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# AIR FORCE MATERIEL COMMAND

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## LEADER'S POST SUICIDE CHECKLIST



Current as of 12 May 2021

## **NOTE TO AFFECTED LEADER:**

Losing a unit member to death by suicide will have a significant impact on a unit. Before jumping right into taking action, it is important to pause and remember that you are not alone. Your Leadership, First Sergeant, and Installation Helping Agencies are available and willing to assist. Support services are available for you, your leadership team, and unit members.

Your role is critical in setting the tone for how the unit responds. The time period after a suicide death and the efforts to facilitate the healing of individuals, families, and units from the grief and distress of a suicide loss, as well the efforts to mitigate the negative aspects of exposure to suicide, is referred to as Postvention.

Postvention efforts are intended to provide everyone who is exposed to a loss by suicide with compassionate, immediate and long-term support. These efforts are vital to comprehensive suicide prevention efforts. Postvention includes providing individual and collective opportunities for healthy grieving.

The AFMC Leader's Post Suicide checklist is designed to assist you as a guide in the necessary steps that will need to be taken in response to a suicide. This checklist is intended to augment any local policies. It incorporates "lessons learned" from leaders who have experienced suicide deaths in their unit.

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**INFORMATION WORKSHEET**

When a suicide of a unit member is reported, document the information you are provided.

Name	
Age	
Rank/Grade	
Organization	
Date/time of suicide	
Name of Informant	
Phone # of Informant	
Relationship to Deceased	
Location	
Method	
Status of any bystanders	
Was Next of Kin Notified	
What information do they wish to be shared with unit members?	
Have arrangements been made?	
Immediate Supervisor	
Division/Branch Chief	
Notes:	

## INSTALLATION NOTIFICATIONS

	<p>Contact local law enforcement/Security Forces, AFOSI, and 911 (situation dependent).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AFOSI duty agent can be contacted after hours through the Law Enforcement Desk or Command Post.</li> <li>• Do not disturb the scene.</li> <li>• If the suicide occurred on duty, contact the Judge Advocate and AFOSI to validate who has jurisdiction of the scene and medical investigation.</li> </ul>
	<p>Notify the Installation Command Post (CP).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CP will initiate Operational Reporting (OPREP) messages.</li> <li>• CP will notify Installation Key Personnel such as: Installation Commander, Mortuary Affairs, and OSI.</li> </ul>
	<p>Notify Chain of Command.</p>
	<p>Notify First Sergeant.</p>
	<p>Consult with the Disaster Mental Health (DMH) Team Chief.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Command Post will make notification to the on-call DMH Team Chief.</li> <li>• The DMH Team Chief will:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Conduct a needs assessment</li> <li>b. Provide a review of available support services offered by various Installation Helping Agencies (i.e. Mental Health, Chaplain, Airman and Family Readiness, Military Family Life Counselor, Employee Assistance Program, and the Violence Prevention Integrator)</li> <li>c. Coordinate the necessary support services</li> </ol> </li> </ul>

## NEXT OF KIN NOTIFICATION

	<p>For suicide of a <i>military member</i>, contact the Casualty Assistance Office (CAO).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Casualty Assistance Representative (CAR) will review Casualty Assistance services and provide a briefing on managing casualty affairs IAW with AFI 36- 3002.</li> <li>• The Installation Commander or office designee makes notification if NOK is in local area. The CAR can assist.</li> </ul>
	<p>For suicide of a <i>civilian employee</i>, contact Civilian Personnel Flight (CPF)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If initial NOK notification is required, the CPF will help coordinate notification.</li> </ul>
	<p>Non-Traditional families (fiancé's, girlfriends, boyfriends)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NOK notifications are provided to NOK listed on either the Service Member's Record of Emergency Data (DD Form 93) or the civilian employee's official forms on file.</li> <li>• Contact either the CAR or CPF for guidance on notifications of all others</li> </ul>
	<p>NOK Notification was made by: _____</p>

## UNIT NOTIFICATION

Recognize information may spread quickly, so informing the unit in a timely manner is necessary. Timely and accurate information briefs can help dispel possible rumors. It is important to protect and respect the privacy of the deceased unit member and their loved ones during the death notification. Leaders are critical in setting the tone for how the unit responds to the suicide.

Note: If time allows, it is recommended to provide the initial notification to the decedent's immediate co-workers prior to informing the unit.

Prepare announcement to unit and co-workers.

- Consult with DMH Team Chief or on-call Mental Health provider to prepare announcement to unit and coworkers.
- Consult with Public Affairs regarding public statements about the suicide.
- Refer to the Public Affairs Guidance for Suicide Prevention (Note: Your local Violence Prevention Integrator (VPI) can provide you a copy).

Consider having DMH Team member present when you make initial announcement to work site with a balance of "need to know" and rumor control. Listed below are recommendations to follow:

- State it was a suicide or reported suicide.
- Avoid announcing specific details of the suicide.
- Announce location of suicide as having occurred either on-base or off-base.
- Do not mention method of suicide completion.
- Do not announce who found the body.
- Do not state whether or not a note was left.
- Do not make any statements as to why the member may have decided to take their life by suicide.
- Avoid glorifying/idealizing the deceased or conveying the suicide is different from any other death.
- Express sadness at the Air Force's loss and acknowledge the grief of the survivors.
- Emphasize that alternatives to suicide are readily available.
- Reinforce that support from Helping Agencies is available and encourage personnel to seek assistance when distressed.
- Express sadness that the Airman did not recognize that help was available.
- Encourage Wingmen to be attuned to those who may be grieving or having a difficult time following the suicide, especially those close to the deceased.
- Provide a brief reminder of warning signs of distress.

After the death announcement is made to the work center, follow up your comments in an e-mail provided to the unit.

- Restate the themes noted above.
- Include a listing of support available (i.e. Mental Health, Chaplain, Military Family Life Counselor, Employee Assistance Program, etc.).
- Sample e-mail notifications for unit members are available at:  
<https://www.resilience.af.mil/postvention-tools/>

## UNIT SUPPORT

The DMH Team can coordinate support which includes offering individual and group counseling or coordinating a grief/loss support group for unit members.

Refer grieving employees to available Installation Helping Agencies for support.

- For *Military beneficiaries* consider Mental Health, Chaplain, Airman & Family Readiness, and Military One Source (1-800-342-9647).
- For *civilians employees* consider Employee Assistance Program (EAP) (1-866-580-9078) or Airman & Family Readiness.
- If non-beneficiaries (i.e., extended family members, fiancé or boy/girlfriends) are struggling and asking for help, refer them to community-based services and/or discuss options with the DMH Team Chief.

Increase unit leadership team presence in the work area immediately following the death announcement and decrease that over the next 30 days to a tempo you find appropriate.

- Unit leadership should engage informally with personnel and communicate messages of support and information.

For ongoing support you can consult with the Installation Community Support Coordinator (CSC) to explore additional resources overtime.

- Anniversaries of suicides (1 moth, 6 months, 1 year, etc.) are periods of increased risk.
- Promote healthy behaviors and the Wingman concept during these periods.

## ACTIONS FOLLOWING A CIVILIAN EMPLOYEE DEATH BY SUICIDE

Notify the Installation Civilian Personnel Flight (CPF) and provide the following information:

- Commander/Director's name and phone number
- First level supervisor's name and phone number
- Organization
- Deceased employee's name
- Date, time and place of death
- Cause of death
- Name and relationship of person providing notification of death
- Name, phone number, and address of next of kin (NOK) on file

CPF will notify AFPC's Benefits and Entitlements Servicing Team (BEST) and a BEST representative will:

- Contact NOK by phone (this is after the Initial NOK notification has been made, if required)
- Provide survivor benefits letter and claim forms
- Provide advisory services and survivor annuity computations.
- Process death claim forms
- Input personnel actions into the Defense Civilian Personnel Data System (DCPDS)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notify the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) of death-in-service via email link on OPM web site</li> <li>• Forward appropriate package to Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), OPM, In-turn</li> </ul> <p>NOTE: BEST will contact the NOK on file. NOK may contact BEST at their convenience at the toll free number 1-800-525-0102 or commercial (210) 525-0102.</p>
	Certify the time and attendance in the Automated Time Attendance and Production System (ATAAPS) as soon as possible on the first work day after the employee's death.
	Save a copy of the employee's Electronic Record (to include any disciplinary actions).
	Save a copy of the employee's current pay records and leave balances (annual and sick leave).
<b>PERSONAL BELONGINGS</b>	
	<p>Discuss with NOK the process for claiming deceased employee's personal items.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange for delivery or pick-up of items at an appropriate time within a reasonable period.</li> </ul>
	<p>Conduct a search of the employee's work area to secure all personal possessions (AFI 34-501, <i>Mortuary Affairs Program</i>).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete the Record of Personal Effects of Believed to be Deceased Form (DD-1076).</li> <li>• Obtain signature and provide a copy to the NOK.</li> </ul>
<b>UNIT SPONSORED MEMORIAL SERVICES</b>	
Consult with the Chaplain regarding coordination for a Unit Sponsored Memorial Service. Memorial services are important opportunities to foster resilience by helping survivors understand, heal and move forward in as healthy a manner as possible.	
	<p>Guidance on memorials can be found in the Postvention Toolkit at the following location:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="https://www.resilience.af.mil/postvention-tools/">https://www.resilience.af.mil/postvention-tools/</a></li> </ul>
	<p>Keep in mind that a memorial is different than a funeral. The goal of a memorial is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comfort the grieving.</li> <li>• Help survivors deal with guilt.</li> <li>• Help survivors with anger.</li> <li>• Encourage Airmen/family members to seek help.</li> <li>• Prevent "copycat" suicides.</li> </ul>
	<p>Public communication after a suicide, including a memorial service, has the potential to either increase or decrease the suicide risk of those receiving the communication. The following are recommendations to keep in mind:</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If not conducted properly, a memorial service may lead to glorification of the suicide event and trigger “copycat” events.</li> <li>• Balance communication between recognizing the member’s military/civilian service and expressing regret about the manner of death.</li> <li>• Memorial services should avoid idealizing the deceased or the current state of peace found through death.</li> <li>• Avoid normalizing suicide by inferring it is an acceptable reaction/response to distressful situations.</li> <li>• Focus on personal feelings and feelings of survivors.</li> <li>• Promote help seeking and the Wingman concept.</li> <li>• Public memorials such as plaques, trees or flags at half-mast are not recommended.</li> </ul>
<b>DOD SUICIDE EVENT REVIEW (DODSER) ENTRY</b>	
	<p>The Installation Director of Psychological Health (DPH) is required to register all military suicides into the DoD Suicide Event Report (DODSER) database.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist the DPH by providing requested data to assist them with completing the DODSER entry.</li> </ul>
<b>RESOURCES</b>	
	<p>Additional leadership tools and resources are available on the Air Force Resilience site at: <a href="https://www.resilience.af.mil">https://www.resilience.af.mil</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These tools can also be found on the AF Connect App, under either your Installation or the AFMC page, in the Leadership Toolbox.</li> </ul>
	<p>The Manager’s Guide to Suicide Postvention by the American Association of Suicidology provides additional information: <a href="https://suicidology.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Managers-Guidebook-To-Suicide-Postvention.pdf">https://suicidology.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Managers-Guidebook-To-Suicide-Postvention.pdf</a></p>
	<p>For questions contact Mr. Mike Owens, HQ AFMC/A1RZ:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="mailto:Michael.owens.21@us.af.mil">Michael.owens.21@us.af.mil</a></li> <li>• (937) 257-2125</li> </ul>