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Suicide prevention month: Reach out to help others or seek help

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — September is Suicide Prevention Month. With suicide being the 10th leading cause of death in America it is a good time for each of us to take pause and think about what we can do to reduce and eliminate this National Tragedy.

We all can play a role in preventing suicide. Calling someone that is struggling is not a complicated task, it is simple and in turn tells the person called they have value and you care. Best of all, this simple act of kindness can help someone feel they are not alone.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense is teaching people today that preventing suicide can start with the very simple act of reaching out to people who are in crisis. They are asking all to “be there” and this is something we all can do. Most members of our community who end their lives by suicide are alone. If each person had just one person who would “be there,” this pandemic could soon lose its place as the 10th leading cause of death.

Making yourself available for someone in crisis doesn’t need specialized training. If you know someone in crisis, calling often and checking in with them will allow that person the opportunity to open up about problems and issues. The most important thing we can do is to show genuine, heartfelt support for someone going through a rough period in their life. You might worry about what to say, but just calling and saying “Hello, how are you doing?” is enough to open the door to a good conversation.

Here are a few tips when talking to someone who is in a possible suicide risk or having a life crisis:

- Remain calm
- Listen more than you speak
- Maintain eye contact in person or listen intently on the phone
- Speak and act in confidence
- Don’t argue, and speak with assurance
- Limit your questions in a casual talk format and gather information casually
- Always use supportive and encouraging comments
- Be honest an upfront as possible

When talking keep in mind the following signs of crisis:

- Is the individual thinking about hurting or killing oneself?
- Is the individual looking for ways to kill oneself?
- Is the direction of the discussion moving towards talking about death, dying and suicide?

- Are there any destructive behaviors and excessive use of drugs and alcohol involved?

If you notice or witness the signs in either yourself or a friend/neighbor who is a veteran or a service member, please call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and press 1, or go to the <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>, or send a text to 838255 and receive confidential support 24 hours a day.

Each one of us can be there for a friend or neighbor. If you just want to stop by my office for a cup of coffee that's ok, its free, and my staff or I will be more than pleased to speak with you. For directions to the office or if you just want to talk, give us a call our phone number is 907-334-0874 or toll-free 888-248-3682. I believe together we "be there" for one another to change this National Tragedy of Suicide that is affecting our Veterans, military members and their families.

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