



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH TALKING POINTS AND KEY MESSAGES

Provided in support of the Call to Service Leaders: Video Messages in Support of 2021 Suicide Prevention Month (SPM); the below talking points and key messages provide recommended SPM messaging to add to your video message content, which should highlight your organization's services, resources, and/or programs. The messages below can be used to share SPM information with your audience and how individuals can **#ConnectToProtect** and **Be There** for Service members, veterans, and their families. Content can be modified as appropriate to align with your needs. However, the overall tone should capture a hopeful and resilient message. Please coordinate with a public affairs officer and leadership, as needed.

Note: Avoid words that with negative connotation, infer weakness, or stigma-associated language when mentioning DoD or Service members. Refer to [the Leaders Suicide Prevention Safe Messaging Guide](#) to use language that is supportive, hopeful, and encourages help-seeking.

- The Department of the Air Force is committed to preventing suicide among Service members and their families.
- Suicide prevention is a Department of Defense (DoD) priority throughout the year.
- During September—SPM—the Department brings added attention to the complex issue of suicide and emphasizes the available resources and supports.
- This year, the DoD's SPM theme, **Connect to Protect: Support is Within Reach**, highlights the vital role that connections to family, friends, the community, and resources can play in preventing suicide.
- During the global pandemic, our relationships have taken on a new level of meaning and importance in these challenging times. Reaching out and building connections is a useful and needed way to **Be There** for your community members.
- Research indicates that a sense of connectedness is a factor that can reduce the risk of suicide.
- Having social connections that you can count on and a sense of belonging can be protective against some of the potential risk factors for suicide, like loneliness.
- As we head into September, each of us needs to focus on connecting to protect the Service members and military families in our lives. We have a moral duty to protect each other—now more than ever.
- Remember, there is no one "fix," and we all play a role in preventing suicide. We encourage you to take steps in September and year-round to **Connect to Protect**.
- It is imperative to keep our personnel's safety and morale in mind during the most challenging times.
- While suicide risk is not a topic not often discussed, it should be addressed with more frequency to encourage people to seek help, reach out to one another or a helping resource for support, and talk about the challenges.

- No one is alone in their challenges. We all face similar stressors from relationships and family to financial or legal issues. You do not have to cope with these challenges alone; Help is available.
- Support looks different to a lot of people. Some may seek support and assistance from friends, mental health professionals, financial counselors, and chaplains. There is no wrong door when seeking help.
- Seeking help is a sign of strength and increases your resilience.

Lethal Means Safety

- Suicide significantly impacts our military community, and every death by suicide is a tragedy.
- Department of Defense research shows that the most common lethal means – objects used to carry out a self-destructive act such as suicide – were personal firearms.
- One of the most effective ways to save a life is to put time and distance between someone who is feeling overwhelmed and a method of suicide.
- Practicing safe storage is an effective way to save lives and prevent accidents.
- Store your firearm(s) in a safe with a lock, use cable locks, and store your ammo separately from your firearm. These additional safety measures will prevent accidents in the home and prevent a crisis from turning into a tragedy.
- Additionally, talk to your children and others in your home or immediate environment about your firearm, your preferred safe storage practices, and set and share your protocols in the event someone would like access or knowledge of where you store your firearms.
- Some suicide deaths can happen without warning and within a short span of time. Research shows it can take less than 10 minutes between thinking about suicide to acting on it. In other words, suicide attempts take place during a short-term crisis. Putting time and distance between a person at risk for suicide and a means for suicide is an effective way to prevent death and save a life.
- While owning a firearm does not *cause* someone to be suicidal, storing a loaded firearm at home increases risk for dying by suicide four to six times.^{1,2} Firearms are the most common method used in deaths by suicide in both military and civilian populations.
- As a firearm owner, you are the most knowledgeable about safe handling of your firearms. Safe storage practices can help prevent accidents and even save a life.

¹ Dempsey, C.L., Benedek, D.M., Zuromski, K.L., Riggs-Donovan, C., Ng, T.H.H., Nock, M.K., ... & Ursano, R.J. (2019). Association of firearm ownership, use, accessibility, and storage practices with suicide risk among US Army soldiers. *Journal of the American Medical Association Network Open*, 2(6), e195383-e195383.

² Simonetti, J.A., Dorsey Holliman, B., Holiday, R., Brenner, L.A., & Monteith, L.L. (2020). Firearm-related experiences and perceptions among United States male veterans: A qualitative interview study. *PLoS one*, 15(3), e0230135.