



"I will never leave a fallen comrade."

Our Warrior Ethos is not only a promise we make to the nation, but it is also a promise we make to each other. It is a pact between Warriors with an expectation that we will always take care of each other. If you visit the Army's website for "Stories of Valor," you will find examples of Soldiers going into harms way to save their comrades and showing courage in the face of adversity. However, taking care of each other does not end on the current battlefield. We are engaged on a new battlefield, one that is as insidious a place as any we have fought on before. That battlefield is the mental health area of operation and suicides are killing our Soldiers at an alarming rate.

The Army announced in January that Soldier suicides have risen for the fourth year in a row. We can work to reduce and eradicate this invisible enemy in three ways: remove the stigma, learn the warning signs, and get involved.

First, we need to remove the stigma associated with accessing mental health services. A study published in 2004 reported that "among Soldiers who screened positive for depression, anxiety, or PTSD, 53% reported that their unit leadership might treat them differently, and 54% reported that they would be seen as weak." This report indicates that there continues to be a stigma associated with seeking help. We can change this. Our Soldiers – our friends – would not seek help for fear of ruining their careers or for fear of being identified as weak in some way. It takes moral courage to ask for help. Seeking mental health assistance is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of strength. It takes courage to be self-aware and to take action when unwanted changes are affecting someone's behavior.

Second, we must learn to recognize the warning signs surrounding suicides. In many cases, someone knew when a person was contemplating suicide and did not know enough to act. Suicides can be preventable if we know what the warning signs are and if we have the courage to seek help or to assist someone to seek help.

Below are some of the warning signs (GTA 12-01-001, Army Suicide Prevention Program).

- Failed Relationships
- Legal/Financial/Occupational Problems
- Previous Suicide Attempts
- Suicide Threats
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- Statements Revealing a Desire to Die
- Sudden Changes in Behavior
- Prolonged Depression
- Making Final Arrangements
- Giving Away Prized Possessions
- Purchasing a Gun or Stockpiling Pills
- Feelings of Humiliation

For additional information about suicide warning signs or prevention, please check with your local mental health professional or ask your chaplain.

Third, when we are aware of the warning signs we must not be afraid to get involved. If you suspect someone is contemplating suicide, think about **A.C.E.**.

Ask your buddy. Have the courage to ask your buddy directly about thoughts or plans for suicide, but stay calm.

Care for your buddy. If someone tells you they are suicidal, it is often a plea for help. Ensure the Soldier gets immediate assistance (Chaplain or Behavioral health). Calmly control the situation. Remove any lethal means as calmly and strategically as possible.

Escort your buddy. Never leave your buddy alone. Find someone to stay with your buddy. Escort to the chain of command, a Chaplain, a mental health professional, or a primary care provider.

The Army has had the Buddy System for as long as I can remember. A Battle Buddy is someone that can be trusted with your life. A Battle Buddy should speak up when he/she notices changes taking place in one's behavior that are of concern. The Buddy System works very well on the battlefield. It can also work in garrison as a way for us to look out for each other.

As we continue to fight a determined enemy in an era of persistent conflict, some of our Warriors are returning with wounds not visible to the eye. It is incumbent upon leaders and friends to help someone when we suspect there is a problem. Remember – let's get rid of the stigma associated with seeking help from mental health professionals; learn the warning signs of suicide; and seek help if you suspect someone or if you may be contemplating suicide.

Let's take care of each other.

SECURE THE HIGH GROUND!