



LEADERS TOOLKIT FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION, INTERVENTION, AND POSTVENTION

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INTRODUCTION

BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

This Toolkit empowers National Guard Commanders and unit leaders at every echelon to save lives by having immediate, comprehensive access to the most useful suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention tools. Developed by the National Guard Bureau J1 Warrior Resilience and Fitness Division (NGB-J1-W), this Toolkit is where leaders can find trustworthy, evidence-based guidance to execute their responsibility of protecting the health and safety of Service members. This resource does not replace suicide prevention training.

LEADER ROLES

PREVENTION

Relentless leader commitment to suicide prevention is critical. Leaders are well-positioned to help Service members by promoting protective factors for suicide, recognizing risk factors, and encouraging help-seeking behaviors. Leaders should be attentive to others and build a culture of trust. Attuned leaders who apply this Toolkit can save lives.

INTERVENTION

An effective leader response to warning signs of suicidal ideation is vital. This Toolkit connects leaders to resources that describe behavioral and verbal cues (both subtle and apparent) associated with suicide, allowing leaders to intervene and guide Service members to safety.

POSTVENTION

Postvention occurs in the aftermath of a suicide attempt or suicide. This Toolkit contains resources to respond effectively to the shock and grief of these events. Using this Toolkit, leaders can offer a safe space for those affected and promote healing.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Leaders can best use this Toolkit by developing a working knowledge of the resources in Table 1, which are further described throughout this document. Share this Toolkit with others to promote resilience and force readiness.

SUMMARY OF TOOLS

(Organized by When to Use)

TOOL	WHEN TO USE	DESCRIPTION
Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (Columbia Protocol)	Prevention	Identifies whether a Service member is at risk and gauges the level of support needed
Command Climate Assessment (CCA)	Prevention	Commander-led efforts conducted annually to gather information on organizational climate. Helps identify risk and protective factors that affect warfighter readiness
Comprehensive Integrated Primary Prevention (CIPP) Plan	Prevention	Guides planning and coordinating prevention activities, identifying data-driven actions to reduce risks and strengthen protective factors within units
NG Connectedness and Relationship Education System (CARES)	Prevention	Increases protective factors and holistic health in support of Service members and their families throughout their careers
Defense Organizational Climate Pulse (DOCP)	Prevention	A brief, fully customizable survey used voluntarily or as directed. Provides timely feedback on targeted topics and supports evidence-based climate solutions
Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS)	Prevention	A congressionally mandated, unit-level survey used by military Commanders and Department of War (DoW) civilian leaders. Gathers confidential feedback on their organization's climate
Engage	Prevention	Develops leadership skills and confidence in handling professional and personal confrontation
Go Safes, Locks, Outside the Home (Go SLO)	Prevention	Provides a slogan for distancing distress and lethal means
Leaders Suicide Prevention Safe Messaging Guide	Prevention	Describes how to communicate effectively about suicide and clarifies misunderstandings to decrease stigma
Lethal Means Safety Guide for Military Service Members and Their Families	Prevention	Describes lethal means safety and safe storage
Unit Risk Inventory (URI)	Prevention	Identifies risk factors within units to mitigate high-risk behavior
Ask, Care, Escort (ACE) Base +1 Training	Prevention/Intervention	Prevention: Increases awareness of protective factors, risk factors, and warning signs that contribute to a person's level of risk for suicide Intervention: Provides specific actions to bolster protective factors, mitigate risk, and intervene in a crisis to help prevent suicide
Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM)	Prevention/Intervention	Prevention: Trains professionals to counsel individuals on safely reducing access to lethal means and creating time and distance during emotional distress Intervention: Provides skills to compassionately engage with Service members in crisis and collaboratively develop safety plans that reduce immediate access to lethal means
Supporting Service Members Facing Disciplinary or Legal Action	Prevention/Intervention	Prevention: Recognizes disciplinary or legal action as a risk factor for suicide Intervention: Provides support information, such as where to go, when to offer, and how to access (for example: confidential counseling and a crisis hotline)
Policy: National Guard Suicide Prevention Program	Prevention/Intervention	Prevention: Provides guidance on suicide prevention training procedures Intervention: Provides guidance on suicide investigation procedures
Ask, Care, Escort-Suicide Intervention (ACE-SI)	Intervention	Develops skills for crisis situations and assists at-risk individuals
Risks & Warning Signs: How to Help	Intervention	Lists the top risk factors for suicide and how to help someone in a suicidal crisis
Postvention Toolkit for a Military Suicide Loss	Postvention	Promotes healing among suicide loss survivors
Responding to Grief, Trauma, and Distress After a Suicide	Postvention	Offers a framework to foster healing and resilience
Standard Operating Procedure for Reintegration Following a Crisis	Postvention	Provides steps for reintegration after crisis and key considerations
The Days Ahead: Essential Papers for Families of Deceased Service Members	Postvention	Provides resources for surviving family members and information on coping with the loss
Together We Can Cope with a Suicide Loss	Postvention	Encourages emotional understanding with coping tools to navigate grief
Unit Commander's Suicide Postvention Handbook	Postvention	Equips leaders to stabilize units and promotes recovery

TOOLS

IDENTIFYING A SERVICE MEMBER AT RISK

» Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (Columbia Protocol)

Primary Users: Army National Guard (ARNG) and Air National Guard (ANG)

When to Use: Prevention

The Columbia Protocol is a six-question tool designed for use by anyone, anywhere. Leaders do not require specialized training or background in behavioral health to assess suicide risk and save lives. This plain-language scale assesses suicidal thoughts and behaviors, using simple “yes and “no” answers to identify low-risk, moderate-risk, and high-risk individuals. The results inform next steps, timelines, and appropriate levels of support. This tool is available for free via the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

VALUE

- + Communicates suicide risk in a few minutes
- + Provides appropriate next steps
- + Prevents harm
- + Fosters communication that can lead to help-seeking behavior

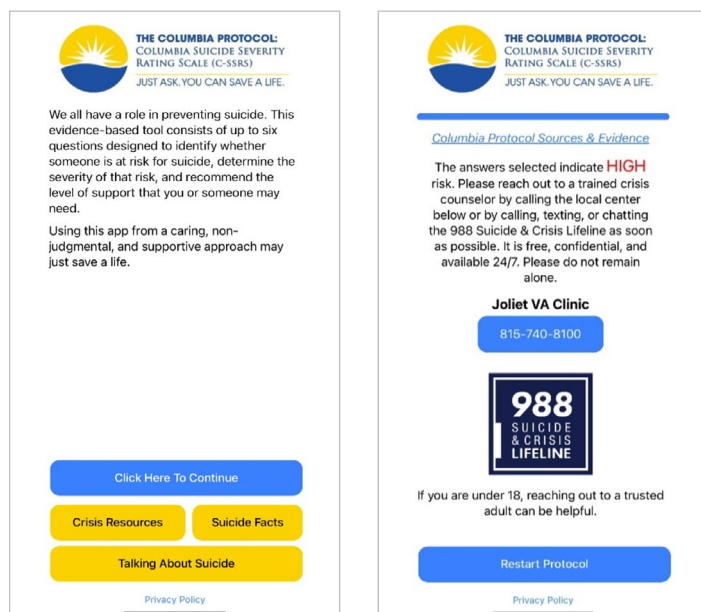


Figure 1. The Columbia Protocol iPhone app, with a completed risk assessment and next steps

» Supporting Service Members Facing Disciplinary or Legal Action

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG

When to Use: Prevention, Intervention

Administrative and legal problems are major risk factors for suicide. This resource provides information on support such as where to go for it, when to offer it, and how to access it.

VALUE

- + Addresses directly the effect of disciplinary or legal action on suicide
- + Provides resources to prevent and manage mental health challenges

DISTANCING DISTRESS AND LETHAL MEANS

» Lethal Means Safety Guide for Military Service Members and Their Families

Primary Users: ARNG

When to Use: Prevention

Use the Lethal Means Safety Guide for Military Service Members and Their Families to distance at-risk Service members from lethal means, such as firearms and medications. This tool shares how to store lethal means, misconceptions and facts about suicide, and crisis and noncrisis resources.

VALUE

- + Identifies types of lethal means and how to store them
- + Uses time and distance to protect Service members
- + Addresses common misconceptions about lethal means safety
- + Fosters a culture of safe storage and support-seeking behavior

» Go Safes, Locks, Outside the Home (Go SLO)

Primary Users: ANG

When to Use: Prevention

Champion safe firearm and medication storage by encouraging Service members to “Go SLO”—that is, use Safes, Locks, and storage Outside the home during distress. This slogan helps distance distress and lethal means to save lives.

VALUE

- + Reduces immediate access to lethal means, lowering the likelihood of impulsive self-harm during a crisis
- + Strengthens a culture of responsible storage and risk mitigation, supporting suicide prevention and unit safety

LEADING PRACTICES TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY ABOUT SUICIDE

» Leaders Suicide Prevention Safe Messaging Guide

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG

When to Use: Prevention

The Leaders Suicide Prevention Safe Messaging Guide provides tools and resources to safely and effectively communicate about suicide with Service members, units, and military communities. Learn how to prevent suicide by advocating for connection and self-care, communicating caringly and openly, and reinforcing hope. This tool provides clear talking points that leaders can use in daily conversation.

VALUE

- + Offers effective language to communicate safely about behavioral health
- + Avoids inadvertently stigmatizing or triggering Service members
- + Provides facts about suicide and corrects common misconceptions
- + Encourages help-seeking behavior

» NG Connectedness and Relationship Education System (CARES)

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG

When to Use: Prevention

This tool enhances relational awareness, trust, and unit cohesion. Moreover, the resource promotes holistic health for Service members and their families.

VALUE

- + Prevents harmful behaviors by increasing relational awareness and mitigating risks
- + Fosters connection among Service members and their families
- + Provides leaders with information to recognize and address risks
- + Enhances leadership skills through courses that improve self-efficacy and development capabilities

RISK ASSESSMENT SURVEYS

» Unit Risk Inventory (URI)

Primary Users: ARNG
When to Use: Prevention

This tool helps Commanders understand the needs of their units. The anonymous questionnaire screens for high-risk behaviors within units, including alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, suicide, financial problems, and personal and unit relationships.

VALUE

- + Includes 10 questions about National Guard and Reserve Service members
- + Develops a prevention/early intervention plan focused on specific challenges

» Defense Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS)

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG
When to Use: Prevention

This unit-level survey collects data on organizational climate, such as harassment and discrimination. The survey is congressionally mandated and available to all military Commanders and DoW civilian organization leaders.

VALUE

- + Encourages leaders to develop a targeted action plan to address any emerging and current problematic issues with the overall goal of improving their command climate
- + Ensures individual anonymity within the unit

» Defense Organizational Climate Pulse (DCOP)

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG
When to Use: Prevention

This brief, fully customizable organizational climate survey includes questions selected based on topics relevant to a unit or organization. The survey provides timely feedback on targeted topics. Leaders may field this survey voluntarily for any reason or may be directed by their leadership.

VALUE

- + Provides relevant data
- + Identifies priority areas for improvement
- + Supports evidence-based prevention and climate solutions

» **Command Climate Assessment (CCA)**

Primary Users: Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce
When to Use: Prevention

These assessments are Commander-led efforts to gather information on organizational climates and must be conducted annually in accordance with the Office of People Analytics. It is recommended that Commanders at every echelon use this assessment to help identify risk and protective factors that affect warfighter readiness. The results help assess unit health, supporting evidence-based prevention strategies.

VALUE

- + Provides insights on organizational climates
- + Helps Commanders direct prevention efforts

» **Comprehensive Integrated Primary Prevention (CIPP) Plan**

Primary Users: Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce
When to Use: Prevention

This tool documents integrated primary prevention-based activities to promote healthier climates across communities in the DoW. The plan reflects a variety of data, including administrative records, reports, interview data, focus group data, and survey data such as the Defense Organizational Climate Survey.

VALUE

- + Reflects data from assessments and other means from within a leader's organization
- + Informs leaders of strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations

TRAININGS

» Ask, Care, Escort (ACE) Base +1 Training

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG

When to Use: Prevention, Intervention

This is the U.S. Army's mandatory one-hour of annual suicide prevention and intervention training. The ANG is currently implementing this training. The purpose of the training is to increase awareness of protective factors, risk factors, and warning signs that contribute to suicide risk. Also, the training provides specific actions to bolster protective factors, mitigate risk, and intervene in a crisis to help prevent suicide.

VALUE

- + Improves readiness
- + Provides knowledge for attendees to share to reduce the risk of suicide
- + Encourages intervention for at-risk family members

» Ask, Care, Escort-Suicide Intervention (ACE-SI)

Primary Users: ARNG

When to Use: Intervention

This is the U.S. Army's enhanced suicide prevention unit training program. This program provides comprehensive instruction on how to appropriately and deliberately intervene in crisis situations and to recognize and assist at-risk individuals who are dealing with challenges.

VALUE

- + Teaches leaders to remain calm, ask about suicidal ideation, and express empathy
- + Teaches leaders to safely escort at-risk individuals to the appropriate response agency or to remain with them until help arrives

» Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM)

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG

When to Use: Prevention, Intervention

Use this tool when a Service member is at risk of harm to reduce access to lethal means by providing safe storage options.

VALUE

- + Guides leaders in identifying those at risk and implementing prevention strategies
- + Promotes safety and risk reduction through safe storage of lethal means
- + Provides skills to compassionately engage with Service members in crisis
- + Provides counseling and resources

» Engage**Primary Users: ARNG****When to Use: Prevention**

Engage training develops leadership skills and confidence in handling professional and personal confrontations. The training develops the ability and skill to drive engagements at the initial alert from a deviation of standards, providing opportunities to change the trajectory of behavior to be consistent with Army values.

VALUE

- + Develops one-on-one communication skills
- + Empowers leaders to intervene before a problem escalates or persists

RECOGNIZING RISK FACTORS

» Risks & Warning Signs: How to Help

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG

When to Use: Intervention

This tool teaches the top risk factors for suicide and how to help someone in a suicidal crisis. The ability to recognize suicidal ideations and attempts empowers leaders to know when to listen, offer hope, and get help from providers specializing in crisis intervention.

VALUE

- + Educates leaders on the risk and protective factors of suicide
- + Provides leaders with actions to help someone in a suicidal crisis

SUICIDE INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES

» Policy: National Guard Suicide Prevention Program

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG

When to Use: Prevention, Intervention

This policy provides guidance on responsibilities, suicide prevention training procedures, suicide event reporting and tracking procedures, and suicide investigation procedures. A Chief of the National Guard Bureau Manual, with an estimated publication timeframe of Summer 2026, will incorporate this policy.

VALUE

- + Requires leaders to participate in suicide prevention training annually
- + Provides steps to conduct an effective suicide investigation

PROMOTING HEALING AMONG SUICIDE LOSS SURVIVORS

» Postvention Toolkit for a Military Suicide Loss

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG

When to Use: Postvention

Use the Postvention Toolkit for a Military Suicide Loss to learn how to thoughtfully support survivors navigating the practical and emotional concerns after suicide loss.

VALUE

- + Promotes healing among suicide loss survivors, including coping with grief
- + Minimizes negative effects of exposure to suicide, including suicide contagion
- + Promotes help-seeking behaviors, messages of resilience, hope, and healing

» Standard Operating Procedure for Reintegration Following a Crisis

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG

When to Use: Postvention

Use this standard operating procedure to effectively support individuals returning to work after a crisis, ensuring safety, stability, and long-term well-being.

VALUE

- + Enables structured reintegration with the understanding of how to address emotions associated with reintegration
- + Encourages leaders to create individualized, holistic plans with mental health professionals for safe transitions
- + Highlights essential steps to minimize risk, including monitoring access to lethal means and addressing workplace reintegration concerns
- + Promotes ongoing communication, emotional support, and resource access to aid recovery and reduce stigma

» Together We Can Cope with a Suicide Loss

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG

When to Use: Postvention

Use this tool for information on processing grief and healing after a suicide loss.

VALUE

- + Offers practical advice for managing grief through self-care, professional support, and community connection
- + Encourages acknowledging grief by addressing complex emotions tied to loss
- + Provides support networks and additional crisis resources

» Responding to Grief, Trauma, and Distress: After a Suicide

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG

When to Use: Postvention

This tool supports individuals and communities affected by suicide, promoting healing and postvention best practices.

VALUE

- + Enables effective postvention with clear frameworks to address the unique needs of suicide loss survivors
- + Supports trauma recovery with tools for fostering resilience
- + Promotes community-wide preventive measures and long-term support

» The Days Ahead

Primary Users: ARNG and ANG

When to Use: Postvention

Use The Days Ahead to navigate the administrative and emotional challenges following the loss of a loved one in service, with clear guidance and support.

VALUE

- + Provides guidance with actionable steps on understanding survivor benefits, funeral arrangements, and financial counseling
- + Helps families gather vital documents, benefits, and resources
- + Connects families with grief resources, peer support groups, and counseling services for emotional recovery

» Unit Commander's Suicide Postvention Handbook

Primary Users: ARNG

When to Use: Postvention

This resource provides guidance to Commanders to help them effectively lead their units through suicide postvention activities, including resetting the readiness of the unit.

VALUE

- + Sets a foundation for healthy grieving
- + Facilitates healing of individuals and the unit
- + Prevents other negative effects of exposure to suicide

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

DoW

- + [Defense Suicide Prevention Office](#)
- + [DoW Suicide Prevention](#)
- + [Financial Readiness](#)
- + [Leader Guide and Postvention Checklist](#)
- + [Relationship Challenges](#)
- + [Resource Library](#)

NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU

- + [Warrior Resilience and Fitness Division](#)
 - [Legal Actions Checklist](#)
- + [Warrior Resilience and Fitness Division Partnerships Resource Tool - \(CAC access required\)](#)
 - [LivingWorks Start](#)
 - [Project Safeguard - \(CAC access required\)](#)

ANG

- + [Air Force Integrated Resilience](#)
- + [Air Force Leader's Post Suicide Checklist](#)
- + [ANG Prevention](#)

ARNG

- + [Suicide Postvention Unit Commander's Handbook](#)

U.S. CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

- + [Facts About Suicide](#)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

- + [Safe Storage of Firearms: Unload It, Lock It, Store It](#)

OTHER

- + [Exploring the Dangers of AI in Mental Health Care](#)
- + [New Study: AI Chatbots Systematically Violate Mental Health Ethics Standards](#)

For additional support applying the resources in this Toolkit, please contact:

- Behavioral Health Officer
- Director of Psychological Health
- Suicide Prevention Program Coordinator/Suicide Prevention Program Manager
- Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce member
- Suicide Intervention Officer
- Chaplain

988 | SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE



988 offers 24/7 judgment-free support for mental health, substance use, and more. **Text, call, or chat 988.**

Have feedback on this resource?
We'd love to hear from you.



ACRONYMS

ANG: Air National Guard

ARNG: Army National Guard

DoW: Department of War

Contact Us: NGB-Suicide-Prevention@army.mil