

Suicide Prevention: A Mission for All

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USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT, At Sea (NNS) -- September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, and USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71), along with the Navy, is using the month to focus on ongoing suicide prevention efforts.

Sailors aboard USS Theodore Roosevelt who may be contemplating suicide can seek help through the ship's chaplains, psychologist or suicide prevention coordinator.

"A couple weeks ago, a master chief died by his own hand in Camp Lejeune and it devastated the command," said Cmdr. Ryan R. Rupe, chaplain of Theodore Roosevelt. "He was a great model of accomplishment. Now he's gone. I'm not judging him and I don't know what happened in his life but I would much rather have him alive than be gone."

It is difficult for any person to come forward and seek help with the worry of how their peers will view them after the fact, said Rupe.

"People are not crazy and certainly not out of the ordinary," said Rupe. "I think a lot of people don't seek help because they fear they are going to be marginalized. That's why we have chaplains, a ship psychologist, doctors and trained personnel on board because matters of the heart are harder to solve sometimes."

Anyone can be a suicide prevention specialist. It doesn't take a super hero to save a life or lend a helping hand.

"A lot of people don't even know that they are helping," said Rupe. "Just by talking to someone who is suicidal, you are providing hope and an ear that listens."

Chief Culinary Specialist Carmen D. Goode, the ship's suicide prevention coordinator, said that Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month is helpful for the cause, but suicide prevention is an on-going and continuous battle.

"It raises awareness at all levels," said Goode. "It also encourages other Sailors to help each other out - shipmates helping shipmates. Just knowing where all the resources are aboard the ship."

Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month encourages Sailors to talk about the topic and take a more proactive approach to prevent suicide.

"There are so many issues that can be focused on," said Lt. Cmdr. Mathew B. Rariden, the command psychologist. "Drawing attention to something over the course of an entire month opens up the dialogue, and it raises the degree of awareness in the importance across the Navy."

The Big Stick's team of chaplains and medical and support personnel have built a system and created an environment to assist Sailors contemplating suicide.

"We have worked very hard to foster our culture where if people need to reach out for help, not only can they do it but they can get help very quickly and there are very few barriers in the way," said Rariden.

Rariden said that one of the largest misconceptions and reasons why people don't come forward to talk to him is that they think they will be separated from the Navy for doing so.

"I want people to know that this is not a career ender," said Rariden. "People have this fear that they come forward and ask for help that they just ended their career. I have people flowing through my office and then getting back to work."

Before Theodore Roosevelt can combat external enemies, the carrier must ensure her combat systems are functioning and her Sailors are operational as well. Talking about suicide will not end a Sailor's career, but keeping it bottled up could end a life.

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