



Commanding Officer, Marine Aircraft Group 24 Suicide Prevention Policy Statement



It's OK not to feel OK. It's OK to ask for help.

Suicides are sadly on the rise, and we are losing far too many Marines and Sailors to suicide each year. The Marine Corps has been losing more Marines and Sailors to suicide than to combat in recent years. Suicide prevention directly ties to mission accomplishment, readiness, and the well being of our Marines, Sailors and Families. Suicide prevention aligns with my number one priority of maintaining readiness to accomplish all assigned missions while preserving our most precious assets—our individual Marines and Sailors.

Suicide is not completely understood. Particularly with the recent rise in military suicides, combat exposure, post-traumatic stress, misuse of prescription drugs and financial difficulties are often contributing factors. On a more micro level, common factors in many recent Marine suicides include relationship problems, job performance issues, financial problems, substance abuse issues, legal troubles and recent changes in behavior. Sadly individuals that have been victims of hazing or sexual assault may also be at a higher risk for suicide. We will use our force preservation councils to identify and help Marines and Sailors that may be at high risk.

There is a lot of help and resources available to help us win our personal battles—take advantage of them if needed and please lead your fellow Marines and Sailors to them if they need help. Assistance can be found through your chain of command, the Group Chaplain, our Medical Officers and Corpsman and, most importantly and most often effective, from your fellow Marines and Sailors. The Marine Corps has some world-class resources to include the series of “Leave No Marine Behind” Suicide Prevention training, the Leaders Guide to Managing Marines in Stress, Military One Source (www.militaryonesource.com) and the DSTRESS Line (www.dstressline.com). The DSTRESS Line was developed by the Marine Corps to provide professional, anonymous counseling for Marines, attached Sailors, and families when it's needed most.

There is much training required in the Marine Corps, but one of the most important pieces of training is the “Leave No Marine Behind” Suicide Prevention training. I expect every Marine and Sailor in this MAG to be trained and current in their grade-specific suicide prevention training—100% is the goal and expectation.

The strength of MAG-24 will always be based on mutual respect and dignity, how we treat each other, and how we take care of our own. I charge leaders at all levels to stay engaged in the personal lives of our Marines and Sailors and really know them. Whether NCO, SNCOIC, OIC, roommate or liberty buddy, your personal intervention is a vitally important factor in preventing suicide and ensuring a fellow Marine or Sailor who needs help gets it quickly.

I am committed to getting help for those in need and to removing any stigma from Marines and Sailors seeking help or behavioral health services. I charge our medical department to help me remove any barriers from those seeking help. From the everyday stressors of life to the stressors related to combat, stress can affect even the strongest Marine. Seeking help when in distress is not a sign of weakness or detrimental to you career. I will not tolerate those that haze, ostracize, or humiliate any member of this MAG, especially against those who require and are responsibly seeking professional help.

Remember, it's OK to ask for help. If offered help by a friend or leader, please take the offered hand.

I need each and every Marine and Sailor in MAG-24 to accomplish our mission—we can't afford to lose anybody. I also need everyone in our MAG to help prevent the loss of one of our fellow Marines and Sailors to suicide. With engaged, anticipatory leadership we can prevent suicide in MAG-24 and ensure we are keeping faith with our Sailors and Marines. Together, as a Team, we can accomplish any mission and ensure the continued success of MAG-24 to our Corps. Mission first, Marines & Sailors always.

Semper Fidelis,

Paul A. Fortunato
Colonel, United States Marine Corps
Commanding Officer, Marine Aircraft Group 24