

# Suicide prevention and peer support in the Armed Forces

Looking after your team

**SAMARITANS**

Each year, more than 6,000 people take their own life in the UK and Ireland. Each of these deaths has an enormous emotional impact on the friends, family and colleagues of the person who has died.

### Contents

- 4 Introduction
- 5 Identifying
- 6 Understanding
- 7 Intervening
- 8 Supporting
- 9 Reporting
- 10 Quick reference guides
- 12 Further support
- 15 Quick reference card

## INTRODUCTION

Samaritans' vision is that fewer people die by suicide. Samaritans has 201 branches across the UK and Republic of Ireland and answers a call for help every six seconds. We're here day or night, 365 days a year for anyone who needs us.

### Support your team – stand by your mates

Being in the Armed Forces means that you are exposed to a higher degree of risk and pressure than you might expect in other jobs. This booklet is intended to help you look out for your teammates by giving you guidance on how to discuss things with them and about some of the support that is available.



## IDENTIFYING

Here are some ways you might identify someone who is struggling to cope. Even if they are not suicidal they could probably use a listening ear.

- A normally outgoing person becoming withdrawn
- Missing parades or being late when they are normally punctual
- A loss of personal discipline
- Drinking more than usual or on their own
- Appearing distracted or "not quite there"
- Missing group activities or meals
- Having less energy
- Finding it hard to cope with day-to-day life
- Negative statements such as "it's like everything is against me"

## UNDERSTANDING

Suicide is complex, there is rarely only one reason why someone might take their own life.

**This list shows some potential reasons but there are many more.**

- Recent loss of a friend or loved one
- The break-up of a relationship
- Losing custody of a child
- Heavy use of alcohol or drugs
- Mental ill-health
- Painful or debilitating injuries or illness
- Financial or legal problems
- Long-term separation
- Feeling isolated or like they don't belong
- Homesickness

## INTERVENING

An intervention is an act of kindness and you do not have to wait until a person is in danger to intervene. You can help someone just by giving them the opportunity to talk about their problems or thoughts.

**If you feel comfortable and it's safe to do so:**

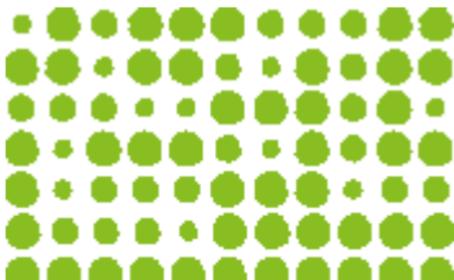
- Choose a time and place where you can approach them privately and without interruption.
- Encourage them to talk, focus on listening and be patient.
- If you feel you can't approach someone because of their rank then speak to someone who can, such as the welfare staff or the chaplain.

## SUPPORTING

You may not feel that you are able to provide ongoing support.

**To make sure someone gets the longer-term support they need, you could consider:**

1. Suggesting that they seek professional support within your unit such as with the medical officer, welfare staff, chaplain or a senior individual they trust.
2. If they do not wish to speak to someone at work you could give them Samaritans' free helpline number (116 123).
3. Using one of the additional support services at the end of this guide.



## REPORTING

It can be difficult to know how and when to report something. You may worry about breaking the trust the person has put in you, or that not reporting it could put them in danger.

- Try to convince them to seek help and ask them who they would be comfortable speaking to. Do your best to let them feel in control and not to rush them.
- Try to respect their privacy as much as you can and don't share anything they have told you unless they wish you to, as long as they are not in danger.
- Do seek help immediately if you think someone could be an imminent danger to themselves or others. You could speak to the medical officer, welfare staff, chaplain or your chain of command. It is important to make sure that the person is safe.



### **Identifying** someone who might be suicidal

- Negative changes in behaviour or personal discipline
- Becoming withdrawn/isolated
- Drinking more than usual or drinking alone

### **Approaching** someone who is struggling to cope

- Find a private and safe place to talk
- Encourage them to talk. Listen
- Offer Samaritans' support (they can call free, day or night on 116 123)
- Encourage them to seek further help, but don't force them

## FURTHER SUPPORT

Your unit welfare staff, chaplain or chain of command will be able to advise you about available support but here are a few other support options that you may wish to consider:

### SAMARITANS

#### Samaritans

If you're going through a difficult time, you can contact Samaritans free – day or night, 365 days a year. You can talk to us in your own way about anything that's getting to you.

Call free day or night on

# 116 123

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

Web: [samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)



#### NHS 111

If you're worried about an urgent medical concern, you can call 111 to speak to a fully trained adviser. The NHS 111 service is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by a team of fully trained advisers.

Call: 111

**COMBAT STRESS 24-HOUR  
MENTAL HEALTH HELPLINE**

**0800 323 4444**

For serving personnel and their families

#### Combat Stress

A team of specially-trained professionals are available day and night to provide free confidential advice and support to serving personnel, as well as onwards referral if necessary.

Family members who are concerned about a service person's mental health are also able to call the helpline.

Call: 0800 323 4444



## SSAFA

SSAFA's Forcesline is a confidential helpline providing advice and information for serving personnel, reserves, veterans and their families.

**Call: 0800 731 4880**

**Visit: [ssafa.org.uk/forcesline](https://ssafa.org.uk/forcesline)**

## Big White Wall® Big White Wall

Big White Wall provides safe, anonymous and 24/7 online support for mental health and wellbeing. The service offers a combination of peer support, online programmes and useful resources, all monitored by trained clinicians. Big White Wall is free to access for all serving personnel, reservists, veterans and their family members aged 16+.

**Visit: [bigwhitewall.com](https://bigwhitewall.com)**



'Something  
doesn't feel  
quite right...?'



**Identifying** someone who might be suicidal

**There's no definitive list of behaviours that a suicidal person will display but these behaviours may be shown by a person in need:**

- Negative changes in behaviour or personal discipline
- Drinking more than usual or drinking alone
- Becoming withdrawn/ isolated
- Recent difficulties in their personal life

A registered charity

**SAMARITANS**

**Whatever you're facing,  
we're here to listen.**

**Call free day or night on**

**116 123**

**Email** [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

**Web** [samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)

A registered charity

Supported by



Ministry  
of Defence