

# Suicide Prevention: Ask the Tough Questions

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by Patrick Gordon NDW Waterline writer

Suicide prevention is a serious job, and it is everyone's responsibility, whether they realize it or not. If a shipmate, family member, friend, or coworker begins to show warning signs of suicidal tendencies or thoughts, it may come down to one person engaging with them in order to help.

During suicide prevention month, Naval District Washington (NDW) is adopting the theme, "Thrive in Your Community," and is asking its personnel to be there for members of the community who may be suffering.



Amanda Woodyard, education services facilitator for the Military Family Support Center, gives a presentation on stress management at a Safety stand down at Washington Navy Yard in November. Increased stress can lead to depression, which in severe cases may lead to suicide. Learning to recognize symptoms and knowing how to help can help prevent such actions. (U.S. Navy photo by Patrick Gordon)

"We are responsible for each other, including our coworkers, family members or friends. It is our duty to stay connected to one another," said Amanda Woodyard, Education Services Facilitator at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling. "Command and leadership support is critical. All involved should be knowledgeable about how to get help and where to get help. It is necessary to prepare our Navy-National Capital Region with resources in resilience and prevention."

It may feel awkward or inappropriate to ask someone if they are struggling with thoughts of suicide, but recognizing the warning signs and reaching out is often the first step to getting someone needed help.

"People are afraid to talk about suicide and it is commonly swept under the rug," said Chaplain (Lt.) Jonathan Craig, NDW Regional Chaplains Office. "We must do away with that notion that suicide is a taboo subject to address. One effective way to do that is to recognize suicide prevention month by bringing it out in the open to be acknowledged and discussed."

Woodyard and Craig both advise looking for warning signs of suicidal thoughts. An individual may display signs of anxiety, hopelessness, anger, mood changes, feeling trapped, and recklessness. Other symptoms may include expressions of hopelessness or desperation; actions such as withdrawal from friends, family and responsibilities; and physical signs such as lack of interest in appearance or disturbed sleep. Once these are recognized, it requires reaching out to the individual to prevent a potentially tragic situation.

"We need to learn to ask the forward and sometimes uncomfortable questions; 'How is your family? Is there anything I can help you with? Are you OK,'" said Woodyard. "Stay engaged and stay connected. If you notice out-of-character behavior, act upon it."

Craig added that dealing with suicide prevention should be done in an upfront, but understanding manner. Avoid confrontational dialogue and show the individual that you have their best interest in mind.

"It is of utmost importance that you approach suicide with an individual in a clearly direct manner but in a way that lets them know you are genuinely concerned for their wellbeing," said Craig. "You should ask the individual directly about suicide, i.e. 'Are you thinking about killing yourself,' or 'Are you thinking about committing suicide?' This lets the individual know you are comfortable talking about suicide and are a safe person in which to confide. Never ask indirectly or condescendingly about suicide, i.e. 'Are you thinking about hurting yourself?' or 'You're not thinking of doing anything stupid are you?' This shows the individual that you are uncomfortable talking about suicide and are afraid to face their challenges with them. They will not feel safe to share their concerns with you."

If a person is considering suicide, having suicidal thoughts, or is displaying suicidal tendencies, let them know of the treatment options they have available to them. Base chaplains, Fleet and Family Service Centers, and local medical

facilities are sources where an individual can get person-to-person attention. Other resources include the Military OneSource website, [www.militaryonesource.mil](http://www.militaryonesource.mil); The Navy Personnel Command Suicide Prevention website, [www.suicide.navy.mil](http://www.suicide.navy.mil); and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-8255.

This story is part two of a series The Waterline will be conducting throughout September for National Suicide Prevention Month.

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