

Family Coping and Resiliency

Suicide Prevention Training Tip Card

This card is to be used as a training aid for the Suicide Prevention for Army Family Members awareness brief.

Army life can be stressful. Stressors that you and your Family might experience include:

- ▶ Deployment separation. Separation from a loved one inevitably strains communication which can affect your relationship. In addition, taking on new responsibilities at home can be challenging and frustrating.
- ▶ Previous suicide attempts.
- ▶ Frequent moves. Many of the stressors that families experience are related to moving.
- ▶ New schools. Adjusting to a new school and a new schedule can be very difficult.
- ▶ New jobs. Finding a new job and/or learning the details of a job that you have been transferred to can be exhausting and overwhelming.
- ▶ Meeting new friends. Both adults and children can have a hard time meeting new people and developing friendships.
- ▶ Not making the next rank, UCMJ, or bad ratings.

Both adults and children can be affected by stressors and can use resilient or negative strategies to cope. Encourage the use of resilient coping strategies.

Resilient Coping Strategies

Adults/Soldiers:

- ▶ Breathing deeply. Slow, deep breaths give your body more oxygen and can produce a calming and focused effect.
- ▶ Church/religious activities. Attending church or other religious activities can provide support.
- ▶ Cooking. Some find great joy in preparing food. The rhythmic motion of chopping vegetables or the aroma of freshly baked bread can be very soothing.
- ▶ Exercising. In addition to keeping you fit, exercise can be a great stress reliever and a great coping strategy. When your body is fit and healthy, coping with stressful situations will be easier.
- ▶ Spending time in nature. Take time to notice the natural beauty around you by taking a walk in a park. Merely getting away from your stresses and finding peace and relaxation, even if only for a few minutes each day, can be beneficial.
- ▶ Support groups. You may feel as if you are the only one dealing with stress and depression; however, you are not alone. Look for support in your area. These groups can be formal groups established in the community, informal groups in your neighborhood, or groups associated with the Army via the Army Family Readiness Group (FRG) www.armyfrg.org.
- ▶ Talking to others. Don't underestimate the power of talk. Talking about your thoughts and feelings can be very useful. Even if the person with whom you are talking cannot fix the problem, the act of putting your emotions into words can be helpful.
- ▶ Volunteering. When you give back to others, whether you volunteer to work with children, the homeless, elderly populations, or at a local animal shelter, you find out just how strong you are. Visit www.volunteermatch.org for opportunities in your area.
- ▶ Writing/journaling. Put your thoughts and emotions on paper. Writing can help you to sort out how you are feeling. You don't have to show what you have written to anyone. Keeping a journal can help you track your moods.

Children/Adolescents:

- ▶ Church/school activities. Children are social beings. Involving them in church and school activities feeds their need for friendship, provides them with support, and exposes them to positive influences.
- ▶ Drawing/journaling. Children can sometimes find it difficult to express their emotions verbally.

If so, drawing and journaling can be great alternatives to express their feelings in a personal, safe way.

- ▶ Reassurance/fun outings. Children benefit from reassurance that they get from individuals who are close to them. Creating fun environments/outings for children reminds them how it feels to be happy.
- ▶ Sports. In addition to providing an outlet for energy, relieving stress, and improving physical fitness, involvement in sports is a great way for children to improve their self-confidence, make friends, and gain support.
- ▶ Talking to others. Just as with adults, children benefit when they share their thoughts and feelings with others. It allows them to know that they are not alone.

Extended use of negative coping strategies can be a risk factor for suicide.

Negative Coping Strategies

Adults/Soldiers:

- ▶ Eating in excess or not enough. Eating or bingeing when stressed is a common but ineffective coping strategy. Not eating enough can be a sign of depression. Both eating patterns are maladaptive and should be replaced with resilient strategies.
- ▶ Not talking. Keeping feelings bottled up inside is not a beneficial way to cope with problems. When people do not talk about their feelings, they become consumed with the negative, which makes a problem seem larger and less manageable.
- ▶ Self-injurious behaviors (e.g., self-cutting, drinking alcohol, taking pain killers, reckless driving, etc.). These behaviors are very serious. They are sometimes a cry for help, but engaging in these behaviors even one time can be fatal.
- ▶ Withdrawing. Individuals might feel that they need to keep to themselves and not burden others with their problems when they are feeling stressed; however, the opposite is true. Withdrawing from others and/or the problem will only make the problem worse.

Children/Adolescents:

- ▶ Drastic mood changes. Mood swings are not uncommon during adolescence; however, uncharacteristic mood swings or violent mood swings could indicate a problem coping with stress.
- ▶ Not talking. Keeping feelings inside is not a helpful strategy for children who might not understand a stressor. Children have fewer resources for coping, and if they don't express their feelings, others cannot provide them with the support they need.
- ▶ Self-injurious behaviors. Behaviors such as self-cutting, drinking, taking pills, promiscuous sexual acts, and other risky behaviors can be a cry for help; however, these acts can also be deadly.
- ▶ Withdrawing. A child who withdraws from family and friends is isolating himself/herself can be at risk for depression.

Your Resources

- ▶ U.S. Army Public Health Command homepage (Search for DHPW Suicide Prevention)
 - ▶ <http://phc.amedd.army.mil>
- ▶ Army Families Online
 - ▶ <http://www.armyfamiliesonline.org>
- ▶ Family Readiness Library
 - ▶ <http://deploymentthealthlibrary.fhp.osd.mil>
- ▶ National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
 - ▶ 1-800-273-TALK(8255)
- ▶ Military OneSource
 - ▶ <http://www.militaryonesource.com> or 1-800-342-9647
- ▶ My Army Life Too for families and friends
 - ▶ <http://www.myarmylifetoo.com>
- ▶ Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN)
 - ▶ <http://www.spanusa.org>

