

Hello. I'm Christiana Montminy, the Employee Assistance Program Manager. I'm here today to talk about what can be a difficult and emotional subject: Suicide.

We have lost shipmates, but we remain committed to working together as a community to take good care of each other.

Suicide has no single cause and indicating otherwise implies an overly simplistic and misleading understanding of this public health problem. Risk factors for self injurious behaviors can include: feelings of disconnection, burdensomeness, or isolation. Protective factors or those skills, strengths and resources that help people deal more effectively with stressful events enhance resilience and help to counterbalance risk factors. Social cohesion is a protective factor.

Suicide happens at a crisis point when an individual feel utterly and completely hopeless. Sometimes a suicide is contemplated for hours, days, or months, or sometimes for minutes or only seconds. In order for someone to die by suicide, they must override the powerful human inclination toward self-preservation.

Most of us avoid difficult conversations — and we may find suicide a particularly difficult or frightening topic. We must, however, become comfortable asking questions to ensure individuals experiencing crisis get the care and resources they need. This year's National Suicide Prevention month campaign theme is "Connect to Protect"--reminding us all about the importance of "being there". We don't need special training to show genuine concern for others. We don't need, nor does the individual experiencing crisis, to have all the answers to make a lifesaving intervention. TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE DOES NOT encourage suicide. Being able to openly address these thoughts and behaviors can help prevent loss. It is SILENCE that is dangerous.

HOLD UP CARD)

We have a tool that provides guidance and language we can use to help those experiencing crisis:

ACE; which stands for Ask, Care, Escort. ACE is based on the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale. Using the ACE card, as it's written, is proven to make a lifesaving difference in critical moments when a person is considering suicide.

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What the Petty Officer did is a good example of using the ACE card to help someone in crisis, someone experiencing suicidal thoughts and plans for suicide. She observed changes in her colleague's behavior and presentation, she ASKED direct questions about suicide, she CARED and expressed her genuine concern, then stayed with him and ESCORTED her peer to the medical clinic for professional assistance.

Thanks to her awareness and lifesaving action, we were able to find supportive services for the Member,

Preventing suicide in the Coast Guard is an all hands responsibility. Each life lost is one too many. Coast Guard policy requires leaders to foster command climates that promote health and a sense of community, remove barriers to seeking assistance, increase awareness of resources, and take appropriate action when a member of the total workforce is in need. Good shipmates buoy each other in times of distress, ashore or afloat, on duty or off duty.

You can find the card on the Coast Guard's Health Safety and Work Life portal, the Coast Guard Support website, the Chaplain's and Medical's portals pages, and also on the Columbia Lighthouse Project page. Print it out! Laminate it! Keep it with you.

Remember your professional helpers who can deliver a higher level of care; the Chaplains, Medical personnel, the Employee Assistance Program Coordinators, Family Advocacy clinicians, Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment personnel, Coast Guard Investigative Services special agents and Threat Management Unit assessors. **HELP IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE.**

Like every other skill we possess, practicing develops comfort. Take time to familiarize yourself with the ACE, and not just during suicide prevention month. Make sure your shipmates and family alike have the card. This is an all hands, everyday effort. You play an important role in creating our network of safety. Thank you for your support.

(SMILE-DON'T MOVE)