



**DEFENSE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE**

For Psychological Health & Traumatic Brain Injury

# **Depression: What Unit Leaders Need to Know**

## **What is Depression?**

Depression is a serious medical disorder that can affect a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviors resulting in a range of symptoms. If depression is left unrecognized and untreated, it can severely damage a service member's career and relationships. As leaders, it's important to recognize depression in your service members and get them help.

## **Facts about Depression:**

- Depression is one of the most common psychological health disorders
- Depression can affect anyone, from the newest recruit to the commander in chief
- Nearly ten percent of Americans have depression in any given year
- Depression is one of the most treatable psychological health disorders with several effective treatment options available

## **TIP OF THE ICEBERG**

Apathy

Irritable

Looks Tired

Frequent Mistakes

Late for Work

## **BELOW THE SURFACE**

Depressed Mood

Low Energy

Poor Concentration

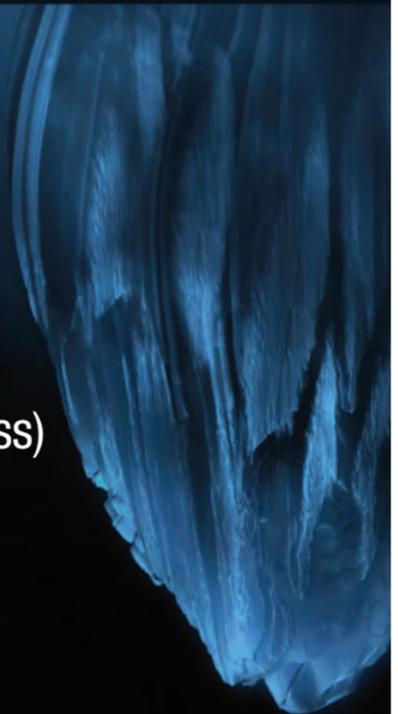
Insomnia/Poor Sleep

Fatigue (Excessive Tiredness)

Low Appetite/Weight Loss

Hopeless About Future

Thoughts of Suicide



## TIP OF THE ICEBERG

It's easy to assume that a service member who starts making mistakes, is 10–20 minutes late to formations at times and is now irritable just has a “bad attitude.” A good leader will know to look beyond the surface and will look into **Why** the member's behavior has changed.

## BELOW THE SURFACE

For service members struggling with depression, the symptoms can make getting through a normal day seem monumental. Often they will have to function on two to three hours of sleep a night, have no desire to eat and feel tired all the time. These are all things people usually try to hide from others, especially at their commands.

## What can you do to help your service members?

- Know your service members so that you recognize when their behaviors change dramatically
- Give your service members the benefit of the doubt—if you do notice dramatic changes, inquire about the changes rather than make assumptions
- Know the symptoms of depression and don't be afraid to ask if a person has them
- Try to encourage service members who need care to go in for help, recommend that they look into off-base or online resources if they are hesitant

## Things to avoid when it comes to helping

- Don't try to act as a counselor or therapist—if service members need help, encourage them to see a professional
- Don't ignore the problem—hoping the person “snaps out of it” is not an acceptable plan
- Don't remove them from leadership positions simply because they have depression
- DO NOT leave a service member who is suicidal alone—immediately get them to a professional qualified to do a medical evaluation
- Do not discuss the service member's issues with others in the unit

# **Why Every Unit Leader Needs to Care About Psychological Health Conditions**

Leaders at all levels need to know the realities of how psychological health conditions affect the unit's ability to perform its mission. Untreated psychological health conditions can lead to a loss of personnel or a loss in mission capability.

## Loss of Personnel

- **Administrative Separation**— Service members who have unrecognized psychological health conditions are at risk of separation for pattern of misconduct (driving under the influence, insubordination, unauthorized absence/absent without leave)
- **Medical Separation**—When service members delay care too long, psychological conditions may worsen and increase the likelihood of a medical separation
- **Suicide**—Service members who feel trapped with no options may turn to suicide

## Loss in Mission Capability

- **Low Productivity**—Service members who suffer from depression or other conditions are not able to perform at their best
- **Mistakes**—Service members who are not able to concentrate and have poor memory are more likely to make errors, which can affect a unit's ability to meet requirements
- **Attrition**—Units that lose too many personnel due to not recognizing problems and/or delaying getting its members into care may not be able to meet their missions



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