



# LIFELINK

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# NEWSLETTER

**Page 1**  
We Need to Talk: Message from the Admiral

**Page 2**  
July Plan of the Week Notes, Lifelink Spotlight

**Page 3**  
Suicide Prevention and the 101 Critical Days of Summer

## We Need to Talk

*By Rear Admiral Philip E. Sobeck  
Director, 21st Century Sailor Office*

My story isn't unique, but I wish it was.

I lost a shipmate to suicide. He was a fellow officer, and he was my boss. Our families knew each other, and I thought he was happy. After he died, though, we "connected the dots" and saw where we had missed signs that he was in pain. I know he didn't talk about the things he struggled with and I wish he would have. I wish I would have asked.

Too many times, we shy away from those tough conversations. It's past time that we change that. As brothers and sisters in arms, we have great influence and impact on our shipmates. We work together in close quarters and for long hours on challenging missions. There are opportunities every day to learn about what our teammates are going through. We must be brave in asking the tough questions and in showing we truly care.

Negative attitudes about mental illness keep people from sharing their situation and asking for help. Lead by example. Talk about mental health openly, honestly and supportively, just like you would about physical health. Mental health issues are common, and they're treatable. We have resources like medical providers and the Counseling Advocacy Program, and confidential support is available through our Navy chaplains or the Military Crisis Line. We can do better at sharing and using these resources.

Most Sailors who die by suicide experienced multiple stressors before their deaths, including relationship issues, transitions, and career or personal setbacks. Maybe they put on a good front to the world, but our annual case reviews consistently reveal missed opportunities after the fact. How do we make sure we don't miss something so important?

Sailors may try to compartmentalize their personal stressors to stay focused on the mission, but it's likely that stressors will spill over into their work performance. Things will seem off, and you can step in to help. For example, if you work with a Sailor who used to be engaged and happy, but now seems withdrawn,

unable to focus or easily agitated, these can be signs of a crisis. They are opportunities for supportive conversation and ACTION: Ask, Care, Treat.

Talk to the Sailor one-on-one and mention that you've noticed that they haven't seemed like themselves lately. **Ask** directly, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" You can follow up with questions like, "Do you have a plan to kill yourself?" Show them you **care** by listening without judgement and paying close attention to warning signs, like statements about not wanting to live, feeling like a burden, feeling hopeless or discussion of lethal means. Help them get to **treatment** immediately and escort them to a medical professional or Navy chaplain for safety. You can also call the Military Crisis Line with them. Know the facts about seeking help, and share them. Sometimes people worry that their security clearance will be immediately revoked if they seek help. In fact, less than one percent of security clearance denials or revocations are related to mental health concerns. If you know their friends or family, consider talking with them, too. If you've seen a change, they probably have, too, and may be able to give a more complete picture of what's going on.

Having these conversations may mean you're able to get the Sailor the help they need, but your responsibility doesn't end with a hand-off. We have to support our Sailors throughout the process, regardless of the level of care needed to help the Sailor bounce back. If you're the supervisor, make sure that they have ample time to attend appointments and help them overcome logistical barriers. If you're a co-worker, check in to see how things are going. Offer to help in whatever way makes sense for you. The only wrong choice is to do nothing.

I can't go back and change anything from before my boss died. I can try to change how we talk about mental health and give you the tools to ACT when you see a fellow Sailor struggling. I'm asking you to share those tools and to help change those conversations, too. Our Navy needs every one of our Sailors and we must be there for Every Sailor, Every Day.



## Lifelink Spotlight

### Navy Medicine West Teaches Peer-to-Peer Suicide Intervention

The Chief of Naval Operation's "**Every Sailor, Every Day**" (ESED) campaign seeks to empower behavior change by providing Sailors and families with ways to support themselves and each other. At Navy Medicine West, pastoral care leaders are promoting enhanced peer-to-peer intervention activities that support ESED's goals.

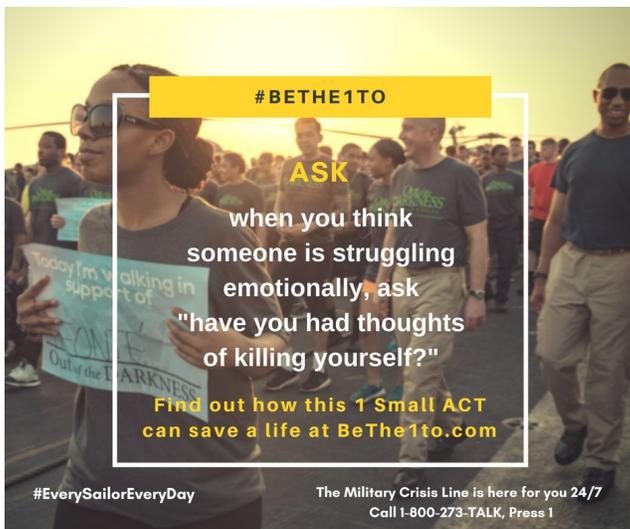
According to Capt. Mil Yi, regional chaplain at Navy Medicine West and pastoral care department head at Naval Medical Center San Diego, awareness is the first step in preventing suicide, but peer-to-peer intervention can be crucial as well. Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) gives people the confidence to provide immediate suicide intervention help.

"When you're with your buddies and you get the feeling something is wrong, when you sense someone has thoughts of suicide, you don't need to wait for help from the chaplain or medical," said Yi. "You can engage first aid and bandage the pain, keeping them safe until you can get them professional help."

ASIST is a two-day, two-trainer, interactive workshop designed for everyone. ASIST can provide family, friends and community members, as well as those in formal helping roles, with the skills necessary to ensure they are prepared to provide suicide first aid help. Participants learn to recognize when someone may have thoughts of suicide and work with them to create a plan that will support their immediate safety.

"The course teaches you to be ready and able. The willingness to help will come as you go through the course as you develop the skills. You want to be that first aid. You want to be that first aid worker. You want to be the life guard to save someone from the river of suicide," said Yi.

ASIST classes are locally-led. For information about upcoming classes, contact your local chaplain's office.



## Plan of the Week Notes

Below are sample Plan of the Week notes aligning with topics covered by the Every Sailor, Every Day campaign during the month of July:

1. Summer safety tip: It's not unusual to feel under pressure during the summer. Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves may mean a loss of connection to friends and family. If you're transitioning this summer, make sure to prioritize staying in touch with your loved ones throughout the process. If you're welcoming new people to your workplace or neighborhood, take time to get to know them and to check on how they're doing. #1SmallACT can make a big difference.
2. The Navy's non-disciplinary self-referral process allows you to seek help and remain an active-duty Sailor. The intent of a self-referral is to provide you with a means of intervening in the progression of alcohol abuse early enough to get help before a problem becomes more advanced and difficult to resolve without risk of disciplinary action. More information, including contact info for the Navy Alcohol Abuse Prevention, (NAAP) office, is available on the NAAP website at <https://go.usa.gov/xEejq>. Refer to OPNAVINST 5350.4D for details and official policies.
3. As part of ongoing Navy Family Framework efforts to expand and improve the experience for spouses, Navy recently announced that Sailors may be reimbursed up to 500 dollars for state licensure and certification costs of a spouse arising from relocation to another state due to a permanent change of station (PCS) move in NAVADMIN 134/19, June 24. The spouse licensure reimbursement is the latest in a series of Navy Family Framework efforts to improve the experience for Navy spouses and families. For details, see the Navy.mil article at [https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story\\_id=110019](https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=110019).
4. As Sailors, sleep can seem like a low priority relative to mission demands, and surviving off of little to no sleep is often worn like a badge of honor. However, the amount of sleep the body needs doesn't vary by individual—seven to eight hours of uninterrupted sleep per night is ideal for all Sailors. Crew Endurance, developed by Naval Postgraduate School with collaboration from Navy's Operational Stress Control Program, offers practical tips, research and operational tools for promoting adequate rest on their website at <http://go.usa.gov/x3sBz>.

## News and Resources

Many Young People Engage in 'Disordered Eating' to Bulk Up  
[National Institute for Mental Health](#)

MyNavyFamily App Released  
[NavyNavStress](#)

Mental Health Resources for Suicide Survivors  
[American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#)

inTransition Provides Free, Confidential Coaching and Resources  
[Psychological Health Center of Excellence](#)

Real Risks of Marijuana Use  
[SAMHSA](#)

Practicing Yoga to Stimulate the Mind, Body, Spirit  
[Health.mil](#)

New Clinical Recommendations on TBI Rehabilitation  
[Health.mil](#)

A Mindfulness Meditation Primer  
[Human Performance Resource Center](#)

Parents of Depressed Teens in Treatment May Also Benefit from Counseling  
[National Institute for Mental Health](#)

## Current and Upcoming Events

### SPC Training Webinars

July 11, 8AM CDT  
July 25, 12 NOON CDT  
August 9, 6PM CDT  
[Register here](#)

**International Self Care Day**  
July 24

**101 Critical Days of Summer**  
Memorial Day—Labor Day

**Preventive Health Month**  
August

## Summer Safety: Suicide Prevention During the 101 Critical Days of Summer

The 101 Critical Days of Summer are always a time to focus on safety – responsible drinking, boating safety, swimming safety and more – but suicide prevention efforts aren't always included as a focus. The causes of suicide are complex, and while seasonality and weather are not significant risk factors, researchers have observed some associations between warm weather and suicide rates. Additionally, the stresses of military moves and accompanying separation from known support networks can be very difficult during this time of year. For these reasons and more, suicide prevention efforts are an important part of summer safety.



### Use caution if drinking and watch out for your shipmates if they choose to drink.

Alcohol abuse has been consistently associated with suicidal behavior, according to the National Institutes of Health. Consuming alcohol can lower inhibitions, increase impulsiveness and impair judgement. Alcohol abuse can also lead to social withdrawal, and all of these attributes can lead to greater suicide risk.

**Understand how to reduce access to lethal means.** Reducing access to lethal means of self-harm is key if a person is at risk of suicide, according to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center. Many suicide attempts happen during a short-term crisis, so reducing access to deadly medications or to firearms is important. Always store medications and firearms safely, or remove them from the area completely if you are concerned about those nearby.

**Stay connected during times of change.** Relationships play an invaluable role in our lives and are one of the Principles of Resilience. During the summer, when people are coming and going as a part of Navy life, it's easy to feel disconnected. Check in on your friends who have left and reach out to new people in your community. Help create a feeling of belongingness in those around you and for yourself.

Suicide prevention is an all-hands, year-round responsibility. If you think a shipmate is having trouble navigating stress, ACT (Ask, Care, Treat):

- **Ask.** Ask directly: Are you thinking of killing yourself?
- **Care.** Show that you care by listening without judgment and offering hope. Be there.
- **Treat.** Help your friend connect with a support system immediately. Contact the Military Crisis Line (call 800-273-TALK and Press 1 or text 838255), escort them to the nearest chaplain, provider or leader, or call 911 if danger is imminent. Stay in contact with your friend throughout their treatment to promote a healthy recovery.

The idea that suicides occur more frequently during the holidays is a long-perpetuated myth and one that can be harmful to prevention efforts, according to the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**. A **2016 study in The Journal of Affective Disorders** reviewed 29 science articles from 16 countries and found that suicide attempts were most frequent in spring and summer. Additionally, a **2016 study published in Environmental Health Perspectives** found positive associations between warmer temperatures and suicide in three East Asian countries, regardless of country, age and gender. More recently, a **2018 study in the International Journal of Biometeorology** examined nine major U.S. cities. Researchers found that there was a tendency toward late spring/summer peaks.

The Every Sailor, Every Day campaign has fact sheets, infographics, posters and magnets educating Sailors and families on key Operational Stress Control (OSC) concepts. Visit <https://go.usa.gov/xyEBp> to download materials, including the Principles of Resilience graphic and Lethal Means Safety graphics, or order them free of charge from the Naval Logistics Library.