



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 81

SUICIDE PREVENTION

The last thing that most people expect in life is that their outlook will become so bleak, or that their problems will become so overwhelming, that they will consider suicide as a solution to their problems. If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts you need to know that you are not alone. Statistics tell us that as many as one in six people will become seriously suicidal at some point in their life. Fortunately, most individuals do not act on their suicidal thoughts - crises pass and problems are resolved. In some cases, however, suicidal thoughts can lead to action.

Suicidal thinking is usually associated with problems that can be treated. Clinical depression and anxiety disorders produce profound emotional distress, which can interfere with effective problem solving. If you are facing difficult problems, and are unable to think of solutions other than suicide, it is not that solutions don't exist; you are simply unable to see them at that time. Therapists, counselors, and friends often will be able to help you see the problems that otherwise are not apparent to you. Other encouraging news is that there are new treatments available, and that studies show that the vast majority of people who receive appropriate treatment improve or recover completely. Even if you have received treatment before, it is important to understand that with assistance, an effective treatment combination can be found for you.

Suicidal crises are almost always temporary. Although it might seem as if your unhappiness might never end, it is important to realize that crises are usually limited in duration. Solutions are found, feelings change, unexpected positive events can change your situation. Suicide is sometimes referred to as "a permanent solution to a temporary problem." It is important that you don't let suicide rob you of better times that would have come your way, if only you allowed more time to pass or had asked for help.

Problems are seldom as great as they appear. Job loss, financial problems, loss of important people in our lives - through divorce, separations and death - all such stressful events can seem catastrophic at the time they are happening. Time and assistance can help to make them manageable. Sometimes, imagining yourself "five years down the road" may help you see that a problem that seems catastrophic now will pass and that you can get past your present situation.

Reasons for living can help sustain a person in pain. You too might be able to strengthen your

connection with life if you consider what has sustained you through hard times in the past. Family ties, friends, religion, love of art or nature, and dreams for the future are just a few of many aspects of life that provide meaning and gratification, but which we can lose sight of during an emotional or difficult time.

The important thing to understand is that you should not keep suicidal thoughts to yourself; help is available. The Coast Guard encourages and supports you to come forward and ask for help without fear of retribution. Getting help in a timely manner will allow you to resolve your problems and continue as a productive member of the Coast Guard. Reach out to a friend, a therapist, a family member, a religious/spiritual leader, or to the support network provided by the Coast Guard.

Members of Team Coast Guard can obtain confidential assistance through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP is a professional counseling and referral service designed to help you with your personal, job or family problems. It is free, voluntary, and confidential. This program provides professional counselors that are prepared to assist you with virtually any issue or problem that may arise, including but not limited to concerns such as emotional, family, relationships, alcohol/drug use, job problems, and legal or financial problems. To obtain assistance, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, simply call 1-800-222-0364.

You can also call or visit an Employee Assistance Program Coordinator (EAPC) at a regional work-life staff, which are located at Integrated Support Commands across the country. To contact the office nearest you, call 1-800-872-4957 followed by the extension listed next to these ISC locations: Alameda (252), Boston (301), Cleveland (309), Honolulu (314), Ketchikan (317), Kodiak (563), Miami (307), New Orleans (308), Portsmouth, (305), San Pedro (311), Seattle (313), St. Louis (302), and Washington, DC (932). Discussions of problems with an EAPC are also confidential.

You may also seek help from the Chaplain Corps, which is also a confidential source of assistance, or from military treatment facilities that are on call 24 hours a day to assist you.

The most difficult step in dealing with any problem that appears to be too big to handle is to ask for help. The majority of people around you, whether they are a friend or a stranger, are willing to help someone in need. When you are facing difficult times, it may seem that to ask for help may be viewed as an admission of weakness; to the contrary, asking for help is a sign of strength. It is the most significant step that you can take toward addressing and resolving the problems that face you. If you should find yourself facing troubling times that seem too difficult to handle alone, reach out to someone, anyone, and ask for help. You will likely be surprised just how quickly and effectively someone can help you address your problems.

Medications, which are commonly used to treat mood disorders, have improved in recent years in that they are both more effective in treating the conditions and less likely to have undesirable side effects. This provides greater flexibility and enlightenment with respect to Coast Guard policy on the duration of medication, as well as assignment opportunities for personnel who are diagnosed with mild mood

disorders (i.e. asymptomatic with medication). Consequently, we have just lifted the restriction from sea duty while on such medication. However, all cases of mood disorders which are not deemed to be mild and all mild mood disorders requiring more than a total of forty two months of therapy will require medical boards and consideration within the physical disability evaluation system. Therapy of mood disorders is defined as medication, counseling, psychological or psychiatric therapy.

Regards, FL Ames

P.S. BAH CHANGES!!!!!!!!!!!!

A few weeks ago, I attended a BAH meeting at the Pentagon with my personnel chief counterparts. The main question on the table was whether to restore the 1999 BAH allowance rate to all the areas that decreased in 2000. Based on that meeting and subsequent review, DoD has decided to restore the rates to 1999 BAH levels in any area and for any paygrade that would have seen a decrease in 2000.

Legislation is needed to make retroactive payments of the higher 2000 BAH rates to 01 Jan 2000. At this time, we will begin paying the newer rates effective 1 March sometime this month. Legislation is already drafted to be presented to Congress to request authorization to make back payments retroactive to 01 Jan 2000. In addition, DoD plans to introduce legislation to Congress to eliminate the requirement that members absorb an average 15% of their housing costs over the next five years.

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