Whether you’re going home or staying home for the holidays this year, it’s a good time to focus on lethal means safety. Holidays can be a time of great joy, but they can also be a time of increased stress. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect many aspects of our normal traditions, which could lead to anxiety or depression among you and your family members.

Many suicide attempts are made impulsively during a short-term crisis period. Restricting access to lethal means is one of the most important steps you can take to prevent an impulsive attempt.

Firearms Safety
Firearms are the most lethal and most common method of suicide in the United States and among members of the U.S. military. Whether it’s within your own home, or in a home you may be visiting, make sure firearms are safely stored, separated from ammunition and secured in a locked location or with a safety device.

In addition to these measures, the Navy offers support for Sailors, commanding officers and health providers through OPNAVINST1720.4B. This instruction describes voluntary measures to reduce access to privately-owned firearms for any Sailor reasonably believed to be at risk for suicide or causing harm to others. If a Sailor agrees to temporarily surrender his or her weapon for safekeeping, the commanding officer (CO) will ensure that it is securely stored on the installation or other available location in coordination with local authorities. It will be returned upon the Sailor’s request or at the end of the predetermined storage period set between the CO and the Sailor.

Medication Safety
Medications can also be a highly-lethal method of self-harm. Secure your current prescription medications, and dispose of unwanted, unused or expired medications. The Military Health System has established a year-round prescription drug take back program using safe, convenient and anonymous drop boxes placed at Military Treatment Facilities (MTFs).

Check with your local MTF to see if they are participating in this program or dispose of medications yourself by emptying them into a sealable plastic bag with coffee grounds or some other undesirable substance and throwing in the trash. Make sure to use a dark marker to obscure personal information on bottles before disposing.

Talk to your Shipmates and Your Families
Lethal means safety can make a real difference in protecting yourself and those around you. Have a conversation with those in your community about the danger of access to lethal means and ways to mitigate it. Seek out information on how to help at the Navy Suicide Prevention website or through the Navy’s Project 1 Small Act blog.

No one has to try and navigate the holidays alone. Reach out to a mental health provider at your command, installation or nearest MTF, or seek confidential non-medical counseling from Military OneSource. Your local chaplain or Fleet and Family Support Center can also be great resources for you or others. If you feel hopeless or are thinking of suicide, get immediate help through the Military Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, press 1. Be there for Every Sailor, Every Day.
Below are sample Plan of the Week notes aligning with topics covered by Project 1 Small ACT during the month of December:

1. December is Impaired Driving Prevention Month. Provide your team with impaired driving prevention materials that are easy to understand and follow. The Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center (NMCPHC) offers ideas and resources, including an Impaired Driving Prevention Health Promotion Toolbox, at [https://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/Pages/hp-toolbox-december.aspx](https://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/Pages/hp-toolbox-december.aspx).

2. December is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) Awareness Month. About five percent of Americans suffer from SAD, but many others may feel a little down during the winter. How do you know if it’s SAD or just the winter blues? The Project 1 Small ACT blog offers information in this article describing SAD and resources about when to seek help at [https://navstress.wordpress.com/2019/01/28/is-it-sad-or-the-winter-blues/](https://navstress.wordpress.com/2019/01/28/is-it-sad-or-the-winter-blues/).

3. Sleep is one of the most important aspects of mental and physical health, and it can also be one of the most elusive. If you’re having trouble getting enough quality rest these days, check out these five tips to chill out before bed from the Real Good Day campaign blog at [https://rgdcampaign.medium.com/](https://rgdcampaign.medium.com/). The Navy’s Real Good Day campaign is building a community focused on sharing health and wellness strategies that work.


5. Looking to cultivate more connections? Start or join a virtual group focused on something you’re interested in, like sports, books, music or video games. Relationships strengthen our resilience: [https://navstress.wordpress.com/2019/02/07/connectedness-relationships-strengthen-resilience/](https://navstress.wordpress.com/2019/02/07/connectedness-relationships-strengthen-resilience/).
This winter, our holidays will probably look different due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although uncertainty and change could be sources of distress, there are ways to take action now and throughout the holiday season to help build your resilience and protect your emotional health. Here are some of the top tips for navigating a different kind of holiday this year.

**Acknowledge your feelings.** If you’ve lost a loved one this year, or if you aren’t going to be able to visit in the traditional ways, it’s ok to express your feelings of sadness, anger or disappointment. Just because it’s the holidays, it doesn’t mean you have to pretend to be jolly.

**Make a plan but be flexible.** Every situation is unique, and commands may have different guidance in place during the holiday season in regard to travel. Things change quickly, and plans may have to be altered for your own health or for local conditions. Try to take things in stride as they come, without pressure or expectation.

**Stick to your budget.** It’s always tempting to overspend during the holidays, and this year’s online shopping is more tempting than ever. Make a plan now for your holiday spending and hold yourself accountable to it. Too many purchases now may be a short-term pleasure now but a long-term headache next year.

**Be creative.** A big holiday gathering may be out of reach, but thanks to technology, we can still make meaningful connections this season. Virtual events with loved ones can help bridge the gap until in-person visits are possible. Maybe a holiday movie marathon, shared online in your pajamas, or a virtual gathering for a special football game – it’s more about being connected than about how we connect.

**Find meaning.** Many people find charitable work to be rewarding, especially during the holidays. Many organizations need volunteers no-contact drop off donations or consider sending a donation to your favorite charity in a loved one’s name.

**Take care of your health.** Don’t abandon healthy habits like exercise and good nutrition, even if you’re off duty. If you’re celebrating with alcohol, don’t overindulge. Get plenty of sleep. Be outside if you can. Self-care doesn’t take a holiday.

We will all need to rethink our “regular” holiday routines for 2020, but we can still capture the feeling of togetherness and make it a holiday to remember.