

Firearm Leadership to Reduce the Risk of Suicide and Harm

“Firearm Leadership” involves knowing the threats and taking actions to prevent firearm injuries, both during routine daily operations and during an acute situation when you are concerned about a service member’s safety. Leaders influence service members not only on the battlefield but also at home. Firearms are an essential tool for many service members and apart of sports and hunting for many. The safe handling and storage of firearms is critical to the safety of service members and their families.

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Do You Know?

- Almost all firearm deaths in garrison are self-inflicted.
- Most suicide deaths involving firearms are impulsive.
- It’s difficult to know who or when a person will attempt suicide.
- Over half of military suicide decedents had NO HISTORY of mental illness.
- Military children die of accidental firearm incidents.

Actions for Firearm Leadership

- Discuss Personal Firearms Storage
 - » Encourage your people to store personally owned firearms unloaded and locked in a case or gun safe when not in use.
 - » Promote locking and storing ammunition in a separate location.
- Be Present and Support Your Personnel
 - » Reach out to service members who are experiencing stress.
 - » Ask them how they are doing and support them in a non-judgmental manner.
 - » Offer options for support resources.
 - » Follow-up regularly.
- Discourage Alcohol Use when Using Firearms
 - » Practice zero tolerance mixing alcohol with handling weapons.
 - » Clearly communicate: “Don’t mix alcohol with your firearms.”

Promote Family Safety

- For some, family safety means keeping a gun loaded and unlocked.
- Emphasize how a loaded and unlocked gun can greatly increase the risk of an accidental or an impulsive shooting death.

- Remind your people to keep firearms out of the reach of children.
- Teach children “guns are not toys” and should only be handled when supervised by trained adults.

Steps to Take When You Are Concerned

A leader may feel concerned when a service member is “not acting like themselves.” When going through a tough time, having access to a firearm increases the risk of impulsive self-harm. How a leader responds can be save a life:

- Tell the person you are there to help
- When time permits, seek advice from behavioral health and chaplain teams
- Escort the person to emergency care
- If firearms are present, consider storing away from home until the situation improves
- Be compassionate and genuine in your approach

Alternatives to Firearms for Self and Family Protection

Remind personnel of options for personal and home safety that are safer than unlocked weapons. These include:

- Guard Dogs
- Alarm Systems
- Pepper Spray
- Stun Guns and Tasers
- Pocket and Tactical Knives

RESOURCES

Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988

Military OneSource

1-800-342-9647

CSTS Suicide Prevention

<https://www.cstsonline.org/suicide-prevention-program/resources/>

CSTS Leadership

<https://www.cstsonline.org/fact-sheet-menu/leadership>

Defense Suicide Prevention Office Lethal Means Safety Guide

<https://www.dspo.mil/Tools/Download-Library/lethalmeanssafety/>

The Firearm Industry Trade Association:

<https://www.nssf.org/articles/securely-storing-firearms-in-the-home/>

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