

Suicide Prevention: Warning Signs & Risk Factors

Warning Signs:

When a Soldier presents with any combination of the following, the buddy or chain of command should be more vigilant. It is advised that help should be secured for the Soldier.

- Talk of suicide or killing someone else
- Giving away property or disregard for what happens to one's property
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Problems with girlfriend (boyfriend) or spouse
- Acting bizarre or unusual (based on your knowledge of the person)
- Soldiers in trouble for misconduct (Art-15, UCMJ, etc.)
- Soldiers experiencing financial problems
- Soldiers who have lost their job at home (reservists)
- Those soldiers leaving the service (retirements, ETSs, etc.)

When a Soldier presents with any one of these concerns, the Soldier should be seen immediately by a helping provider.

- Talking or hinting about suicide
- Formulating a plan to include acquiring the means to kill oneself
- Having a desire to die
- Obsession with death (music, poetry, artwork)
- Themes of death in letters and notes
- Finalizing personal affairs
- Giving away personal possessions



Risk Factors:

Risk factors are those things that increase the probability that difficulties could result in serious adverse behavioral or physical health. The risk factors only raise the risk of an individual being suicidal it does not mean they are suicidal.

The risk factors often associated with suicidal behavior include:

- Relationship problems (loss of girlfriend/boyfriend, divorce, etc.).
- History of previous suicide attempts.
- Substance abuse.
- History of depression or other mental illness.
- Family history of suicide or violence.
- Work related problems.
- Transitions (retirement, PCS, discharge, etc.).
- A serious medical problem.
- Significant loss (death of loved one, loss due to natural disasters, etc.).
- Current/pending disciplinary or legal action.
- Setbacks (academic, career, or personal).
- Severe, prolonged, and/or perceived unmanageable stress.
- A sense of powerlessness, helplessness, and/or hopelessness.

Suicidal Risk Highest When:

- The person sees **no way out** and fears things may get worse.
- The predominant emotions are **hopelessness and helplessness**.
- **Thinking is constricted** with a tendency to perceive his or her situation as all bad.
- Judgment is impaired by use of **alcohol or other substances**.