



U.S. AIR FORCE

*Frontline Supervisors Training:
Manual for Instructors & Students*

“Good Leadership is Good Prevention”

Frontline Supervisors Training

Overview:

Purpose: This course provides in-depth training for frontline supervisors to enhance your ability to recognize and effectively intervene with personnel suffering from emotional distress secondary to a variety of life problems, and builds upon skills first learned during annual suicide prevention training and various professional military education activities.

Overview: This course is based on the motto that “Good leadership is good prevention.” This is a ½-day workshop for supervisors that provides in-depth training on recognizing and assisting personnel in distress. This course synthesizes learning from PME and other sources, and uses an interactive, participatory, experience-based approach to learning. The course is designed to effectively and affordably meet the needs of supervisors, and emphasizes supervisory skills as much as helping skills. This is not a course on how to be a mini-mental health counselor. Rather, it focuses on the application of supervisory skills to helping Airmen in distress. The workshop can be taught by any motivated leader, educator, or helping professional, and the curriculum was designed to be readily understood out-of-the-box; no train-the-trainer required. The basic message of the course is built around the acronym **PRESS** (Prepare, Recognize, Engage, Send, Sustain), which will be explained in further detail later on in this manual.

Instructors: Instructors will be drawn from IDS organizations and base leaders and should have experience supervising personnel and working with people. An educational or teaching background is useful, but not required. A mental health background is not required. Motivated officers and NCOs from any career field can be successful instructors for this course.

Participants: While the class is designed for supervisors, Airmen of all ranks can benefit from attending this workshop, from junior personnel to senior leaders. The class is equally suited for active duty and civilian employees.

Class Size: Ideally, the class size will run 15-30 participants. The class size needs to be both large enough and small enough to support group discussion. Given that instructors will have varying degrees of comfort with class size, the instructor has final authority on determining class size. Some experienced instructors may be comfortable hosting much larger classes.

Course Materials: The course materials include the training slides and the training manual.

Room Needs & Set-up: The classroom will need to be large enough to accommodate the class size, and can be set up in a traditional classroom style with the students facing forward. Some instructors may prefer to set up the room with the students sitting in a circle facing each other.

Equipment Needs: A projector capable of projecting the slides is ideal. However, there may be certain settings where this is not possible and the instructor can decide to teach from handouts instead.

Handouts: In general, no handouts are necessary for this class. It may be beneficial to send students the slides and training manual via e-mail as reference material after the course.

Experiential Learning: Learning is best with practice and rehearsal, and this course emphasizes interaction and participation. The exercises may be uncomfortable for some students, because many of us don't like being put on the spot in front of others. However, people are likely to remember the lessons better through active practice during this class. Just as no one enters combat without training on the firing range, the time to try out these ideas for the first time is not when the supervisor is face-to-face with distressed Airmen. It is worth explaining at the start of the class that, "It is natural to feel uncomfortable practicing in front of others, but we learn best when we practice. In this class, there are no wrong answers. No one is grading you. No one will criticize your participation. Every comment is practice for the real event."

Instructions for Facilitators: It may surprise some attendees that this training focuses on general distress issues rather than suicide prevention. This course emphasizes seminar-type discussion relying on active facilitation on the part of the instructor. At least half of the total time should be devoted to the exercises and group discussion. This course is not intended to be a briefing or lecture. Careful consideration should be given to class size. In general, the number of attendees should be small enough to set the stage for meaningful discussion and role-playing. There are some facilitators whose experience and comfort-level will allow them to be successful in conducting this workshop with large audiences, but that will be the exception and not the norm. The quality of the presentation will be largely driven by the quality of the presenter, and it will be important to choose the right person to conduct the training. Facilitators must familiarize themselves with the course material and be skilled in fostering group discussions. There is no more certain way of losing your audience than to read from the slides. Lastly, the small-group design of the course will create challenges in training large numbers of front-line supervisors at the installation level without over tasking the talented cadre of presenters identified to conduct this training. Reaching 100% of frontline supervisors with this training must be viewed as a long-term project.

Slide Notes: Every slide is explained in narrative form in this manual. It is not necessary to cover every bullet on every slide. Students can see the slides on the screen, and will have them to refer back to after the course.

Course Evaluation: A course evaluation form is provided at Appendix B for use if desired.

Course Agenda & Recommended Timeline:

1. Introduction – 20 minutes
2. Exercise #1 – 20 minutes
3. PRESS – 10 minutes
4. Prepare – 20 minutes
5. Exercise #2 – 20 minutes
6. Break – 15 minutes
7. Recognize – 10 minutes
8. Exercise #3 – 20 minutes
9. Engage – 20 minutes
10. Exercise #4 – 40 minutes
11. Break – 15 minutes
12. Send – 10 minutes
13. Sustain – 20 minutes
14. Exercise #5 – 20 minutes
15. Conclusion – 10 minutes

Introduction:

Good Leadership is Good prevention

The Wingman Culture is central to the Air Force's approach to taking care of its number one resource: its people. Being great Wingmen involves both taking care of yourself and taking care of those around you. We won't be in any position to help our fellow Airmen if we don't first take care of our own stress and health. The Wingman Culture is, at its core, a Culture of Responsible Choices. Airmen take care of Airmen by making responsible decisions that keep themselves and each other safe and healthy.

Purpose

The purpose of this workshop is to provide in-depth training for frontline supervisors to enhance your ability to recognize and effectively intervene with personnel suffering from emotional distress secondary to a variety of life problems. The course material builds upon the skills first learned during annual suicide prevention training and various professional military education activities.

The Military is a Demanding Profession

Today's military is very much about coping with high demands. High standards of personal conduct expected for Airmen, both on and off duty. Airmen move frequently, often are stationed far from their home of origin and extended families, and must deploy around world to austere and hostile locations. AF personnel work long work hours to complete the mission, both at the home station and when deployed. All these factors put pressure on our Airmen and their families, and it is common for our Airmen to feel overwhelmed or stretched too thin.

Supervisors

Supervisors are also often busy and overworked, and are responsible for managing multiple mission-related and administrative tasks. Supervisors often oversee units that are understaffed and personnel who are young and inexperienced, and must frequently deal with time consuming personnel problems.

Military Team

Despite these pressures, military life can be highly rewarding. Airmen can feel pride in serving their country and a sense of professional accomplishment through their training and the performance of their duties. We get to travel around the country and the world, visit exotic locales, and experience different cultures. Unit camaraderie and the sense of base community can be highly rewarding, as well as supportive during difficult times. Daily life in the Air Force is imbued with a powerful team spirit, and commanders, supervisors, Airmen, families, and helping agencies are all vital members of this team.

Why the frontline supervisor?

The frontline supervisor is the key to helping airmen in distress because you spend time every day at work with your personnel. You're familiar with their typical behavior and you may be the first to see problems develop. All these factors make the supervisor the first line of defense in assisting personnel who are in distress. In addition, supervisors who are proactive in fostering emotional wellness and stress management

can help protect their subordinates from undue stress. The impact of distress amongst Airmen is an overall lowering of individual and unit readiness.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the pressures you see facing the members of today's military?
2. What pressures do supervisors have to deal with?

Exercise #1:

This exercise serves both as an ice breaker to get participants in the discussion mode and to get them thinking about how much they really know about their Airmen.

Going around the room in turn, participants answer one or more of these questions (the instructor decides in advance which ones):

1. Why did you join the military?
2. Why did you stay in the military?
3. What does the military mean to you?

After everyone has had their turn, the instructor asks the group: "Do you know the answers to these questions for your Airmen?"

PRESS Approach to Aiding Personnel in Distress:

Helping Airmen in distress can be succinctly summarized with the acronym PRESS, which is summarized briefly here and will be explained in detail as we move through the workshop. PRESS stands for Prepare, Recognize, Engage, Send, and Sustain. Prepare means laying the groundwork ahead of time by connecting with your people. Recognize means identifying personnel in distress. Engage means intervening with and assisting distressed personnel. Send means referring Airmen to the most appropriate place for help. Lastly, Sustain means the supervisors must follow-up regularly with the distressed Airmen until they are certain the problem is adequately resolved.

Prepare:

Connect with Your People

Trust

We cannot help Airmen in distress unless we first lay the preparatory groundwork by connecting with our personnel. It has been said that “nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care.” Your Airmen need to know you and trust you before you can be in a position to help them during times of crisis. You can’t help them if you don’t know their problems, and they won’t trust you with their problems if you don’t take the time to get to know them.

Know Your People

It is part of our job as supervisors to talk to our people about their lives whenever possible. This is crucial to establishing a foundation of trust between the supervisor and the subordinate. We need to get to know our people (e.g., are they married, do they have children, and, if so, what school do they attend?) If they are single, who is important in their life? What is going on in their life? Do they need assistance with anything? It is also important to follow up on what they have told you (e.g., ask about how their daughter’s graduation went, whether they are having problems with their insurance company after the car accident, or if they are still planning on going camping with their brother this summer). You have to show true concern for their well being, on and off duty.

It is easier to recognize distress if you know how someone acts when things are normal. The best way to know how someone acts when things are normal is to get to know them. If you know what they care about, for example, then you will probably notice when they stop caring about it. If they start coming in late to work every day, you’ll remember that they were always punctual in the past. You know when something is wrong with your close friends or family because you know them very well. For this reason, you have a responsibility to know your Airmen, as well.

Build Good Working Relationships

Leaders who focus solely on the mission can neglect interpersonal factors critical to unit morale. When Airmen know their leaders have their best interests in mind, they tend to perform better, take personal ownership of the mission accomplishment, and are more likely to perceive that they will receive help if they should ever need it. Leaders need to balance building relationships and getting tasks accomplished – both are necessary to accomplish the mission. During times of increased operational tempo, with short deadlines and difficult missions, leaders often need to make an extra effort to maintain good relationships with their Airmen. Cohesive units with strong morale perform better under both routine and duress conditions. Leaders must take the time from the very beginning to build that cohesion, so that when that unit is called upon, the Airmen already know and trust each other.

Avoid the Disconnect

It can be easy to become absorbed in the mission requirements and neglect knowing your Airmen. Practical ways to ensure you get to know your Airmen and avoid getting disconnected include walking around the duty section as often as you can and ask about how things are going at work, at home, and personally.

Interact with your Airmen to convey interest and concern for their welfare, and spend time listening to their concerns and their ‘war stories.’ Cultivate your ability to listen attentively, and always try to handle situations fairly and avoid favoritism.

How do you talk to your Airmen? Do you listen attentively or look at your watch when they’re speaking with you? Does what you say match up with how you act? Do you support them (to the extent possible) when they need assistance in non-emergency matters?

Avoiding becoming disconnected from your personnel involves making them feel comfortable about coming to you, creating an atmosphere of trust, and building a climate that fosters two-way communication. Your Airmen need to hear the message that their personal and professional well-being is important to you, that you are interested in hearing about their ‘stories’ and problems, that you’ll support them in finding viable solutions to problems, and that they are a valued and vital part of the unit/team. You must let them know that you believe seeking help for distress shows strength, responsibility, maturity, good judgment, and courage.

Supervisor Actions

Good leadership helps Airmen in distress; the following supervisor actions can help improve your leadership skills, build a healthier work climate, and foster trust amongst your subordinates:

1. Don’t forget leadership skills taught in PME, through mentoring and unit training
2. Make good use of performance feedback sessions; tell the good and bad news
3. Find a mentor, be a mentor
4. Periodically assess your supervisory skills and actions with peers and subordinates alike
5. Examine organizational climate via surveys and interviews
6. Look for leadership actions that alleviate job stress (e.g., time off, gatherings, cookouts, sports)
7. Be comfortable asking tough questions
8. Practice builds experience, expertise, and comfort level
9. Publicly encourage help seeking behavior (i.e., through memos, local policies, or meetings)
10. Set tone that asking for help is perfectly OK
11. Support attendance at prevention or treatment programs (allow flexible work schedules to facilitate attendance when possible)
12. Encourage healthy lifestyle choices (e.g., exercise, eating, and drinking habits)
13. Role model healthy self care and good work ethic; your Airmen are watching your behavior

Healthy, supportive relationships have been shown to be the main factor in helping people get through difficult times. Therefore, it is very important to develop and maintain these relationships in your units. We have a number of ways to do that (e.g., the Buddy System). Supervisors should emphasize the value of healthy relationships, foster an environment of self care and peer support, and encourage the development of peer support networks. Make sure everyone understands and applies the Wingman Concept. Supporting each other enhances the mission and people of integrity care about each other’s well-being.

Discussion Questions

1. How well do you think you know your people? How can you check?
2. How do you ask about home life or personal issues?

Note: Sometimes the best time to get this kind of information is at those informal moments of the day,

like hanging around at breaks or lunch.

Exercise #2:

The purpose of this exercise is to get participants thinking about the subtle day-to-day interactions between supervisors and Airmen that create an atmosphere of trust and open communication. In this exercise, a scenario is read aloud four times with four different final supervisor comments. The instructor will play the supervisor, and one of the participants will be asked to play the Airman. After each round, the group will discuss the likely impact the supervisor's response had on the Airman and the likelihood that the Airman would mention personal problems to the supervisor in the future.

Round #1:

Supervisor: "How are you doing this morning?"

Airman: "I guess I'm OK. Traffic was terrible this morning. I got caught behind an accident. Right in front of me, a guy ran a red light and slammed into the car ahead of me. I almost plowed into the two of them, but hit the brakes just in time. Nobody was hurt, but it still really shook me up. Anyways, it took a long time to get traffic moving again. I was worried I'd be late for work."

Supervisor: "That's interesting. [looking at his watch] Well, you know we have staff meeting in five minutes. Better get to it."

Impact of Supervisor's Response: Supervisor is conveying disinterest and lack of caring about Airman's situation.

Round #2:

Supervisor: "How are you doing this morning?"

Airman: "I guess I'm OK. Traffic was terrible this morning. I got caught behind an accident. Right in front of me, a guy ran a red light and slammed into the car ahead of me. I almost plowed into the two of them, but hit the brakes just in time. Nobody was hurt, but it still really shook me up. Anyways, it took a long time to get traffic moving again. I was worried I'd be late for work."

Supervisor: "That's interesting. I sailed in this morning, hitting green lights the whole way. You know, I usually avoid Main Street and get to base faster using Montgomery Avenue. There are fewer lights and less traffic going that way."

Impact of Supervisor's Response: Supervisor is focusing on his/herself rather than the Airman's situation.

Round #3:

Supervisor: "How are you doing this morning?"

Airman: "I guess I'm OK. Traffic was terrible this morning. I got caught behind an accident. Right in front of me, a guy ran a red light and slammed into the car ahead of me. I almost plowed into the two of them, but hit the brakes just in time. Nobody was hurt, but it still really shook me up. Anyways, it took a long time to

get traffic moving again. I was worried I'd be late for work.”

Supervisor: “That’s interesting. It sure sounds like a hassle. Why didn’t you leave earlier to give yourself plenty of time to get to work? You can never predict when an accident will slow things down.”

Impact of Supervisor’s Response: Supervisor is being critical and comes across as uncaring.

Round #4:

Supervisor: “How are you doing this morning?”

Airman: “I guess I’m OK. Traffic was terrible this morning. I got caught behind an accident. Right in front of me, a guy ran a red light and slammed into the car ahead of me. I almost plowed into the two of them, but hit the brakes just in time. Nobody was hurt, but it still really shook me up. Anyways, it took a long time to get traffic moving again. I was worried I’d be late for work.”

Supervisor: “That’s interesting. I’m glad you weren’t hurt. Are you sure you’re OK? Do you need some time to get some coffee and clear you head? I know staff meeting is in five minutes, but we can sit and talk for a few minutes, if you’d like. The boss won’t mind if we’re late, especially after all you’ve been through this morning.”

Impact of Supervisor’s Response: Supervisor expresses understanding, caring, and support.

Optional alternative exercise: This exercise serves to get participants thinking more closely about how well they know their personnel. The instructor asks the group to think of the person at work whom they know the least well and asks, “Now, do you know if he/she is married, his/her spouse’s name, if he/she has any children (and how many and their names), and his/her favorite activity?” The instructor asks for a show of hands after each question.

Recognize:

Identifying Personnel in Distress

Sources of Distress

Distress can arise from a variety of sources, depending on the person and their situation. Sources of distress include deployments, work, school, legal issues, finances, health concerns, relationships, family, traumatic events (e.g., car accident or assault), and unrealistic expectations (either for oneself or from others).

Signs of Distress

The signs of distress are many, and include the belief there is no solution or no way out, feelings of hopelessness, anxiety or nervousness, agitation, anger, irritability, frequent arguments, indecisiveness, isolation and social withdrawal, depression, low self-esteem, constant fatigue, trouble concentrating, change in appetite or weight, insomnia, excessive sleeping, upset stomach, frequent headaches, loss of interest in work or normal activities, talking about death or suicide, and neglecting one’s responsibilities.

Consequences of Distress

Distress can negatively impact job performance. The impact of distress amongst Airmen is an overall lowering of individual and unit readiness. Research has proven that distressed Airmen are less efficient and productive at work and are absent from work more often. They are more likely to be late for work, to miss deadlines, to make faulty decisions and mistakes, and to experience accidents. They exhibit lower morale and have more arguments with supervisors, co-workers, and customers. All these factors disrupt unit functioning and cohesiveness.

Factors that Protect Against Distress

Traits or qualities that make individuals more resistant to stress and less likely to feel distressed include optimism about your future, strong social support from family, friends, and co-workers, the belief that your life has purpose and meaning, the feeling that you belong to a group (e.g., your unit or social circle), the willingness to seek help, the willingness to talk about your problems, effective coping and problem solving skills, and cultural or organizational norms that encourage people to seek help.

Look For:

Supervisors should be on the watch for any unusual or sudden changes in behavior, appearance, hygiene, demeanor, emotions, work performance, or relationships at work or at home. These can be the telltale signs of a larger problem.

When to be concerned?

Supervisors should get worried when an Airman is experiencing severe, prolonged, or unmanageable stress, is having difficulty coping or functioning, lacks adequate social supports, is using more and more alcohol, feels worthless, hopeless, or depressed, or has a past history of prior suicide attempts. These are indicators that the Airman needs professional help.

Exercise #3:

These exercises serve to get participants talking about difficult situations and how they are handled, based on their direct experience as a supervisor dealing with personnel and/or their own stressful experiences. The instructor will ask participants to read the scenario, and the group will discuss the both what concerns them about the case and what might be done to help the Airman. The instructor can choose to use one, two, or all three of the scenarios.

Scenario #1: Boss, I just don't know what to do anymore! I have enough work for two people and it's getting harder to meet all the deadlines. Right now, it just seems like I'll never get caught up with all my work. And yesterday was horrible! The baby was up screaming three times in the middle of the night, so I was even more tired than usual. When I woke up in the morning, my landlord had sent me an e-mail telling me he was coming back from overseas and that I'd need to move. We each have a military clause in the lease, so it's legitimate, but I just don't have the time or energy to move right now. And then, on the way home, after staying late on catch up on paperwork, some guy tries to go straight in a left-turn only lane and side swipes my car. Nobody was hurt and my car's drivable, but now I have to go through the hassle of getting the car fixed. I just don't know how much more I can take.

Scenario #2: I'm sorry, boss. I never meant to let you down like this. I'm feeling pretty discouraged about this whole thing. When I went to buy that car, I really intended to get something I could afford. The salesman talked me into buying that Mustang – he told me he had sold lots of them to guys like me before and they had no problems swinging the payments. Now, I'm way behind on the car payments, I owe money on my credit card, and my landlord is after me for the rent. When that last check bounced, I really thought I had money in the bank. I never had to manage a checkbook before. Yesterday, the commander warned me I was out of chances. Any more screw-ups and I'm gone. With all the hot water I'm in, I'll never dig out. I just don't see how I can save my career. The commander is bound to hear about something else and boot me. I love being in the military. My whole life, I never wanted to do anything else. I just can't go home now – my parents will be so disappointed. Everyone in the family is so proud of me being in the military. They believe I've finally straightened myself out and made something positive of my life. Boy, if they knew the truth, I'd be so embarrassed!

Scenario #3: Boss, I've been feeling pretty down lately. I don't think I've ever felt this badly in my whole life, and I just don't see things getting any better. I'm exhausted all the time, but I can't sleep. I toss and turn all night long. I'm late for work almost every day, and I struggle to get my work done. I feel pretty much useless most of the time. I never have any energy to do anything, not that I ever feel like doing anything anymore anyways. Nothing feels fun or excites me. I just sit around at night watching TV. My house is a pigsty. I'm so embarrassed about the mess that I won't let anyone come over to the house anymore. No one comes over and I never go out. It reminds me of when I was younger and I felt down all the time. The doctor put me on some pills that seemed to help.

Optional alternative exercises:

1) The instructor will ask the group to think about a situation where they dealt with an Airman in distress and how they handled it. The instructor will ask the group: How did you find out he/she was having difficulties? What warning signs did you see? How do you feel about how the situation worked out? How do you feel about how you handled the situation? The instructor will ask for volunteers to share their stories to generate group discussion.

2) The instructor will ask the group to think about a difficult time in their life when things seemed really stressful. The instructor will ask the group: What were your feelings and symptoms? How did people treat you? Who was helpful? What about your direct supervisor? Did you try to get help? Why or why not? The instructor will ask for volunteers to share their stories to generate group discussion.

Engage:

Intervening with Distressed Personnel

Engaging Personnel in Distress

The first step in engaging personnel is not being afraid to ask if everything is going alright for someone, and giving yourself permission to act. Oftentimes, we may be reluctant to intervene, because we're worried about violating someone's privacy. In addition, supervisors are busy and it's easy to dismiss small signs as nothing

to worry about. We need to make time for our Airmen, even though we're busy. The next steps are to listen first, encourage sharing, acknowledge the Airman's distress, and help them make a plan.

People in distress can focus on the negative and lose sight of positive things in their lives, and supervisors need to help reacquaint Airmen with "plus" side of their ledger (i.e., with all the positive things going on in their lives). We need to emphasize hope as an option. Remember to pay attention to both good Airmen and Airmen in trouble. Both suffer distress, and those with disciplinary issues may suffer the greatest stress and be most at risk.

Recognize & Respect Diversity

Supervisors need to recognize and respect diversity, and handle personnel in ways that are sensitive to their individual values and beliefs. Airmen, Sailors, Soldiers and Marines all have unique cultural traditions. Airmen from different career fields will have unique perspectives and professional cultures. Other types of diversity include culture, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, nationality, age, and education, all of which can impact how an individual understands issues and approaches problems. These differences must be understood and respected in order for effective supervision to take place.

Supervisor Actions

The following supervisor actions can help you engage more effectively with your personnel:

1. Be tactful & professional at all times (True leaders maintain composure and dignity)
2. Address concerns directly: Be frank and honest
3. Avoid euphemisms or talking around the subject
4. Express caring and hope
5. Recognize that showing compassion isn't the same as being weak or lacking resolve; supervisors can be both firm and compassionate
6. Monitor your emotions; Angry words or decisions aren't always best
7. Understand that your values are not necessarily your Airman's values - What's best for you isn't always best for them

How do I talk to someone in distress?

Many of us don't have a lot of experience talking to someone who is really upset and might be suicidal. This simple script can help you through the conversation. Start by saying "I've noticed you're feeling upset" and asking "What's going on in your life?" Let them talk and listen carefully. Give them some time to air their feelings. When they're finished, ask "Are you thinking about suicide?" If they say yes, get immediate help. If they say no, ask "What do you think might help?" and "Where would you like to go for help?" Offer to make the call together by saying "Why don't we make the call together?" If you're worried about them and they don't want to get help, you can say "I'm not going to feel comfortable without being sure you're going to get some help." If they're not suicidal but you are concerned and they decide not to seek help, talk to your supervisor.

Discussion Questions

1. How do you listen well?
2. How do you broach sensitive subjects?

3. How do you deliver bad news?
4. How do you offer corrective feedback?
5. How do you deal with someone you don't like, or someone who is difficult to be around?
6. What do you do with someone who refuses to listen, to change, or to get help?
7. How do you offer hope when someone is in serious trouble?

Exercise #4:

This exercise offers direct hands-on practice responding to hypothetical situations involving Airmen in distress. Students will break into pairs and role-play assisting someone in distress. Student pairs can make up their scenario, choose a scenario from Exercise #3, or choose one from the scenario list in the appendix. After each member of the pair has had a chance to play the supervisor, the instructor will ask for volunteers to role-play in front of the group (either two students can role play in front of the group or the instructor can play the supervisor with a student volunteering to play the Airman). This is the most important exercise in the course and instructors should devote plenty of time to this activity.

Send:

Refer Personnel to the Appropriate Helping Agency

Referring

When should the supervisor refer an Airman for help? It's important to think about getting help early and to refer the Airman quickly before the situation has a chance to deteriorate. In general, thoughts, feelings, and behavior that concern you won't improve without dealing with the underlying problem.

Where should the supervisor refer an Airman for help? It really depends on the nature of the problem and the individual's preferences. We must help personnel choose the most appropriate place to go for help, based on the situation, what is needed, the Airman's values, and what is most comfortable for the Airman. Of course, safety should always come first. Supervisors should be familiar with their base's helping resources.

How does the supervisor refer an Airman for help? Contact the agency in question and ask for guidance, and make the call for an appointment together with your Airman. This helps ensure the Airman follows through, and minimizes his/her anxiety and discomfort.

Where to go for help:

There are many places on base to turn to for help, including family, friends, supervisors, first sergeants, commanders, the Mental Health Clinic, the Family Advocacy Program, the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention and Treatment Program, the Base Chaplains, the Airmen and Family Readiness Center, and the Health and Wellness Center. Another valuable resource is Military OneSource (www.militaryonesource.com or 1-800-342-9647), which is available 24/7.

How to Get Urgent Help

If someone admits that they're thinking about suicide, this is a life or death emergency. If the person is willing, take him/her to the emergency room or the Mental Health Clinic immediately. If they refuse or you're not sure what to do, notify your supervisor or call 911 for help. Never leave the person alone, even to go to the bathroom. Remove any means of self harm, including weapons, medications, sharp objects, or rope. Remember, Mental Health personnel on most bases are available for consultation 24/7, and can be reached through the law enforcement desk, the command post, or the clinic's after-hours phone number (if available). In addition, two national suicide prevention hotlines, staffed with counselors, are available at 1-800-SUICIDE or 1-800-273-TALK. By law, only commanders can order Airmen to receive a mental health evaluation, and only when following appropriate procedures.

Mental Health Services

Mental health providers can treat emotional and behavioral problems that impact well-being and duty performance. Many Airmen are worried that their career will suffer or their privacy will be compromised if they seek mental health care. The truth is that, for the vast majority of Airmen who seek mental health care, their privacy is maintained and their career is unharmed. 97 percent of Airmen who seek treatment at Air Force Mental Health Clinics suffer no negative career impact, and, in 90 percent of cases, no one from the unit is ever contacted and their privacy is maintained. Even when commanders are contacted, they're only given fitness for duty and safety information. Remember, by law, only commanders can order Airmen to receive a mental health evaluation, and only when following appropriate procedures.

Sustain:

Follow-up Regularly Until Problem is Resolved

Following Up

It is vitally important for supervisor to maintain frequent contact with an Airman until the situation or problem is resolved. Supervisors should periodically ask about the status of the situation and check to see if the Airman needs anything. You must sustain your commitment and stay involved. Serious negative consequences can result from the failure to follow through. Supervisors must also guard against the disclosure of private personal information to unit members who have no need to know the Airman's personal details. To support the Airman in reintegrating into the unit, make effective use of encouragement and affirmation and help him/her feel accepted and welcome after return from treatment.

Other Issues to Consider

Always keep your chain informed; they can help you think of things that might help. Recognize your limits and realize that there is only so much you can and should do. You need to establish clear boundaries as a supervisor, or you will get burned out. You can't be all things to all people and you need to have your own life, too.

Coping with Bad Outcomes

Even with the best decisions and actions, tragic events will occur. Some individuals are successful at hiding their difficulties until it is too late. Some individuals will take their lives even when given the best help available. Supervisors must recognize that you can take reasonable steps to help prevent many bad outcomes, but you can't prevent all of them.

Managing Stress

Supervisors can help themselves by practicing effective stress management and help their personnel by teaching and modeling effective stress management. One of the most effective stress management tools is healthy self care, which can be summarized by the acronym **STRAIN**:

- S** = Sleep – Get plenty of rest
- T** = Take time off – Leave, vacation, etc.
- R** = Relaxation & recreation – Have fun
- A** = Activity – Exercise regularly
- I** = Inform – Talk to someone
- N** = Nourishment – Eat healthily

Supervisor's Toolkit

The AF Leader's Guide for Managing Personnel in Distress is a powerful tool to aid supervisors in assisting Airmen in distress. The guide was created to help supervisors, first sergeants and commanders recognize distress-related behaviors, provide support to Airmen in need, and work with installation helping agencies to meet those needs. The guide provides a range of supportive intervention methods, resources and strategies for helping Airmen in distress. Air Force leaders often face Airmen in distress from a wide variety of life stressors, and can benefit from having a quick reference at their fingertips to help these Airmen. The guide covers 35 topics related to distress ranging from alcohol and drug abuse to recognizing suicidal behaviors. It focuses on helping leaders employ awareness and intervention strategies before a person has reached a debilitating stress level. The guide is not intended to be a read-from-cover-to-cover resource, but rather a quick and ready reference when confronted with Airmen suffering from distress. Leaders may not have time to research an issue in-depth before they talk to an Airman in crisis. With the guide, they can quickly familiarize themselves with key warning signs and helpful actions in just a few minutes. The guide's checklists provide a convenient, quick resource for leaders. The guide is available in a CD-ROM format that can be obtained from the base suicide prevention program manager, as well as on the AF Suicide Prevention Program website at <http://afspp.afms.mil>.

Exercise #5:

This last exercise gets participants to reflect actively on healthy self care, appropriate work-life balance, and creating a healthy work climate for subordinates.

The instructor will ask the group to reflect on these questions first, reading them all in quick succession and then leading a discussion of the questions as a group.

1. “When was the last time you took time for yourself away from family or work?”
2. “When was the last time you did one of your hobbies?”
3. “When was the last time you took leave?”
4. “When was the last time you totally relaxed?”
5. “When was the last time you exercised?”
6. “Do you encourage your people to do these things?”
7. “Do you let your people know it is OK to make mistakes, to be wrong, to ask questions, to not know the answer, to suggest alternatives, to disagree with decisions, and to take time to learn new things?”

Conclusion:

Supervisor’s Role in Troop Health

Good leadership leads to good suicide prevention. Commanders and supervisors must work to build supportive work environments. They must make every effort to understand the people in their unit, to talk to them, and to get to know them on a personal level. Supervisors should know the suicide warning signs and how to access the base's helping resources. It's important to ask the tough questions about life problems, suicidal ideation, and alcohol use when it's clear Airmen are hurting. Leaders should publicly encourage help seeking behaviors and should stay actively involved with their Airmen until problems are resolved. Lastly, leaders should recognize when help is needed and get it, for themselves and for their Airmen.

PRESS Approach to Aiding Personnel in Distress

As we discussed during the Introduction section, helping Airmen in distress can be succinctly summarized with the acronym PRESS, which is summarized briefly here and will be explained in detail as we move through the workshop. PRESS stands for Prepare, Recognize, Engage, Send, and Sustain. Prepare means laying the groundwork ahead of time by connecting with your people. Recognize means identifying personnel in distress. Engage means intervening with and assisting distressed personnel. Send means referring Airmen to the most appropriate place for help. Lastly, Sustain means the supervisors must follow-up regularly with the distressed Airmen until they are certain the problem is adequately resolved.

Appendix A:

Scenarios

1. An Airman routinely comes in 10-15 minutes late on Mondays and generally looks like they have had a "hard" weekend (grooming not as neat as usual, eyes tired and bloodshot). The supervisor noticed that this same Airman talks with his co-workers about looking forward to weekend "partying." While the Airman shows no work impairment other than coming in late on Monday, the supervisor begins to have concerns that the Airman is drinking too much on the weekends and may be putting himself in risky situations.
2. The supervisor notices that an Airman, who is also a new mother of five months, has been more distant at work. She used to be very sociable with the unit but now rarely engages in conversation, has stopped going to lunch with others, and has been observed snapping at co-workers. When asked if she is alright, she always says she's fine, but she just doesn't seem like her old self and the supervisor wonders if all is really well.
3. One of your best workers has been putting in really long days for a while; often staying late and coming in on weekends. While it is not unusual for this individual to work like this in short bursts, you become aware that this has been going on for 3 months. Also, he is showing signs that he might be distressed as he has lost weight, appears tired, and often has circles under his eyes. When asked about how he is doing, he says he is going through a divorce but he "has it under control." Despite this, the supervisor has a nagging feeling that he may be doing more poorly than he admits.
4. An Airman is meeting with his supervisor in his supervisor's office after arriving late for work for the fourth time in two weeks. The Airman explains that he sleeps restlessly, struggles to get up in the morning, and always feels tired. "Boss, I really didn't want to be in here again over this. I'm sorry I keep letting you down. No matter what I do, I just can't seem to get enough sleep."
5. A supervisor making the morning rounds of the shop notices one of her Airmen appears visibly nervous, has bloodshot eyes, and appears to have been crying extensively. She asks if she is OK, and the Airman bursts into tears. "I just can't handle it anymore. My husband gets so angry. He screams at me every night and sometimes breaks things. Last night, he punched a hole in the wall. I'm just so scared all the time."
6. An Airman approaches his supervisor to talk about an upcoming deployment. "Sir, this deployment is really stressing me out. I'm really scared about getting shot or killed over there. I'm not sure I can handle it."
7. Another Airman approaches this same supervisor to talk about the upcoming deployment. His unit is short staffed and struggles to meet the deployment rotation demands. "Sir, I just can't go another time. Last year, I was deployed when my baby was born. This time, I'm worried he won't recognize me when I get back. My wife and I know deploying is part of the job, but she needs my help and I've only been back a short time. Isn't there anything you can do?"
8. After extended search and recovery operations, an Airman will not deploy one more time, and refuses to get back into the helicopter as ordered. Multiple casualties were suffered in the aircraft mishap and the human remains were scattered over a wide area. The Airman feels distraught and overwhelmed.
9. An Airman approaches his co-worker's supervisor, "I know John got a DUI and an Article 15 several weeks ago and I don't want to end his career, but he reeks of alcohol. I am afraid he will have an accident that hurts himself or someone else."

10. An Airman is angry all the time and his co-workers are afraid of him. As the supervisor, you approach him and find out his wife has been cheating on him with another member of the squadron.
11. An Airman approaches his supervisor to discuss his disillusionment with military service. The member says that his recruiter lied, that he is very unhappy, and that, while his friends try to cheer him up, he often has problems with missing home.
12. An Airman is observed by friends to be disheveled and they describe him as a partier. He has lots of friends, a spouse, and a new born baby. The supervisor sees the Airman as being a very effective worker, but is easily distracted and unclear about his future goals. It is rumored that he is having problems at home, but there are no clear indicators of problems.
13. An Airman has recently been diagnosed with a condition that will medically board him out of the service. In addition, he is under investigation for passing bad checks and using marijuana. The member does not seem at all remorseful about these issues, and frequently fails to comply with even simple directions from the supervisor.
14. An Airman whose active duty husband is currently deployed and who is herself scheduled to deploy in one month e-mails her husband and informs him that she is feeling increasingly frightened and sad about her upcoming deployment. She writes in the e-mail that she wishes she "would get hurt or injured" so her deployment would be cancelled. The Airman's husband becomes alarmed after reading the e-mail and, when he is unable to reach his wife via phone, he takes a copy of the e-mail to his supervisor, requesting assistance. He says, "I don't know what to do!"
15. A newly arrived Airman is cited for underage drinking, reportedly consuming seven drinks at a party in the dorms. There were noise complaints and some damage to the day room. He was with several service members who are frequently in trouble. The service member is very nervous about the discipline consequences and also about fitting into his new unit.
16. An Airman looks very upset and frightened. When asked, she hesitantly reports that she thinks she had been sexually assaulted the previous night while drinking with other members of the shop. She is very frightened and embarrassed, saying "I don't know what to do."
17. An NCO, an outstanding performer and leader in the squadron, received a DUI after a night of heavy drinking. The Airman is picked up by his supervisor and taken back home. The member appears to be coping well and said he "just needs to sleep it off." The supervisor knows that this individual is currently going through a divorce and is now facing administrative action for the DUI. The supervisor is concerned about these multiple life stressors, and is worried about leaving him alone.
18. A spouse of a military member in the unit contacts you by phone to report that he and his wife have been having marital problems. He reports that she frequently makes threats about hurting herself. You approach your member and she informs you that her husband is attempting to get back at her for a fight they had and denies any thoughts of harming herself.
19. An Airman receives a text message from a fellow Airman saying, "I just broke up with my boyfriend and when I get home tonight I'm going to get drunk and take all my pills. Please don't tell anyone about this. I just need to work through it on my own." The Airman approaches his supervisor for help.

20. An Airman just out of tech school walks into his first sergeant's office and complains that his supervisor will not leave him alone. He says that he went home to register his car, driving 600 miles, and, upon his arrival, his supervisor called him to say he did not have permission to leave the state and demanded he return immediately. The Airman starts to shake, and then cry.
21. A 26 year old female Airman suffered from depression two years ago, but it resolved completely with treatment. She's been off medication and out of therapy for one year. Recently, she reports feeling moody, has had trouble sleeping, and her energy and appetite are down. She comes to her supervisor because she's very concerned her depression is returning.
22. A 20 year old female Airman worked diligently to save the life of one of her peers who was severely injured in a car accident. She witnessed the traumatic amputation of her friend's legs and had to do mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to keep her friend alive. Her friend is in serious condition at the hospital, but looks like she'll survive. The Airman complains of reliving the accident whenever she closes her eyes. She has trouble sleeping, doesn't feel like eating, and can't concentrate at work.

Appendix A:

Course Evaluation Form

Please answer the following questions using the scale from 0-10 (with zero meaning “Strongly Disagree” and 10 meaning “Strongly Agree”):

Strongly Disagree

0 1 2

Neutral

3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Agree

8 9 10

1. This workshop was worthwhile and informative. _____
2. This workshop increased my knowledge about helping Airmen in distress. _____
3. This workshop will help me in my day-to-day duties. _____
4. The speaker was knowledgeable about the subject presented. _____
5. The speaker was engaging, easy to understand, and well prepared. _____
6. The workshop audiovisual aids were of high quality. _____
7. The workshop written materials were informative and of high quality. _____
8. This workshop met its stated educational objectives. _____
9. Time allotted for training was (circle one): too much just right too little
10. Other Comments:
