

Resources for Airmen Facing Legal Stressors:

Airman & Family Readiness Center: Financial counseling, transitional assistance, job resumes, Air Force Aid.

Area Defense Counsel (ADC): Personal assistance and guidance with legal concerns. Can provide realistic information about the nature of the legal issues faced and possible options of redress.

Chaplain: Offers complete confidentiality for Airmen to discuss their spiritual concerns without risk of impacting their legal case. Provides spiritual assistance and help with relationship concerns.

Family Advocacy Program: Couples and family counseling, parenting issues, New Parent Support Program.

Health and Wellness Center: Multiple services to address fitness, nutrition, tobacco cessation, stress management, and other health-related issues.

Life Skills Support Center (LSSC): Counseling and/or medications to manage the stress induced by the investigation and address any psychiatric disorders that may be present. Treatment regimens are individualized to address the Airman's specific concerns (anxiety, depression, substance abuse, relationship issues, goal-setting, etc).

Most Important Resources of All: Family, friends, church, unit, community, and all other people you may know who may offer support to the individual under investigation.

Limited Privilege Suicide Prevention Program (LPSPP):

IAW AFI-44-109 Airmen believed to be at risk for suicide can be referred to the LSSC for evaluation and placement into the LPSPP. This program expands confidentiality for Airmen so long as they are deemed a suicide risk by the LSSC. Their disclosures while in the program are considered protected (with limited exceptions) from legal discovery during investigations and Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) proceedings. However, these communications are not completely protected from use by a commander for administrative action. As such, LPSPP is limited in its scope. However, the real value is that it can connect an Airman in distress with a provider at the LSSC.



Investigator's Guide For Assisting Airmen Under Investigation

Resources for Suicide Prevention



Airmen with legal stressors: A high-risk population

Airmen under investigation are at an elevated risk for suicide. Suicide risk is elevated for those who have received an unfavorable information file (UIF) or face possible loss of a career through involuntary separation. Expect investigations of any type (i.e., Office of Special Investigations, the Inspector General, civilian criminal investigations, commander-directed investigations) to increase stress as they are time-consuming, have uncertain outcomes, and carry consequences for an individual's reputation and career, either within or outside of the military.

To reduce suicide risk, investigators must recognize the unique risk factors of personnel who are facing legal stressors. This pamphlet is designed to assist investigators by outlining helping resources and specific action strategies.

Key Support Steps:

Investigators can help reduce the risk for those under investigation by using the following guidelines:

- **Investigation hand-off.** Airmen must be handed off directly to their supervisor, commander, or first sergeant immediately following any investigative subject interview. Investigators should observe the Airman's reaction to the interview, coping and emotional state, and provide this information to the individual receiving custody of the Airman. The Investigator should also be ready to immediately engage helping agencies if/when needed.
- **Move investigations along without compromising sufficiency.** One of the greatest stressors for an Airman is the time spent awaiting the completion of the investigation while the future is unknown.
- **Timing of notification.** When possible, attempt to interview Airmen under investigation early in the week. This provides increased visibility of the affected Airman to their leadership, and allows Airman to access helping agencies (when needed by the member) before the weekend. **Note:** The requirements of an investigation may not permit this, but, if possible, it can help commanders manage the Airman.

When appropriate, and consistent with established procedures, direct subjects to legal resources. Provide the phone number for the ADC and give general guidelines for how they may help. Encourage the individual to use their legal resources.

Why do I care?

While your job is to gather evidence for your investigation, you are also an important link in the chain of suicide prevention. Your intuition and training make you an expert in observing human behavior and you are the first link in preventing the unnecessary death of a subject.

Additionally, establishing a positive relationship with a subject can enhance and facilitate your investigation.

Finally, the goal is an efficient and effective investigation. Your actions could make the difference between an Airman living or dying.

What do I look for?

Investigators should monitor how the subject is managing the stress of the investigation whenever in contact with the individual under investigation.

Be on the lookout for these signs of distress:

- **Increased use of alcohol**
- **Behavioral changes** (*Social isolation, deteriorating work performance, unkempt appearance, decreased participation in activities, increased conflicts*)
- **Cognitive changes** (*decreased concentration, memory lapses*)
- **Mood changes** (*continuously angry, sad, or irritable, and/or frequent mood fluctuations*)
- **Feelings of hopelessness & helplessness** (*"Things will never get better," "There's no way out," "My family would be better off if I were gone," "My life is over."*)
- **Asking about suicide will only help. Talking about suicide does not increase its likelihood.**

Possible subject responses to your inquiries:

Because of your role as the investigator, Airmen may not perceive you as a source of support. You may be met with a range of responses from anger to defensiveness to blank stares. It's still important that you inquire into how the Airman is doing and ask about suicidal ideation.

Assess coping and suicide risk. Consider asking these questions at the conclusion of a subject interview. Although potentially uncomfortable, subjects are unlikely to volunteer this information unless these questions are asked.

- ✧ "How are you dealing with your situation?"
- ✧ "Who are you talking with to help cope with your situation?"
- ✧ "Have you had thoughts about suicide?"
 - If YES:
 - "How might you kill yourself?"
 - "Do you have the means to kill yourself?"
 - "Have you decided when you would kill yourself?"
 - "What keeps you from killing yourself?"
 - "Have you done anything to hurt yourself?"

What to do if an Airman endorses suicidal thoughts:

- ✧ Assess the extent of risk and determine the presence of weapons or other means of self-harm.
 - Ask all the suicide questions above.
- ✧ Your first priority is to keep the Airman safe.
 - Do not leave the Airman alone.
 - Remove all potential weapons and means of harm (over-the-counter and prescription medications, pens, keys, matches, lighters, rope).
- ✧ Contact the Airman's commander immediately so they may coordinate with a Life Skills provider and arrange transport to a LSSC or local emergency room.
- ✧ Supervisory personnel, including commanders, may encourage Air Force members to voluntarily seek mental health care.