

PREVENTION IN ACTION

CONNECTEDNESS

SEPTEMBER IS SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

The Marine Corps is committed to preventing suicide among Marines, their Families, and the civilian workforce.

Though suicide prevention is a priority throughout the year, in September—National Suicide Prevention Month—the Corps highlights efforts to promote awareness of the complex issue of suicide and emphasizes the resources and support available.

The Suicide Prevention Month theme of “Connectedness” highlights the important role that connections to fellow Marines, leaders, family, friends, the community, and resources can play in preventing suicide.

September will kick off a yearlong campaign (1 Sept 2020—31 Aug 2021) and use the slogan “Connect to Protect” to support the overall theme. The slogan emphasizes connecting with others and the community, as well as with suicide prevention resources. Use the Hashtag #BeThere when supporting prevention efforts on social media.

How can you Connect to Protect?

Connect with self. It is important to focus on your own good health and wellness.

- Participate in spiritual or community

CONNECT TO PROTECT

Make it Your Mission to
#BeThere

activities and groups.

- Volunteer for causes or organizations that you care about.

- Spend time with friends and family members—whether in person or virtually depending on what is best.

- Seek support from peers, family, or health professionals.

- Reach out to others.

Connect with others. Show your support and #BeThere for your community by strengthening connections:

- Check in with friends and family. Let them know you care.
- Plan activities you can enjoy together.
- Listen when they want to talk.
- Accept what others have experienced without judgement.
- Resist the temptation to problem-solve.
- Reassure them.
- Express care and concern.

- Encourage them to get help and stay in touch with friends and family.

- Know your military and community resources.

Take steps year-round to “Connect to Protect” with Marines and Families. Join your units or installations by participating in suicide prevention activities and programs. Contact your unit’s Suicide Prevention Program Officer for additional information and resources.

If you are concerned someone is in crisis and you think it’s an emergency, don’t delay in responding. Call the duty (if the Marine lives in the barracks) or report the post immediately to your chain of command.

If you believe the person is suicidal, call 911. If the situation is concerning but not an emergency, give the person options to talk to someone on the phone, online, or in person:

- [Military Crisis Line](tel:800-273-8255): 800-273-8255 and Press 1
- [Military One Source](tel:800-342-9647): 800-342-9647
- [Community Counseling Center](#)
- Chaplain

—Suicide Prevention Capability

CONNECT TO YOUR COMMUNITY BY VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering leads to almost automatic connections to your community and the people you meet while helping others.

Volunteering brings together people that have an altruistic spirit, and it is amazing to see the results of just one afternoon.

Volunteers report feeling less stressed and having a more positive view of themselves and those around them.

What are some of the things you can do to build a connection through volunteering?

Contact your installation’s [volunteer coordinator](#). Learn about opportunities on and off the installation that can help you build

connections.

Volunteer virtually. There are many opportunities to volunteer virtually, especially because of COVID-19. You may not interact in person with others, but you will still make connections.

Just volunteer. It doesn’t matter if you volunteer once a month or once a week. It doesn’t matter if you volunteer with friends, with family, or alone; just volunteer. You will connect to others, improve your mental and physical health, and impact your community in a positive manner.

—Personal and Professional Readiness Branch



Sgt. Lakezia Ortiz (left) and Capt. Kyle Cawthon volunteer with other Marines to repair storm damage in Nashville in March.

WE SHOULD MEASURE OUR CONNECTEDNESS TO OTHERS

BY CDR GREGORY CATES
CHAPLAIN, MF DIVISION

How important is it to be connected? What is the first answer that pops into your head?

Answers to that question will vary greatly depending upon many factors.

A few of those factors include how you were raised, where you were raised, and whether you are an introvert or an extrovert.

For example, I have a friend whose dad would come home from work and go straight to the garage for the next three or four hours. He made it clear he wanted to be left alone.

I have another friend whose dad takes forever when he goes to Walmart or Home Depot because he likes to talk to everyone there about everything under the sun.

My two friends have different views on connectedness, and if I introduced them to you, I think you would be able to tell who had which father.

Most of us know that it is very important to be connected, and research supports that idea. As human beings, we are social creatures.

Our social connectedness will vary with personality types, but



In the 2000 film *Cast Away*, Tom Hanks' character is stranded on an island alone for four years. He forms an imaginary friendship with a volleyball to cope with his loneliness.

some type of connectedness is instrumental to our mental and physical health.

I still remember going to the theater in 2000 with my mom (Oh, the good old days) and seeing the movie "Cast Away" with Tom Hanks.

If you have not seen it, he is the sole survivor of a plane crash and is on a deserted island.

We see him go through the crash, realize his situation, and later dance around when he was finally able to create fire.

Then, there is a pause, and the action picks up after some time has passed. He has lost weight,

has a long beard and shaggy hair, can spear a fish with no problem, and eats it raw (pretty cool).

Then we see how long he had been on the island. A caption crawls across the screen that reads, "Four Years Later." I remember hearing a collective groan through the theater as everyone thought about how rough it would be to live alone like that for four years.

Sometimes we can get into a rut where we are not making connections with others. We might not be isolated for four years, but we need to monitor our connectedness to others.

I thought of three questions we can ask ourselves:

- What are the top three ways that I connect with others?
- Do I connect more with others through technology or person to person?
- Who have I connected with today, this week, this month?

As we think about the answers to these questions, we can truly see how connected we are.

If we find we don't have enough meaningful connections, we can work to forge new ones and strengthen existing ones.

What is connectedness?

• Don't confuse connections via technology with actual social connectedness, which has more to do with the quality of our relationships, rather than the number and frequency of interactions.

• Understand that we need both connections with others and solitude to connect with ourselves.

• Consider that religion or spirituality can foster connectedness—to others, to one's self, and to a higher power (for those traditions that acknowledge it).

• Experience intentional ways for connectedness through religion and spirituality with meditation, prayer, religious rites and rituals, and communal gatherings. Build social fitness through practice because connectedness takes practice.

• Remember that religion and spirituality also assert that connectedness is not something to be earned but rather is a fundamental need of humanity.

• Talk to your partner about your respective needs for connectedness and work to meet each others' needs.

PRACTICE SELF-CARE

Welcome to the Self-care Corner, which focuses on self-care techniques that Service members, civilians, veterans, and families find helpful. Stress is a part of everyday life, and all of us can benefit from learning techniques to manage it. Each month you will hear from two individuals about their favorite techniques.

Capt Meagan Kirk, Military Advisor, Behavioral Programs, Marine and Family Programs Division

What: Working out and reading

How it Helps: Working out at the end of the day allows me to relieve any stress and clear my mind for a full night of sleep. Reading for an hour in the evening allows me to disengage from technology, relax, and disconnect from the stress of the day.

Christine Heit, Prevention Manager, Marine and Family Programs Division

What: Belly breathing (take a deep breath until you feel it in your belly, exhale slowly, repeat) and hiking with my dogs.

How it Helps: When I am stressed or anxious, I feel it in my chest and stomach; belly breathing helps calm my body. I am an active person and I feel centered when I am outside. Walking my dogs gives me the opportunity to exercise, exercise them, and clear my mind.

CONNECT WITH NATURE BY VISITING A NATIONAL PARK

While many of our Marine Corps Community Services recreation programs have been placed on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the great outdoors is becoming a popular outlet for low-risk healthy activity.

Did you know that recent studies show a correlation between exposure to outdoors and increased physical fitness, stress reduction, social connectedness, and overall happiness?

In fact, it also has been linked to improved work productivity, reduced job-related frustration, increased self-esteem, and enhanced capacity to pay attention.

The National Park Service (NPS) is partnering with state and local parks to promote the Healthy Parks Healthy People campaign to educate the public that parks are cornerstones of people’s physical, mental, and spiritual



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Shenandoah National Park in Virginia is one more than 400 national parks.

health and social well-being.

Even neighborhood parks play an important role in health by increasing social interaction in communities.

The America the Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreation Land Pass is available to Service members at no cost and offers free admission to all 400+ National Parks across the country, as well as 2,000 federal recreation sites.

Rich with historical landmarks, trail systems, scenic rivers and waterfront, historic lighthouses, and more, the NPS has many outdoor experiences to explore. In addition, this pass also allows Service members to enter any site managed by organizations partnering with NPS in this effort. This pass is available at any national park that charges an entry fee.

It’s time to connect to your

Semper Fit:

- Offers six fishing areas, six skate parks, and more than 80 park and pavilion areas for Marines and their Families.
- Operates 27 outdoors recreation equipment checkout/rental centers where you can use kayaks, camping gear, and other equipment.
- Operates 274 athletic fields and courts for competitive fun in your off-duty time.
- Promotes more than 50 miles of trails across installations to explore or to get ready for the Marine Corps physical fitness test.

local park system and find health, healing and happiness!

For more information on the America the Beauty National Parks Pass and to find a list of NPS parks, visit this [site](#).

—Semper Fit

FIVE WAYS SINGLE MARINE PROGRAM CAN HELP YOU CONNECT WITH NEW PEOPLE

1. Join the [Single Marine Program](#) (SMP) Council. Contact your SMP’s President to find out when the next SMP meeting is.
2. Volunteer at SMP events. Connect with your community by volunteering in your off time. It’s a great way to meet new people, find a new passion, and it’s good for your mind and body!
3. Attend a SMP recreation event. Connect with like-minded Marines by participating in various recreation events, from adventurous trips to video game tournaments.
4. Contact your unit’s SMP representative.

Your voice matters. SMP representatives serve as a link between you and your installation’s SMP Council. Address quality of life issues and suggest trips and volunteer events you would like to see through your unit’s SMP Representative.

5. Communicate with your barracks manager to see how you can improve quality of life. Ask your barracks manager what you can address through SMP to better single Marines’ quality of life in the barracks. To see a chart on how to communicate quality of life issues through SMP, see MCO 1700.36B.

—Semper Fit





FORGE STRONG FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Are you a first-time parent with a lot of questions? Adjusting to parenting a newborn and an older sibling?

Do you have a feisty toddler on your hands who demands independence? Looking for strategies to effectively deal with behavioral challenges? Potty training isn't going as planned?

These are all good reasons to reach out to your local New Parent Support Program (NPSP).

The NPSP is available to all Marine Families who are either expecting a child or have a child or children 5 years old or younger.

Our mission is to promote personal and family readiness by providing parenting support and education to encourage healthy parenting from the start.

Dedicated civilian staff members include licensed registered nurses, social workers, and therapists skilled in supporting military families in their new or expanded roles as parents. Services focus on understanding child development, promoting nurturing and attachment, increasing positive parenting skills, promoting social connections, and ensuring that families know where they can go for assistance.

NPSP services offer a great opportunity to connect with other families also raising young kids. Classes and groups offered include a one-day Baby Boot Camp for expectant parents, breastfeeding support groups, play mornings, and various parenting classes.

Families might find NPSP resources especially helpful when they move to a new installation and their family and support networks are far away.

Services are primarily provided individually to each family, in the home, office, or community. Families are able to connect with their assigned home visitor to address the topics that are important to them. Visits typically occur twice per month and may focus on topics such as newborn care, safe sleep practices, breastfeeding support, health and safety concerns, structure and routines, co-parenting issues, and promoting self-care.

The program also promotes father engagement and ways to include Service members in parenting routines, even during periods of deployment or other absences.

Contact your local [NPSP](#) for more information.

PREP FOR A NEW BABY WITH BOOT CAMP

The New Parent Support Program's mission is to promote personal and family readiness by providing parenting support and education to encourage healthy families from the start. Baby Boot Camp is an important part of the program.

Baby Boot Camp helps expectant parents, typically in their final trimester, enhance their knowledge and skills to prepare for their new little one.

When offered in person, this one-day class provides hands-on activities so that parents can practice caregiving and learn new skills. Expectant moms and dads learn in a group format that is facilitated by licensed nurses, social workers, and therapists.

The class covers safe sleep practices, the dangers of Shaken Baby Syndrome, infant feeding options, sleep routines, and safety proofing of the home.

Expectant parents also learn how to involve fathers and other caregivers, understand the signs of postpartum depression, and how to get help from resources.

The class is highly interactive. Expectant parents will:

- Practice diapering and bathing a newborn.
- Learn the benefits and differences in breastfeeding vs. bottle feeding.
- Learn about postpartum depression, the warning signs, and how to get help.

- Meet other expectant parents to increase social connections.

- Get information on available resources on the installation and in the community, so families know where to go for help.

Dads may wear an empathy belly to better relate to what pregnant moms go through.

Families are invited to group activities after the baby is born, to connect with other families and receive additional support.

These activities may include breastfeeding support groups, play groups for infants and toddlers, and parenting classes on various topics.

Families also are invited to participate in individualized services in the form of home visits. Home visits typically occur twice per month and are individually tailored to the needs of each family.

If you or someone you know would like to join a parenting class or request individualized services, please contact your installation New Parent Support Program. COVID-19 restrictions have affected course offerings in some locations.

Military OneSource's [New MilParent](#) offers free and personalized support for new parents.

—New Parent Support Program



YOUTH PROGRAMS HELP KIDS CONNECT

Children connect with others in a variety of environments like school, sports, community centers, or faith community, to name a few. Connectedness with others is vital for their social-emotional growth.

An enhanced sense of like skills such as self-awareness, resilience, decision-making, and relationship building are the foundations for any child to succeed at school, home, and work.

For youth, establishing positive relationships and making connections through character development experiences are effective ways to prevent risky behaviors; hence, increasing the likelihood of a successful transition to adulthood.

Programs like the Boys and Girls Club of America (BGCA) "Mission: Youth Outreach" promote positive outcomes by providing:

- A safe place to learn and grow
- Facilitation of ongoing relationships with others
- Character development curriculum
- Hope and opportunity

A national partnership between the Marine Corps and BGCA complements installation Child and Youth Programs by offering consistent programming and stable support in areas such as resiliency and reintegration, Military Youth of the Year, volunteerism, health and nutrition, and workforce readiness.



Clubs offer a wide variety of educational, recreational, cultural, and social activities for youth. Clubs are designed to maximize opportunities for young people to acquire a sense of belonging, usefulness, influence, and competence.

A typical club has an arts and crafts area, gymnasium, library, game room, and multi-purpose room. Some have computer learning centers, pools, camps, and outdoor play areas. In the last three years, installation youth programs have received more than \$190,000 in grants to support programs in science and technology, sports, fitness, arts, and other youth interest areas.

Mission: Youth Outreach is accessible to all military youth ages 6 to 18 who live on and off installation.

Families who don't live near or have access to a military Youth Center can use the "Find a Club" feature at BGCA.org to find the nearest club.

For more information about Mission: Youth Outreach, email myo@bgca.org, or call 404-487-5355. For more information on Child and Youth Programs, click [here](#).

—Child and Youth Programs

EXCEPTIONAL FAMILY MEMBER PROGRAM PROVIDES RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

The installation Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) team is a great resource and support for families with permanent change of station (PCS) orders. One of the primary responsibilities of EFMP is to help families think through, plan, and access specific resources that will help to make the PCS move less challenging.

As part of our standardized PCS Warm Handoff process, families can expect the following support:

- Contact from a family case worker (FCW) following receipt of orders to identify any needs, provide resources to meet those needs and/or develop a plan to address those needs through referral, case management and coordination between the losing and gaining EFMP staff.
- Ninety days prior to the PCS execution date (or earlier if needed), your family FCW will check back in to see how things are progressing and if additional support or resources are needed. At this time, your FCW will provide the name and contact information of your gaining location FCW.
- Between 60 and 90 days prior to your PCS execution, your gaining location FCW will make contact to introduce themselves and coordinate locally any needs, such as housing accommodations or to discuss resources within the local community.

- Thirty days prior to your PCS execution, your losing and gaining FCW will coordinate on the transfer of respite care, if applicable, and discuss any final needs to make sure your family is ready to move.

- Upon arrival to your new duty stations, your new FCW will request transfer of your case within the EFMP Case Management System, so that they may begin to provide routine case management support to help your family connect to your new community.
- If your family is transferring to a sister Service installation and would like to connect with the local EFMP team, part of the Warm Handoff will include an introduction to the sister Service EFMP point of contact.

At any time, families may reach out to request more frequent support. Usual topics associated with PCS moves include: housing needs, dependent travel options, transfer of TRICARE, special education support and transition, service animals, respite care, community resources, and safety.

In all cases, your FCW will follow your lead and address those needs that are most important to you.

—Exceptional Family Member Program



STAY CONNECTED DURING DEPLOYMENTS

Deployments can be hard on Marines and spouses individually, and as a result, challenging for the relationship. Here are some tips for staying connected:

Keep communicating.

Communicate honestly about your feelings, concerns, or issues at home and work, but also talk about happy and fun things that make you both laugh.

Keep trust solid. Discuss your expectations of each other prior to the deployment. For spouses: Surround yourself with family and mutual, positive friends. You will both feel comfortable knowing that you are safe and with people you each know and trust.

Exhibit understanding and patience. Being understanding will help lessen the tension between you and your Marine. Being patient will help both of you learn to get through each day and each tough time, step by step.

Build a support network.

Research organizations that you would like to get involved with, either locally or online. There may be extended periods of time when you are unable to speak to your Marine. Talking to other people can sometimes help relieve stress and/or ease the anxiety of waiting by the phone. You can then have a loving and calm conversation when your Marine finally gets the chance to call.

Stay busy. Consider taking a class or joining an exercise group. Staying busy and taking positive steps toward your mental or physical health will help you manage the separation in a healthy way.

Start a journal. Jot down what you are doing, how you are feeling, and what has happened from the time your Marine leaves until his or her return. If you have a picture, attach it to that day.



Every 30 days, send your Marine your 30-day chronicle.

Send care packages. Depending on the length of the deployment, try sending themed care packages with your Marine's favorite goodies and/or a funny video of you singing his/her favorite song.

Remember why you're together. Think about how you fell in love. When things get rough, pull out those photo

albums and wedding videos. Send some images to refresh your Marine's memory, too.

For more information about workshops, contact your local [Marine Corps Family Team Building](#). To read more about making a military marriage work, click on this [link](#).

—Marine Corps Family Team Building

CONNECT WITH A MENTOR TO ENRICH YOUR LIFE

Mentor. Coach. Guide. Counselor. Teacher. Instructor. Adviser. The word "mentor" has a lot of meanings, so how do you settle on one term?

Formal Mentoring

In this one-on-one relationship, a senior or more experienced person (the mentor), provides guidance to the junior or less experienced person (the protégé, sometimes called a "mentee"). Sometimes there's a formal program that matches a mentor to a mentee, like when you were assigned a sponsor at your new duty station. The relationship might last a year or more, or might just be a single conversation.

Formal mentorship programs exist for military spouses as well. Read the article, "[Finding a Mentor as a Marine Spouse](#)," or

reach out to the [Military Spouse eMentor Program](#), and Military OneSource's [Spouse Ambassador Network](#) to find out more and locate participating organizations.

There are formal mentoring programs for veterans and military spouses. The [Marine For Life Network](#) recently profiled [American Corporate Partners \(ACP\)](#), [eMentor](#), and [Veterati](#).

Informal Mentoring

People who mentor may not be Mentors (with a capital M). Any person who knows more than you about something, or has more experience than you do, can be an excellent informal mentor.

For Marines, informal peer mentoring occurs every day between Marines.

For spouses, many organizations facilitate

networking, such as [Marine Corps Family Team Building](#), [L.I.N.K.S](#), [Blue Star Families](#), [The Rosie Network](#), and [The Milspo Project](#).

For veterans, members of the Marine For Life Network informally mentor others. It's hard to come up with a [Veteran Service Organization \(VSO\)](#) that doesn't encourage informal mentoring between members. Check out [Veterans of Foreign Wars](#), [American Legion](#), or the [Marine Corps League](#).

Ready to get involved? Learn more through your Installation's MCCS [Transition Readiness](#) and [Family Member Employment Assistance Program](#) and ask the Marine For Life Network on [LinkedIn](#). You can also like Marine For Life on [Facebook](#).

—Personal and Professional Development

MAKE CAREER CONNECTIONS THROUGH SKILLBRIDGE PROGRAM

As Marines approach their transition to civilian life, they have a lot to consider. Not only do they have to determine what to do in their civilian careers, but they must also determine the path to that career. The Marine Corps SkillBridge program can help.

What is the SkillBridge Program?

SkillBridge is a program that connects Marines with training, apprenticeships, and internship opportunities that offer a high probability of employment. Most SkillBridge programs are provided at no cost to Marines.

Why should Marines care?

Marines can connect to the SkillBridge program to gain additional work experiences and help beef up or close any training gaps on their resume. For example, a Marine interested in IT

but with little experience in IT during his/her service could explore the Microsoft Software and Systems Academy (MSSA) SkillBridge program. The Marine's résumé would then not only reflect the leadership and discipline of a Marine, but also computer experience. Often, these training opportunities are meant to lead to employment with the training provider, giving Marines another advantage during their job search.

Who can participate?

Marines who have:

- Completed 180 days of active duty
- Been discharged from active duty with an honorable discharge (or general discharge under honorable conditions) within 180 days of beginning participation in the program
- Sufficient time remaining on their Corps

contract to complete the program

- Attended and completed the requirements of the Transition Readiness Seminar
- Attended an ethics brief or completed a DoD-approved ethics training presentation within the last 12 months from the start date of the SkillBridge Program

• Received command approval to participate in the program

Check out the new SkillBridge [brochure](#). For more information about the SkillBridge Program, contact your installation Career Resource Center.

For more information on career networking through the Marine for Life program, read this [article](#) on making networking feel more natural or this [one](#) on the Marine for Life LinkedIn network.



Want to talk?

There's no wrong door.

Marine & Family Programs

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response
Family Advocacy Program
Community Counseling Program
Substance Abuse Counseling Center
Military Family Life Counselors

Military OneSource

ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER

The United States Marine Corps Prevention System publishes Prevention in Action. The contents are for informational purposes only. The content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you [subscribe](#) to the newsletter by providing us with your email address, we will use it solely to deliver the newsletter.

You may opt out of receiving the newsletter at any time by responding to the sender.

To suggest topics or submit questions, email hqmcprevention@usmc.mil. October's newsletter will focus on financial management, and November's topic will be leadership.

To access hot links in newsletter: right click on link, copy link location, and paste link into a new browser window.

DSPO releases suicide postvention toolkit

The Defense Suicide Prevention Office (DSPO), in partnership with the Office of People Analytics, has developed the [Postvention Toolkit for a Military Suicide](#)

[Loss](#), a comprehensive, evidence-informed resource guide for military postvention providers, including unit commanders, chaplains, casualty

assistance officers, Suicide Prevention Program Managers, military first responders, military investigators, and non-clinical behavioral health providers.