

Suicide prevention key to mission readiness

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FORT POLK, La. — September is Suicide Prevention Month. Although September brings a special focus, Army leaders have determined that everyone should remain vigilant to prevent Soldier suicides around the clock.

Suicide is a constant threat to mission readiness and every Soldier lost is a tragedy. The impacts are felt throughout the Soldier's immediate Family and friends, the unit and the community. It is up to the Army community to recognize the warning signs, identify high risk behaviors and provide immediate assistance through available resources.

Defeating suicide will take active involvement from everyone. Civilian and military re-

search on suicide has demonstrated it is a complex phenomenon which defies easy solutions. The Army has expanded access to services and programs to help Soldiers and Family members improve their ability to cope with stresses associated with military service.

The Army has developed numerous resources to reach out and educate Soldiers at every level about suicide prevention. At Fort Polk these include:

- ACE (Ask, Care, Escort) training should be provided for all Soldiers, leaders, and Department of the Army civilians and helps teach how to recognize suicidal behavior and its warning signs. ACE provides basic training on how to ask about thoughts of suicide directly to those Soldiers and civilians most at risk and the least likely to seek help due to

stigma. ACE teaches basic skills in active listening and encourages Soldiers to take a battle buddy in need directly to the chain of command, chaplain or behavioral health provider.

- ACE-Suicide Intervention training is comparable to ACE training, but also teaches some intervention skills. This is a one-time training for junior leaders and first-line supervisors.

- ASIST T2T training is a two-day course available to Soldiers and Family members, and transferrable from installation to installation. T2T focuses on training suicide intervention "gatekeepers" — those who have daily contact with others, down to the smallest unit. You can't have too many gatekeepers. The finer the safety net, the more likely you are to "catch" those that need help. On a higher level, ASIST T4T is a five-day "train the trainer" class.

Reinforcing the Army profession and its values to heighten awareness and instill responsibility and accountability is everyone's business. It's important for everyone to cultivate an environment of accountability for each others' resilience, and recognize warning signs, then connect those at risk to resources.

Doing this not only increases individual, unit and Army resiliency and performance, but also helps Soldiers and Family members cope with the rigors of today's military life. Each Army teammate contributes to the mission and helps foster a sustained environment of readiness to "stay ready and live resilient."

For more information about suicide prevention call John Pilgrim, Fort Polk Suicide Prevention Program manager, Army Substance Abuse Program, at 531-6187. Pilgrim's office is located at 7700 Alabama Ave., bldg 1947, Suite 115F.

