



## Suicide Prevention/Lethal Means Safety

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In 2021, Navy lost 69 Sailors to Suicide (59 Active; 10 Reserve) and in 2022 that number grew to 77 (70 Active; 7 Reserve). In Jan 2023, Navy experienced 11 suicides (9 Active; 2 Reserve).

### 2022 Suicides Death Data (preliminary):

- 60% were by firearm, 27% by hanging, 1% by jumping, and 11% by other means.
- 91% were men; 9% were women.
- 7% were 17-19; 46% were 20-24; 14% were 25-29; 13% were 30-34; 11% were 35-39; 7% were 40-44; 1% was 45+.
- Top stressors were relationship (47%), mental health (36%), unknown (27%), transition (26%), disciplinary (20%), and financial difficulties (11%).

Suicide is a complex, difficult topic to discuss, and is rarely the result of a single event or stressor. However, there is normally a chain of events leading to a Sailor feeling anguished and hopeless in combination with the capacity to be lethal.

To combat suicide, leaders at all levels should focus on implementing Navy's Suicide Prevention Program (OPNAVINST 1720.4B; and Suicide Prevention Handbook). In doing so, they should:

- 1) Build command protective factors that reduce the risk of suicide, specifically developing a sense of connectedness and cohesion within their command; and prevent risk factors that include stress, toxic leaders/hostile work environment, and harassment (racial or sexual) (1720.4B Enclosure 1 Para 3).
- 2) Understand and identify personal risk factors and stressors associated with suicide, leveraging concepts, such as One Small ACT (Ask – Care – Treat); programs such as SAIL, and processes such as Human Factors Councils (1720.4b Enclosure 1 Para 1).
- 3) Implement and drill a Crisis Response Plan (1720.4B Enclosure 5)
- 4) Establish a "Lethal Means Safety" program to facilitate Sailors putting highly-lethal methods of suicide (including firearms and medication) out of reach during times of increased stress (1720.4B)

In response to the CNO's Call to Action to Get Real and Get Better, the Navy is in the process of simplifying, streamlining, and aligning its culture, people, toughness and resilience programs, with a target completion by the end of the year.

## Who needs to know?

- All Sailors
- All Triads, Chiefs Mess
- All Civilian and Military Supervisors

## What you need to know – key points

- If you are thinking about suicide, are worried about a Shipmate, or would like emotional support, the Lifeline network is available 24/7 across the United States. Veterans Crisis Line- Dial 988 then Press 1.
- To prevent suicide, leaders at all levels must create climates that build protective factors and reduce risk factors, creating a sense of connectedness and cohesion within their unit, and root out unmanaged stress, toxicity, hostility and harassment of all kinds.
- Sailors can be affected by command risk factors and individual risk factors.
- Risk factors for suicide include a disruption in primary relationship, loss of status, psychological health issues, feelings of rejection or abandonment, increased substance use or misuse, pending legal/disciplinary actions, transition periods, and access to lethal means.
- Commands must develop and drill their Suicide Crisis Response Plan, knowing how to get Sailors the care they need when a crisis occurs.
- Lethal means safety saves lives- it has proven effective at preventing suicide.





- Gun locks are one method to secure firearms and have proven effective in reducing the likelihood of a suicide attempt by placing distance and time between the person and their firearm.
- Storing medications safely can reduce medication-related suicides and suicide attempts.

## Sample POD/POW Notes

- Great Leaders. Great Teams. Great People. Go to the [1 Small ACT Toolkit](#) for more information on annual suicide prevention and mental health observances that are meant to facilitate consistent dialogue and generate behavior change through continuing education, sharing resources, and empowering self-efficacy in individuals, communities, and fleets.  
[https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Portals/55/Support/21stCenturySailor/Suicide\\_Prevention/Documents/FY-23%201%20Small%20ACT%20Toolkit\\_FINAL.pdf?ver=WsOuzebD8H2gXaGuU5jfiw%3d%3d](https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Portals/55/Support/21stCenturySailor/Suicide_Prevention/Documents/FY-23%201%20Small%20ACT%20Toolkit_FINAL.pdf?ver=WsOuzebD8H2gXaGuU5jfiw%3d%3d)
- Let's talk about firearm safety! Did you know that [Fleet and Family Service Center](#) (CONUS and Hawaii) have gun locks available for Sailors to use with their personal firearms at home? Firearm safety is also lethal means safety, which is ensuring that highly-lethal methods of suicide are out of reach during times of increased stress.
- How can gun locks effectively prevent suicide? Firearms are the most common method of suicide among Sailors and family members in 2021. Gun locks are effective in reducing the likelihood of a suicide attempt by placing distance and time between a person and their firearm. Contact your local [Fleet and Family Service Center](#) (CONUS and Hawaii) for a gun lock today.  
[https://ffr.cnrc.navy.mil/Portals/76/Family\\_Readiness/Documents/FFSC%20Directory%202023.pdf?ver=MQfc2PKYxWxb8pG2ssCktA%3d%3d](https://ffr.cnrc.navy.mil/Portals/76/Family_Readiness/Documents/FFSC%20Directory%202023.pdf?ver=MQfc2PKYxWxb8pG2ssCktA%3d%3d)
- New Year, New Medicine Cabinet! When was the last time you went through your medicine cabinet? Storing medication safely can reduce medication-related suicides, suicide attempts, and accidental overdoses. Not keeping lethal doses of medication on hand, locking up medications, and disposing of medications that you no longer need or are expired are all ways to keep you and your family safe.

## FAQ

### Q. What are Command Protective Factors?

A. Command Protective Factors are attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors associated with great teams. Two items for leaders to focus on include:

- 1) **Cohesion:** Whether individuals in a workplace care about each other, share the same mission and goals, and work together effectively as a team.
- 2) **Connectedness:** The level of closeness one feels to a group and satisfaction with one's relationship to others in the group. Building connectedness starts before a Sailor arrives (sponsor program) and includes how a Sailor is brought into the team (command indoc program).

### Q. What are Command Risk Factors?

A. Command Risk Factors can include these three areas:

- 1) **Stress:** Beyond expected stress, risk increases when people feel unable to control important things in their life, or experience stress beyond their ability to cope. (Resource: [E-OSC](#))
- 2) **Toxic Leaders / Hostile Work Environment.** Toxic leaders disregard input, are unpredictable, self-promote and are demeaning, degrading, coercive, or deceptive. A hostile work environment exists when people act in a hostile manner towards each other, to include insults or gestures to humiliate.
- 3) **Harassment (Sexual or Racial).** Harassment exists when members have unwelcome or offensive experiences based on their sex, race, color, religion, and/or national origins, leading to a workplace that is intimidating, hostile, offensive, or unreasonably intrusive. (Resource: [CMEQ](#), [SAPR VA](#))

### Q. What are individual risk factors?

A. Individual risk factors include relationship problems, mental health, disciplinary/legal problems, transitions, and financial difficulties. Substance abuse, past history of suicide related behaviors, social isolation, ostracism, and withdrawal are also risk factors.

*Identifying and acting upon identified individual risk factors is an All Hands effort. However, Human Factors Councils enable leaders to periodically assess individual risk factors for all, or at-risk Sailors.*



**Q. What is a Crisis Response Plan?**

**A.** Like a warfighting tactic, technique, or procedure, a Crisis Response Plan defines how a command will respond when things such as the following occur: a Sailor exhibits a Suicide Related Behavior; medical/mental health resources are required; a Sailor calls in distress; a Sailor starts behaving in an uncharacteristic manner; the command receives a concerned call from a family or friend; or firearms must be safely stored.

**Q. What is lethal means safety?**

**A.** Lethal means safety places time and space between a person in crisis and their access to lethal means, such as firearms and medication. Firearms can be stored in gun safes, have gun locks installed, or be voluntarily surrendered.

**Q. What are different methods of lethal means safety?**

**A.** Gun locks, gun safes, and voluntary surrendering of personal firearms are all methods to prevent suicide by firearms. Safe storage of medication, not keeping lethal doses of medication on-hand, medication lock-boxes are all methods to prevent suicide by overdose. Additionally, it is encouraged to dispose of medication that is no longer needed or outdated at a pharmacy.

**Q. How can I get a gun lock?**

**A.** Gun locks are available for Sailors and their family members through Fleet and Family Service Centers (CONUS and Hawaii).

**Q. What is voluntary surrendering of a personal firearm?**

**A.** The Voluntary Storage Policy ([OPNAVINST 1720.4B](#)) states that commanders and healthcare professionals may ask Sailors who they believe are at risk of suicide or causing harm to voluntarily allow their personal firearm to be stored for safekeeping by the command.

**Q. What does it mean to “voluntarily surrender my personal firearm”?**

**A. IF** a Sailor agrees, their CO will ensure that their personal firearm is securely stored on the installation or other available location in coordination with local authorities.

**Q. Can a CO or healthcare professional take my personal firearm?**

**A. No.** While COs and healthcare professionals are authorized to ask Sailor’s about personal firearms if they believe the Sailor is at risk, surrendering the firearm is entirely voluntary.

**Q. If I voluntarily surrender my personal firearm, when will I get it back?**

**A.** If a Sailor voluntarily surrenders their personal firearm for safe storage during a period of high stress and concern by their CO or healthcare professional, it will be returned upon the Sailor’s request or at the end of a predetermined storage period which was previously agreed upon by the CO and the Sailor.

## Resources

- [OPNAVINST 1720.4B \(Navy Suicide Prevention Instruction\)](#)
- [FY-23 1 Small ACT Toolkit](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Handbook](#)
- [Veterans Crisis Line](#)- Dial 988 then Press 1
- [Military OneSource](#)
- [Fleet and Family Support Centers](#)
- [Psychological Health Resource Center \(PHRC\) Live Chat](#)