

SPIRITUALITY, RELIGION, AND SUICIDE RISK



BACKGROUND

Military Service Members may be at a higher risk of suicidal behavior than civilians, with risk highest in young, enlisted males. Suicide prevention research focuses on increasing protective factors to decrease the likelihood of suicide. Protective factors are things that reduce risk. Spirituality and religious practice have each been found to be protective against suicide.

SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE PROTECT AGAINST SUICIDE RISK

Both spirituality and religious practice are associated with decreased risk of suicide. Military Service Members who engage in spiritual or religious activities feel more socially supported, valued by and important to others, and have access to more support services and resources. They may be less likely to attempt suicide because they are surrounded by others who encourage a sense of self-worth and provide forms of support like childcare and financial assistance. The protective aspect of religiosity can also be connected to church/religious service attendance, affiliation with an organized church/religion, and/or belief in God.

MORAL INJURY INCREASES RISK OF SUICIDE

Military service (especially during combat exposure) is associated with increased risk of experiencing moral injury, which is acting in a way that contradicts one's moral beliefs or values. This can cause complex problems, especially if someone holds strong spiritual or religious beliefs. Supporting these individuals and providing spiritual or religious support may help reduce the risk of suicide.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Facilitate spiritual or religious engagement. Marines joining a new unit may need support finding spiritual opportunities or religious services that align with their practices or beliefs.
2. Coordinate with Chaplains and Religious Program (RP) Specialists. If you suspect someone is struggling or may need spiritual or religious support, connect them with Chaplains and RPs. Chaplains and RPs may provide direct support or help connect them to others who more closely align with their chosen practices.
3. Encourage Spiritual Fitness, as it is part of Marine Corps Total Fitness and is an important component of force readiness that can help a Marine accomplish their mission with honor. ([See ALMAR 033/16](#))

DID YOU KNOW?

SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE ARE SIMILAR BUT NOT THE SAME.

Spirituality and religious practice are often used interchangeably but are not the same.

Spirituality is about having a sense of purpose, believing in something greater than oneself, and the connection between the two. For some, that can mean being a part of something such as the Marine Corps. For others, it may mean a search for purpose. Spirituality can also be participation in practices such as meditation and mindfulness.

Those who identify as religious tend to report a belief in God or another higher power. Many also identify as a member of a church or religious organization.