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The one thing that will save a human life is a human relationship

Although suicide remains a relatively uncommon event, it is a tragic loss of life with devastating consequences for families, workmates/colleagues and the organisation in general. Intervening with people who have thoughts of suicide or who have engaged in suicide-related behaviour is possible. However, it does require a determined and focused commitment from all members of the ADF.

Suicide is a difficult subject but it is everyone’s business.

What makes a person engage in suicidal behaviour(s)?

Everyone has different levels of tolerance to stress and pain and we all try to cope as best we can during significant and sometimes painful changes in our lives. However, sometimes the burden of pain and suffering can be so great that an individual is overwhelmed to a point where he/she loses their usual effective coping ability. Suicide may be considered by an overwhelmed individual; however, these thoughts and feelings can be overcome with effective support and intervention.

What are the risk factors?

While there is no ‘typical’ profile for someone who may contemplate suicide, there are some common risk factors that we all need to be aware of in an effort to save lives. Some of these factors include, but are not limited to:

- significant losses (death of a loved one, pet, loss of a relationship)
- feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- lack of current and accessible social supports that the person is willing to use
- mental health concerns
- past history of suicide-related behaviour
- emotional pain that does not seem to have an end.

Secure LIFE

L LOCATE HELP
I INFORM – chain of command
F FIND – someone to stay with the person
E EXPEDITE – get help immediately

Do not joke about suicide

This will contribute to the stigma surrounding suicide and mental health and make it harder for an individual who is thinking about suicide to seek help. It is mandated in Defence policy that an individual’s Commander must be notified if you witness any comment or gesture implying suicidal thoughts or behaviours. It is the responsibility of all Defence personnel to respond to the risk of suicide.

What should I look for?

Signs are simply those things that alert us to the possibility that someone may be thinking about suicide. If we see or hear signs, they are an opportunity for us to ask if the person is thinking of suicide. Asking does not increase the likelihood of suicide.

People can become very frightened if they see these signs, but it’s vital to remember that signs may be an attempt by a person at risk of suicide to communicate that they are not coping and that they are overwhelmed by intense emotional pain. This pain is often associated with stressful events and/or loss.

Signs may appear as changes in a person’s situation, their behaviour(s), physical state, thoughts, and/or emotions/feelings. These may include:

- talk or hints of suicidal behaviour
- preoccupation with death
- giving away possessions
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