

Is Suicide on Your Bucket List?

The studies vary, but the consensus is that about 20 veterans a day are taking their own life. Recently I've learned from other Marines that they are hearing from some brother and sister Marines that are suicidal and don't know what to do. The Marines on the receiving end feel as if someone has handed them a grenade with the pin pulled and another Marine's life is in the balance. If you're thinking about suicide here are some things that you need to know:

1. Having suicidal thoughts doesn't mean that you are crazy. It means that you are trying to figure a way out of the emotional and/or physical pain. Most people experience these thoughts at some time in their life in a fleeting way due to some form of physical and/or mental suffering. It's part of our survival instincts to want to get away from pain.

2. If you find yourself talking to others about your suicide, it's that part of you that really wants to live (Corpsman!), letting someone know that you are really hurting, and are feeling overwhelmed. In this moment from your perspective life sucks and is not worth enduring. If you told another Marine "I'm seriously wounded and maybe dying" we'd all expect that Marine to do whatever it took to help keep you alive, but when you tell another Marine that you are seriously considering taking your life they are not really equipped to help other than listen, and typically feel helpless and frustrated. As we all learned from our D.I.'s we are all ultimately responsible for ourselves and our own actions.

3. If you find yourself self-medicating with drugs and/or alcohol/stimulants (caffeine, sugar, energy drinks) and talking about suicide, you're not your real self, you are a version of yourself that is distorted by these substances. Everyone knows how frustrating and usually counterproductive it is to deal with someone when they are drunk, high, hyper, or buzzed, and when you come off of that the pain that is driving you to consider suicide is still there, but you already know that.

4. If you're spending hours online or on a phone talking/posting/texting/messaging about your suicidal thoughts, what you're doing is isolating and avoiding real face-to-face interaction with others equipped to help you. You may feel better temporarily, but you're stressing everyone else out and just letting the whole world know that you need help (Corpsman!). Unless you're overwhelmed psychotically, let them help you by driving you to a location where professionals are equipped and trained to help. If you're having psychotic episodes where you're losing control, it's better to be transported by ambulance.

5. If you tried to get help before and it didn't work out, that still doesn't mean that you can't be helped. Marine Corps history is filled with events that required multiple attempts to achieve success. Getting a good therapist or medical doctor or therapeutic team is a lot like buying shoes, you may have to try on several pairs before getting the right fit. Also, physical and emotional recovery is rarely linear; in other words, relapse, or bad days are a normal part of recovery or getting better.

6. You may not believe it right now, but if you get the right help, follow your treatment plan and adopt a healthy lifestyle, the suicidal feelings will fade as they are displaced by more positive thoughts and concerns. Sometimes it helps to realize that while these thoughts are very real at this moment, that it's impossible to rule out feeling better in the future. If you were so good at predicting the future you'd be very rich. Whenever I have had to intervene as a police officer or a therapist I've never had anyone, after they received adequate care, regret that they were prevented from taking their life.

7. Sometimes in your struggle while hesitating about getting help you may have to convince yourself, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, not to harm yourself. Remember that even though you're not feeling very strong at this moment, you've already proven yourself to be stronger than most by earning the title of Marine.

8. You're probably feeling that everything is out of control, but it's not. You are in control of what you do. It's not easy and it takes courage, but everyone that is a Marine knows the drill. There are times when you have to reach down deep inside and take a courageous step to succeed. In this case, not procrastinating, and getting the help that you need ASAP.

9. After you are actively in treatment there is a long list of things that you can do to promote the best outcome for your treatment. Don't expect anyone or anything to magically cure you. You are going to have to work hard and be actively committed to your journey of going from struggling with suicide to thinking that life, while not perfect, (no one's life is) is well worth living.

10. Most importantly remember that you are not alone. As a Marine you have many brothers and sisters that share or have shared your struggle, but we can't do much more than listen, drive you to aid, or call 9-1-1 if you are suicidal. Once you are in treatment use the League and your brother and sister Marines and the League activities as a support system.

11. So Marine here are some first steps in getting help:

Call/Text Lines

I suggest all hands list them in their phone contacts, if unable to contact or dissatisfied with one, try another:

V.A. Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255, press 1, or text on your smart phone

838255 Professional help and support for vets, active military, National Guard, family, and friends needing immediate help or seeking support and resources. You can also go on-line and engage in live chat:

veteranscrisisline.net

Vet2Vet Crisis Line: 1-877-VET2VET (838-2838)

Peer support and referral to professional help. For vets in crisis preferring to talk to a vet.

National Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-8255

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Don't discount this hotline, suicide is a national problem and although your veteran's experience may be different your struggle with suicide is not.

Professional Crisis and Non-Crisis Treatment

V.A. Hospital

Local Hospital

Check your area for state, local, and private programs that specialize in assisting veterans with mental health issues, or general mental health services.

Professional Non-Crisis Treatment

Give an Hour. Go online to: giveanhour.org. You can find a local mental health professional that has volunteered to provide one hour of free therapy a week to post 9/11 veterans and their family members for military service related issues. If your service is pre 9/11 you might ask the therapist if they would consider providing the same benefit, but you'd have to respect their decision as this is outside the umbrella of GAH.