



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

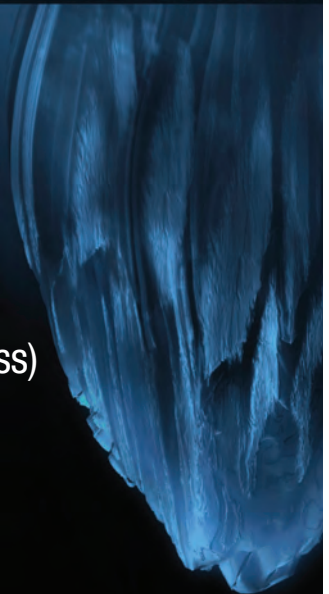
Insomnia/Poor Sleep

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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