

## A Guide to Stopping Military Suicide

*This article was written by Steve Johnson, the creator of [PublicHealthLibrary.org](http://PublicHealthLibrary.org) to point out ways that may reduce military/veteran suicides. The Department of Pennsylvania VFW State HQs offers a link to this article to provide military personnel, veterans and their families with an overview of some of the issues faced by some military troops and veterans. Hopefully, this article will generate the discussion and interaction needed to help persons facing difficult times. This article is not a substitute for emotional and/or physical healthcare services that may be needed or as a method to determine the need for such services. Please consult a qualified healthcare professional if you have questions or concerns.*



Photo by [Defence-Imagery](http://Defence-Imagery)

Members of the military give their lives to protect our country. However, in some situations this group must also be protected. Unfortunately, over the last few years, statistics on the number of servicemen and women who commit suicide have increased. Their traumatic experiences often lead to suicidal tendencies. How can we detect suicide risk amongst military personnel and prevent it?

Approximately 22 military members take their own lives every day. During their time in the military, veterans faced a variety of difficult situations. When they finally arrive home, the transition is often more difficult than expected. Unfortunately, this can lead to depression, anxiety, and, ultimately, suicidal thoughts or behaviors.

### **Military Life**

During a veteran's time in the military, they are exposed to a number of different factors that can cause [damage to their mental health](#) and wellbeing. These include:

- Death or injury of a fellow veteran or civilian
- Injury or illnesses
- Combat environment (including explosions and constant fear)
- Lack of sleep
- Sexual assault (particularly amongst female veterans)
- Extreme physical exertion
- Overall drastic lifestyle transition

These factors can impact the mental health of a military member, possibly causing:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Agitation
- Loneliness
- Anger

### **The Transition to Civilian Life**

When a veteran returns to [civilian life](#), the unfortunate reality is that they end up facing many difficulties. These difficulties are mainly reflected through disposition, in which the veteran may feel a lack of purpose, disorientation, and insecurity. These things are what can ultimately lead to feelings of depression, inclinations towards addiction, and [suicidal thoughts](#).

### **The Impact of Military Experiences on Mental Health**

Military experiences that lead to negative emotional states can cause a number of diagnosable mental health issues, including:

- [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder](#) (PTSD)
- Depression
- Bipolar Disorder
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Sadly, very few veterans seek help for these conditions because:

- They may not recognize the symptoms
- They may be in denial
- They do not want to jeopardize promotions or deployment opportunities
- They may not think that treatment will help
- They may not want to stay in treatment for an undetermined period of time
- They may not want to come off as being "weak" for admitting their issues or accepting help

### **How Friends and Family Can Help a Suicidal Veteran**

Suicide is preventable, and friends and family can assist a veteran in getting the help they need by trying the following:

1. Express your concern about their emotional state
2. Offer to connect them with the proper resources (including a doctor and mental health professional)
3. Create a safe environment for them
4. Be patient in finding the right time to address the situation
5. Learn about their war experiences
6. Educate yourself on their disorder(s)
7. Remain calm and understanding, even during periods when they are in a negative emotional state

### **How State, Local, and Federal Officials Can Help Prevent Suicide and Treat Veterans**

Recently, President Obama signed the [Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Act](#) in an effort to address the increase in military suicides. This law will help veterans gain access to doctors and mental health professional through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). New initiatives will also include:

- Increased resources for the VA's crisis hotline
- Increased numbers of mental health providers
- Improved research efforts
- Distribution of grants to suicide prevention programs

To prevent and treat suicidal veterans, officials could also:

- Increase overall funding for the mental health of military members
- Increase outreach initiatives
- Create an early detection system of suicidal thoughts or actions

**Steve Johnson** has always been dedicated to promoting health and wellness in all aspects of life. Studying in the medical field has shown him how important it is for reputable health-related facts, figures, tips, and other guidance to be readily available to the public. He created [PublicHealthLibrary.org](#) with a fellow student to act as a resource for people's overall health inquiries and as an accurate and extensive source of health information. When he isn't hard at work in his studies, Steve enjoys playing tennis and listening to his vintage record collection.

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