



National Guard

Suicide Prevention Toolkit for Leaders

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Our Approach to Suicide Prevention

Suicide is a complex issue that must be addressed through holistic efforts. The National Guard's approach to reducing harmful behaviors and increasing Force readiness focuses on getting ahead of problems to prevent adverse outcomes. Breaking the cycle of crisis and response requires fostering healthy climates that better support our Service members. We are accomplishing this by readily identifying Service members at risk, encouraging help-seeking behaviors, and promoting protective environments that enhance safety.

As a leader, your on-going commitment to prevention is critical. Every leader must ask themselves what they can do better to establish a culture of trust that connects Service members with the resources needed to improve their health and well-being.

Although each National Guard unit is unique, there are common challenges across the 54 States, Territories, and the District of Columbia. This toolkit aims to provide leaders with resources to reduce stigma that can prohibit Service members from seeking the behavioral health treatment needed to prevent harm and reduce contagion.

Familiarize yourself with these resources so you know when to use them. Find out how they can help you better lead and advocate for your Service members. Share the evidence-informed information and resources with others to create a healthier environment. Reach out to your Behavioral Health Officer, Director of Psychological Health or Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce member for additional support. Invite them to speak to your Service members about any of the resources or challenges included in this toolkit.

RESOURCE	CHALLENGE
Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale	Identifying Service members at risk
Safe Messaging	Talking to Service members about suicide
Misconceptions and Facts About Suicide	Separating fact from fiction
Blogs and Social Media	Communicating safely and effectively online
Lethal Means Safety	Putting time and distance between at-risk Service members and a method of suicide

Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (Columbia Protocol)

The Columbia Protocol is a plain-language survey to assess suicide thoughts and behaviors. It consists of two to six questions depending on responses. The simple 'yes' or 'no' answers identify low-moderate-high level of suicide risk. Survey results can help inform next steps, timeline, and appropriate level of support. The Columbia Protocol does not require training. It can be administered by anyone in any setting.

Benefits:

- Easy to use anytime and anywhere – in the office or in the field; in-person or over the phone
- Does not require specialized training or background in behavioral health
- Fast and accurate results identifying level of suicide risk
- Informs next steps such as counseling, referral, hospitalization, or other action
- Avoids immediate or long-term harm for at-risk Service members
- Reduces stigma as it can be administered by anyone

Recommendation: Use the Columbia Protocol to quickly assess risk and save lives; share it with others and encourage them to use it too

Access the [Columbia Protocol](#) to learn more.

Safe Messaging

The Safe Messaging guide offers straight forward guidance on how to discuss suicide and behavioral health safely and effectively. It includes recommendations on specific language to use or actions to take to encourage Service members to get the help they need. The Guidelines also provide clear explanations of why certain terms or actions are recommended over others.

Benefits:

- Helps leaders start needed conversations about suicide with Service members
- Encourages open and honest dialogue
- Promotes objectivity
- Re-enforces connections
- Builds a culture of trust
- Encourages help and hope for at-risk Service members
- Minimizes stigma associated with help-seeking behaviors

Recommendation: Use the Safe Messaging guide to adopt non-judgmental language that encourages help-seeking behaviors

Access the [Leaders Suicide Prevention Safe Messaging Guide](#) to learn more.

Misconceptions and Facts About Suicide

The Misconceptions and Facts About Suicide guide is a user-friendly manual of common misunderstandings and countering facts about suicide. It provides clear talking points and simple statistics that can be used in everyday conversations.

Benefits:

- Empowers leaders with the facts about suicide
- Increases confidence in openly discussing behavioral health issues with Service members
- Establishes credibility for leaders among Service members
- Corrects common misperceptions
- Creates an environment that encourages Service members to reach out for support

Recommendation: Use the *Misconceptions and Facts About Suicide* guide to share accurate information with Service members and gain their trust

Access the [Leaders Suicide Prevention Safe Messaging Guide](#) to learn more.

Blogs and Social Media

The Blogs and Social Media guide provides instructions on how to write clear and effective blog posts such as including help-seeking resources and using objective, precise language. It also offers social media tips such as focusing on positive stories, including images, and engaging your audience with a call to action.

Benefits:

- Offers an accurate and unfiltered means of communicating directly with Service members
- Assists leaders with understanding how language may influence behaviors
- Promotes mindfulness of language to prevent judgement
- Avoids inadvertently stigmatizing or harming Service members
- Encourages help-seeking behaviors by offering resources and information

Recommendation: Use the *Blogs and Social Media* guide to learn how to effectively communicate with Service members online, while remaining sensitive to those with suicidal thoughts

Access the [Leaders Suicide Prevention Safe Messaging Guide](#) to learn more.

Lethal Means Safety

The Lethal Means Safety guide provides information and resources on one of the contributing factors to suicide – access to lethal means. It identifies different types of lethal means (e.g., firearms, medications, sharp objects) and how best to store them. It also discusses one of the most effective ways to prevent harm by putting time and distance between someone in distress and a method of suicide. The guidance contains common misconceptions and facts about mental health and deployment, as well as crisis and non-crisis resources.

Benefits:

- Identifies the different types of lethal means and the best ways to store each
- Promotes time and distance as a means of keeping at-risk Service members safe
- Corrects common misconceptions held by Service members regarding lethal means
- Provides statistics which can be used in everyday conversations to increase credibility
- Fosters a culture that encourages safe storage and promotes support seeking behaviors

Recommendation: Use the Lethal Means Safety guide to promote time and distance between at-risk Service members and a means of suicide

Access the [Lethal Means Safety for Military Service Members and Their Families](#) to learn more.

For more information, please contact ng.ncr.ngb-arng.list.suicide-prevention@army.mil