

LEADER ACTION CHECKLIST

Preventing & Responding to Suicide Events

Early Engagement

- Get to know your unit personally through one-on-one meetings and unit social events
- Engage with people early when you think there is a problem and follow up regularly
- Model strong self-care (e.g., sleep, nutrition, stress management, time off)
- Identify and address unit stressors (organizational, relationship, financial, legal, etc.)
- Keep units informed of decisions that may impact them
- Encourage participation in unit planning and develop a strong mentoring system
- Have activities that promote unit cohesion and encourage peer support
- Ensure access to resources to improve stress and performance (fitness, sleep, nutrition, relaxation)
- Eliminate policies and procedures that stigmatize or create barriers to help-seeking
- Create a culture that encourages people to seek help early before problems worsen
- Create connections to chaplains and behavioral health and request prevention outreach
- Talk about safely storing firearms and other methods of harm (e.g., pills, poisons)

Responding to Suicide Ideation or Attempt

- Tell the person you are there to help
- Ensure immediate safety; Calmly remove any means that could be used for self-injury in a crisis
- Directly ask the service member if they have suicidal thoughts: “Are you thinking of killing yourself?”
- Do not leave the service member experiencing a crisis alone
- If time permits, consult with behavioral healthcare, other healthcare provider, or chaplain
- For immediate evaluation, escort service member to the emergency room, behavioral health, or chaplain
- Share details about the situation with only those who need to know

- Address gossip with information that can be shared
- Be active in safety planning, including removal and safe storage of lethal means
- Do not give up on the person or label them as “weak” or “a lost cause”
- Connect with a peer or mentor to support you in the process of navigating a crisis

Responding to a Suicide Death

- Immediately contact appropriate law enforcement and first responder teams
- Ensure notification to chain of command, chaplain, and behavioral health team
- Contact behavioral health expert before announcing death to unit
- Lead by being **PAV**:
 - » **PRESENT** in your unit — more than usual
 - » **ACTIVE** — walk around in the unit and events talking to each member
 - » **VISIBLE** — let members know you are there
- Consult with the chaplain about unit sponsored memorial services
- Promptly identify family & survivors for referral to mental health & bereavement resources
- Check-in and support survivors throughout grieving
- Provide information that is public about the suicide; Focus on the loss of the person vs. how they died
- Address rumors and discourage gossip
- Openly acknowledge grief and loss; genuine expressions of emotion can help others heal
- Remind people it's okay to feel sad or angry
- Create opportunities for unit members to be together and stay connected
- Reach out to people who seem disconnected or drifting away
- Role model, encourage, and facilitate self-care to avoid burnout & compassion fatigue
- Remind people there is support available, including chaplains and behavioral health