

COMMANDER'S CORNER

Reaching out to others can aid in suicide prevention, commander says

By Col. Kevin Brown
GARRISON COMMANDER

Our Soldiers, Family members and civilian employees are our most valuable resources.

Our Soldiers carry out the Army's mission. Their Families support them while they're at home and deployed. Civilian employees provide services and support to our Soldiers and their Families. One, without the others, just doesn't make a complete team.

When we lose a member of our team to suicide, everyone feels it. I want everyone on this post to know suicide is not the answer. I want them to know how they can get help, and that we do care. September is Suicide Prevention Month and just one of the times throughout the year we can get the word out.

For years now, our team has been working day and night to keep up with a high operational tempo. It can be draining. Numerous deployments and the stress of being away from Family can seem insurmountable at

times.

If that becomes the case for you, don't be afraid to seek help. All units at Fort Riley have trained gatekeepers. If stress is overwhelming you and you've thought about suicide, seek out your unit gatekeeper, Chaplains, in units and for the installation, can provide help. And don't forget about your friends. They are there for you.

If you are a friend, co-worker or leader who someone reaches out to, know what to do. Be aware, however, that not everyone reaches out. Pay attention to those around you – your co-workers, fellow Soldiers, the other spouses in your Family Readiness Group. Take what they say and their actions seriously.

Most suicides are in reaction to feelings of loneliness, worthlessness, hopelessness, helplessness or guilt. Risk factors may



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include relationship problems, work-related problems, substance abuse, medical problems and severe or perceived unmanageable stress. It can be easy for someone to get trapped into a cycle of negative thoughts.

If someone comes to you for help, remember the ACE acronym:

Ask your buddy – Have the courage to ask the question directly, "Are you thinking of killing yourself?"

Care for your buddy – Remove means which could be used for self-injury; calmly control the situation; and actively listen to produce relief.

Escort your buddy – Never leave your buddy alone; escort them to the chain of command, a chaplain, a behavioral health professional or a primary care provider.

Besides having the resources to help individuals get the help they need when they need it, Fort Riley also has programs in place to build resiliency and teach our team members how to deal with the ongoing stresses of

Army life.

The Army's first Resilient Spouse Academy started in August at Fort Riley. Through that program, spouses are being trained as additional sensors to be prepared to help and spot anyone who may be having suicidal thoughts.

The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program focuses on strengthening our Soldiers', Family members' and civilian employees' abilities to maintain healthy physical, mental, spiritual, Family and social lives.

Family Life Ministries, our chapel programs and Strong Bonds program help Soldiers and Family members stay in touch with their spiritual sides.

Chaplains also provide counseling to help strengthen marriages and provide single Soldiers with the skills they need to develop healthy relationships.

Every morning you can see our Soldiers exercising their resiliency during physical training. At gyms across post, civilians and Family members utilize programs and classes to build

their physical strength. Civilian employees can participate in the My Life Fitness program, which teaches them healthy lifestyle choices and how to make working out a part of their lives. We're on our way to providing child care in one of the post's gyms to make it easier for spouses to work out.

One of the main components of strengthening our Soldiers' mental strength is the military life consultant program. Military life consultants meet with Soldiers upon their redeployment to talk about stresses or worries they may have. Soldiers may meet with or without their spouses, and the off-the-record appointments allow Soldiers to find the resources they may need.

Family programs abound on post. Anywhere you turn at Army Community Service, you'll run into someone who provides a service to our Families. From parenting classes to volunteer opportunities, "ACS has a program for that." There are numerous ways to strengthen Family ties before, during and

after deployments.

One of the things many of us forget to do during our hectic work days is to schedule time to breathe, enjoy our Family and friends or just do something we enjoy.

Make time for yourself. Whether it's participating in a Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers trip, taking a class at the Arts and Crafts Center or getting in a game of golf, connecting with others socially is an important way to build resiliency. Keep an eye on the newspaper for upcoming events you can get involved in, or visit www.rileyarmy.com.

We all deal with emotions differently. Building our resiliency reserves can give us the strength we need to realize a situation is something we can deal with, and if we need help, it's okay to ask.

If you would like to comment on this article, or suggest a topic for a future Community Corner, e-mail riley.post.newspaper@conus.army.mil.

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teers who care about the community and want to make life better at Fort Riley and across the Army. So volunteer to be a part of the conference staff.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Is my issue an AFAP issue?

Check the issue against the AFAP Issue Checklist. Does the issue:

- Relate to a well-being concern within the Department of Defense, the Department of Army or Fort Riley?
- Present a realistic solution or a creative alternative?
- Have broad impact?
- Appear attainable after considering current political and resource environments?
- Within the purview of Fort Riley, DoD or DA to influence?

Are there other ways for me to give feedback about

programs and services?

Yes. Three ways to provide input about services at Fort Riley are the Interactive Customer Evaluation, Community FIRST focus groups and AFAP.

- ICE, a web-based system, enables people to easily submit online comment cards to a participating program/service manager from any computer located anywhere in the world. Those wishing to submit a comment can submit the card anonymously, but if they want the service provider to respond to the comment(s), they will need to provide contact information, either by e-mail or phone. Because comments are sent directly to the service provider, those submitting a comment can obtain a response within three business days. ICE can be accessed from the Fort Riley website at www.riley.army.mil, or through one of the many ICE kiosks located

throughout post.

- Community FIRST focus groups are designed to identify and resolve quality of life issues at Fort Riley. The intent of the focus group is to identify and discuss ideas or suggestions about services or programs on the installation. It is a time and place to bring up issues which can be resolved by the garrison commander, or issues which need to be forwarded through the AFAP process.

• Army Family Action Plan – Through AFAP, community members have the opportunity to improve life throughout the Army. For those with ideas or suggestions about Armywide services or programs which could be improved may fill out an AFAP issue sheet.

How do I know which way is best for my particular issue? ICE will give a faster answer to concerns and give program managers a chance to work on

problems. For those who have used the ICE system and feel their issue meets the criteria listed above, then AFAP is where they need to be.

What are some examples of AFAP issues?

In the history of AFAP, 667 issues have been worked, 123 legislation changes have been made, 172 DoD or Army policies have been revised and 192 programs and services have been improved at the Army level. Examples include:

- Tricare for Life.
- Military Savings Plan.
- In-state tuition rates for military personnel and their dependents.
- Authorization for distributing Montgomery GI Bill benefits to dependents.
- Chiropractic care for ac-

tive-duty servicemembers.

- DoD Reserve Component Family member ID cards.
- Vehicle storage at government expense when a Soldier is reassigned to an area where shipment isn't authorized.
- Temporary living expense authorization for first-term enlisted personnel; also being pursued for first-term officers.
- Family Readiness Groups institutionalized.
- Programs like Army Family Team Building and Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers created.
- Dislocation allowance for first PCS.
- Informational and interactive websites established to address retirement information and planning, employment opportunities and application, and enlisted soldier assignments.

Contact the AFAP Program Manager at 785-239-9435 to become part of the AFAP Conference. To submit an AFAP issue, download the issue sheet from the website, complete it and e-mail it to: riley.dmrwac@conus.army.mil.

A handwritten AFAP issue can also be submitted by picking up an issue sheet at Army Community Service, 7264 Normandy Dr., on Custer Hill, or by contacting Becky Willis, AFAP program manager, at 785-239-9435 for a copy of the issue sheet.

The next conference will be from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Oct. 2 at the Fort Riley Teen Center. The adult AFAP conference will be from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Oct. 5 to 7 at Riley's Conference Center. Free childcare is available with pre-registration.



Stay in touch from anywhere

Sign up for Stay In Touch with Fort Riley to get information about upcoming events or services on post and in surrounding communities.

To register, visit www.riley.army.mil and complete the form linked on the homepage.