recommendations on how to use and/or promote this video, please contact Dr. Liz Barnes at sandra.e.barnes2.civ@mail.mil or (703) 614-1824.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth P. Van Winkle', written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Elizabeth P. Van Winkle
Executive Director, Force Resiliency