

## *How to Support Warrior Mental Fitness*

*An overview of what can be expected from peer-to-peer trained leaders, why they are needed, and how they can be supported.*

*The DOD Strategy for Resilient and Healthy Defense Communities is a national security imperative and moral obligation to provide the total force with healthy, safe, functional and resilient environments in which to live and work.*



# MILITARY M LE PROJECT



## Empower

Upskilling soldiers in how to support the needs of their peers is an essential leadership skill that plays a critical role in suicide protection efforts, creating a multiplier effect that positively impacts stigma and culture.

## Why We Need Peer-to-Peer Trained Leaders

- A recent DOD study found that service members strongly prefer to seek and receive support from fellow service members.
- Research demonstrates that peer support not only significantly enhances individuals' recovery journeys by empowering them to manage their health actively but also proves cost-effective by reducing healthcare utilization.

(Yanos et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2021)



***This training is...***

**SPRIRIC ALLIGNED | SUPPORTS H2F | SUICIDE PROTECTION**

# WHAT TO EXPECT

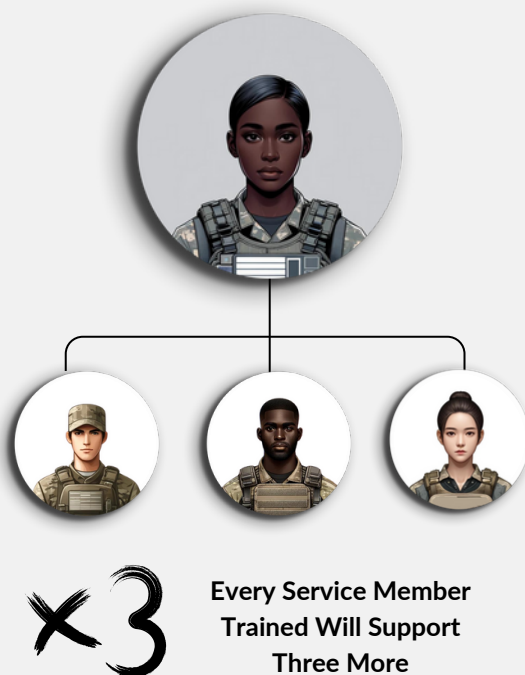
## Skills to Reinforce *Healthy & Resilient* Defense Communities



### YOUR TRAINED LEADERS ARE:

- Peer-to-Peer trained
- Prepared to navigate stress
- Stigma-fighters
- Empowered to respond to others
- Reinforcing healthy & safe habits to maintain high performance
- Navigating difficult conversations
- Leveraging lived-experience to help others
- Expanding help beyond clinical interventions
- Reducing burden on care systems
- Increasing access to support networks
- Critical partners in suicide protection

## FORCE MULTIPLYING EFFECT



## TESTIMONIALS



*"The most impactful thing in today's session was finding out how to ask questions and know how to listen."*



*"We all realized that there's a lot of us that smile all the time because we don't want others to know how broken we are."*



*"I realized that I am not the only person going through difficult things."*

## POST-TRAINING IMPACT



Participants on average grew their knowledge by 400%



4x more likely to seek mental health support from others.



3x more likely to engage in mental health conversations



Average comfort level for offering mental health support at 7.8/10

# Data Collection Process Overview

In your roles, we understand the importance you place on metrics in evaluating success. Here's how we measure the effectiveness of our trainings, helping you not only encourage soldiers to attend future sessions but also support those who have already reached their first milestone.



## Responsively Informed by Soldiers

Our data collection aims to assess the effectiveness of our mental health support training in improving soldiers' ability to both seek and offer peer support, as well as enhance their communication skills, such as active listening.

## Our Process

### Methodology

We utilize a pre- and post-evaluation process at each training iteration to capture participants' growth in comfort and skill levels.



**Pre-Evaluation:** Conducted before each session to establish baseline data on comfort and skill levels.



**Post-Evaluation:** Administered immediately after training to measure improvements and compare with pre-evaluation results.



**Data Consolidation:** Following each session, data is consolidated and input into a visual dashboard for a clear, at-a-glance summary of outcomes. This dashboard is provided back to the base for their review and future planning.

### Data Analysis & Reporting



After each training session, Give an Hour's data, evaluation, and technology manager compiles and analyzes the results to produce a real-time comprehensive report.



These reports are designed to inform future training iterations, ensuring a customer-informed approach and supporting a continuous improvement model.

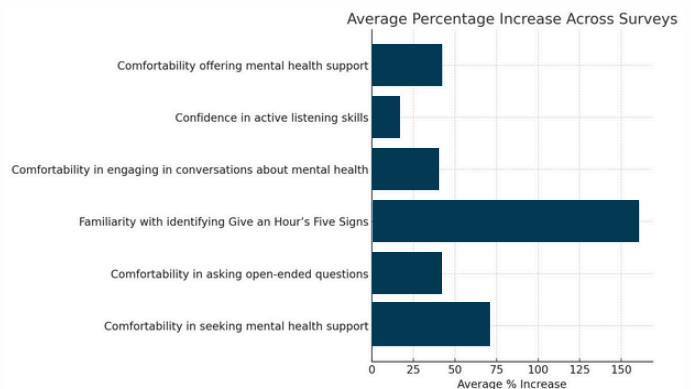
### Key Metrics:

Our evaluations track percentage increases across the following areas:

- Comfort in seeking and offering mental health support
- Familiarity with identifying Give an Hour's Five Signs (early indicators of mental health struggles)
- Confidence in engaging in mental health conversations
- Active listening skills

### Continuous Improvement

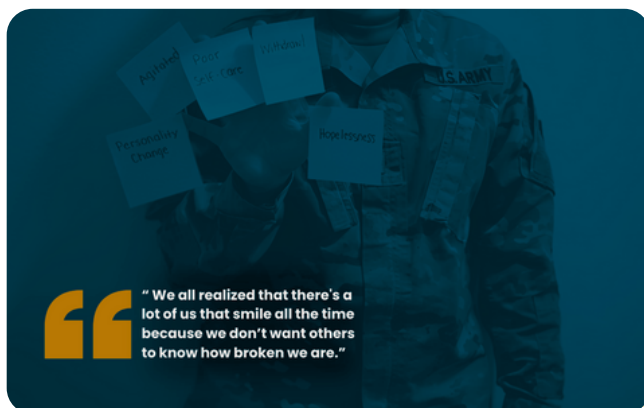
Our real-time data analysis not only provides commanders with actionable insights but also helps refine the training program based on participant feedback, ensuring that each iteration of the training addresses the evolving needs of the soldiers.





# MILITARY M O L E PROJECT

## Support your newly trained peer-to-peer leaders



### Combat Stigma Directly

- Promote and practice open, judgment free discussions.
- Recognize and challenge stereotypes about mental health in the military.
- Acknowledge and value the importance of their efforts to be a peer leader.

### Learn, use, and support the terminology for healthy mental health conversations

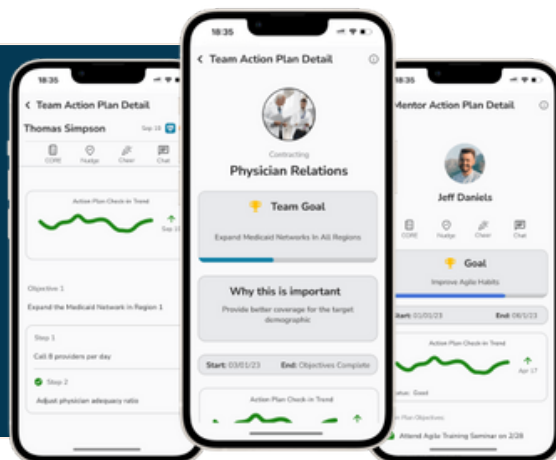
- Print/post/share info sheets in this brief
- Regular reminders to refer back to peer leadership training
- Call on soldiers to recognize signs of distress and help others who are struggling

### INFORMATION BOARD



### Connect Them to Resources

- Ensure easily access mental health resources, both within and outside the Army
- Support individual efforts to get peer-to-peer trained and continued education



# F A C E *t h e* F I V E

## Signs Someone is Struggling

Being a service member presents unique challenges that significantly impact mental health. Past experiences, high-stress environments, and exposure to traumatic events contribute to mental health struggles. Many service members have difficulty prioritizing their own health, with significant stigma surrounding seeking help, fear of being perceived as weak, and concerns over security clearances exacerbating the issue. As a trained mental fitness coach, it's important to recognize the signs of emotional struggles among your fellow service members. Give an Hour's "Five Signs" provides a common language to understand how emotional struggles can manifest, along with ways to show support and respond.

## Know the Signs and What they Look Like



### PERSONALITY CHANGES

*Soldiers may seem different exhibiting behaviors that don't align with their usual self.*

Stressed-out, checked-out, frequently anxious or depressed, acts differently than 'normal', eerily "at peace" or joyful when previously stressed/depressed.



### UNCHARACTERISTICALLY ANGRY, ANXIOUS, AGITATED, OR MOODY

*Soldiers may struggle with frequent mood swings.*

Lashing out, angry outbursts, panic attacks, self-soothing. Always in 'crisis mode', feeling repeatedly triggered. May happen with or without a clear trigger.



### WITHDRAWAL OR ISOLATION FROM OTHER PEOPLE

*Soldiers might pull away from, peers, family and/or friends, signaling a need for support and understanding.*

Not responding to texts, excessive malaise or sleeping, Needing to be alone. Not showing up for planned activities, housebound or signs of agoraphobia, avoidance when questioned.



### MAY NEGLECT SELF-CARE AND ENGAGE IN RISKY BEHAVIOR

*Financial strain, physical limitations, and emotional distress can contribute to neglecting self-care or engaging in risky behaviors.*

Reckless or irresponsible spending, substance use, sedentary lifestyle/lack of physical activity, change in appearance, "Depression House", significant weight gain or loss. Excessive sleeping.



### OVERCOME WITH HOPELESSNESS AND OVERWHELMED BY CIRCUMSTANCES

*Soldier may experience extreme or prolonged grief, feelings of worthlessness, or guilt.*

Verbal expressions of distress: "There's no point in going on", shutting down, masking feelings, making end-of-life plans, suicidal thoughts, self-harm, or worrisome verbal statements, "It's hopeless".

### WHAT YOU CAN SAY:

"I've noticed that lately when we talk or hang out, you seem checked-out, you don't seem like your usual self. Can you tell me more about what's going on? I want to find ways to support you."

"Hey, I can see you're going through a tough time right now, and it's okay to feel that way. I want you to know that I'm here for you, and it's important to take care of your mental health just as much as your physical health. Let's talk about what's been bothering you and figure out a way to get through this together. It's not a sign of weakness to ask for help—in fact, it's a sign of strength."

"I've noticed that you've been crashing on the weekends, and you've been spending more time by yourself. It's important to catch up on sleep, but is there anything you want to talk about? You can lean on me for support, I'm here if you need someone to talk to."

"This might be difficult to talk about, but I've noticed you've been drinking more lately, and I'm really concerned about you. I just want to make sure everything is okay. I'm here for you. Do you feel comfortable opening up about that?"

"From a sincere place of concern I want you to know that I've noticed you've been really struggling lately. I understand it can be hard to talk about this, but I want you to know I'm here for you. Are you having thoughts about hurting yourself?"

# EMPATHY & ACTIVE LISTENING

## Empathy

Empathetic statements acknowledge experiences and feelings without offering suggestions. Being empathetic means understanding and sharing someone else's feelings, not just feeling sorry for them. Empathy creates genuine human connections, making others feel understood, respected, and valued.

## Sympathy

Sympathy involves feeling pity or sorrow for someone else's situation. It maintains a distance between your own emotions and their experience. While you recognize their suffering, you do not share in their feelings as deeply as you would with empathy.

## Empathetic Statements

- It sounds like you did everything you could
- I can see how difficult this has been
- The whole thing sounds so discouraging
- I can totally see why you would be upset
- This is so hard
- I can't believe how well you're holding up considering how much stress you're under



## Active Listening

*An empathetic person listens first and only speaks after they've carefully heard. We call this active listening.*



Active listening means affirming what the person is saying with nods and verbal cues like “uh-huh,” and asking clarifying questions to show you are not being afraid to be there with them.



Stay present and attentive. You can't be actively listening if you are thinking about how to solve their problem or what you are going to suggest next.



Commit your undivided attention to the conversation by maintaining steady eye contact or leaning in towards the person. Resist side conversations, interruptions or unfocused body language.



Summarize your understanding. Once the speaker has finished talking, reflect their experience back to them by saying things like, “So, what I’m hearing from you is that the hardest part of what you are experiencing is...” Then ask, “Have I understood this correctly?”



Allow the other person to rant. When someone's having troubles they may be emotionally flustered. That's okay. Give them the space to feel that. Let them talk from their heart and share how they feel; often, this will lead to them discovering their own solutions.

# GUIDANCE FOR SUICIDE PROTECTION



When someone we care about might be thinking about suicide, it's scary. We often don't know how to start the conversation, even though we know it's important. 90% of service members would be willing to talk to someone who had thoughts of suicide and 6% would be willing to reach out to a service friend. This matters!

## Take it Seriously

- **Recognize Warning Signs:** Indicating feelings of hopelessness, isolation, or extreme distress.
- **Direct Statements:** Expressions about wanting to die or no longer be a burden.
- **Behavioral Clues:** Sharing of self-harming images, goodbyes, or giving away possessions.

## Encourage Professional Help

- **Provide Resources:** Share vetted helplines like 988 then Press 1 or text 838255.
- **Recommend Trusted Websites:** Direct them to reliable mental health resources, such as **Give an Hour** or **Vets4Warriors**.
- **Avoid Making Promises:** While your intention is to help, avoid making promises that you cannot keep.

## Suggest Group Support

*Peer supporter programs like those offered by Give an Hour offer a caring and confidential space to share feelings and find community. These spaces can also be a lifeline to individuals experiencing emotional suffering.*

### TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE SAVES LIVES!

Asking someone directly about suicidal intent lowers anxiety, opens communication, and reduces the risk of an impulsive act.



### Assess Emotional Reactions

"I've noticed you're not quite yourself lately, you don't seem as happy" Or "What you said scares me; tell me what's been going on."



### Ask Open-Ended Questions

"How have you been feeling lately?" Be prepared for various emotional responses including denial & anger. Allow them to speak freely without interruption.



### Cultivate Trustful Environments

Assure them you are here to listen and it's safe to share. Reflect their feelings back to them, "It sounds like you've been feeling overwhelmed."



### Use Verbal Cues

Nod, maintain eye contact, and verbal affirmations such as "I see" to show understanding.



### Show Empathy

Respond with phrases like "I'm here for you" or "That sounds really tough, thanks for sharing with me."



### Avoid Judgement

Avoid invalidating phrases like, "Just snap out of it" or "It's not that bad" or "It could be worse."



### Make a Pact

Ask them to make a pact not to act. "Promise me you'll wait; let me help you."



# How to Cope...

## When There's No Immediate Fix



Feeling helpless when you're a helper is disheartening, frustrating, and draining. This is especially true when an issue cannot be easily solved or the outcome is not within your control, but you can control how you manage your emotions and help others. Learning ways to mitigate these mixed feelings is essential for your mental and physical health.

### Establish Healthy Coping Mechanisms

Develop a "letting go" routine. It's easy to get preoccupied with the "failure". It can feel demoralizing to think there's nothing you can do. When we look at the big picture, things that go right often outnumber the things that go wrong.



Consider journaling each small win, even if the result isn't what you want, you can feel good about what you did accomplish.

### Establish Healthy Coping Mechanisms

Create a dedicated workspace:

- When you walk away from it, the work is over
- Close or silence apps when your shift is over
- Calendar fun activities as if they are work meetings.

### Ignoring the Pain Won't Make it go Away

Ignoring your pain or trying to keep it from surfacing won't make it go away, it will only intensify the impact it has on your life. Manage grief and pain by acknowledging it and making strategies to actively deal with it. Consider where you have power and control, then lean into those spaces and opportunities to make small changes accessible.

### You Don't Need to Stay Strong for Others

Crying doesn't mean you are weak, but many people mask sadness with anger, creating conflict with those around them. You don't need to "protect" your family, friends, or colleagues by putting on a brave front. Showing your true feelings can help them and you manage and process emotions in a healthier way.



## Managing Expectations

The human mind is incredibly averse to uncertainty and ambiguity. We respond to uncertainty or lack of clarity by generating plausible explanations. These expectations need to be managed as they're not based in reality.

*It's Okay to not be Okay right now.*



Relinquish your search for reasons, and what-ifs. Trying to force answers can lead to more frustration and confusion than when you started. We don't own events or their reasons. We own what we do with them.



Let go of the expectations of others and of the pressures that you put on yourself- these are not an accurate representation of you.



Expectations can be contradictory. It is statistically impossible to please everyone. Don't allow the voices of others drown out your own.

# MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH: THE CONNECTION

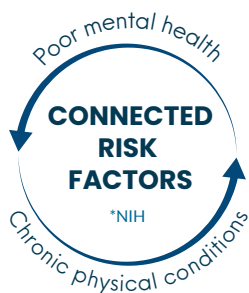
**TARGET: Look & Feel Good**

**OUTCOME: Help Ourselves & Others**



## MENTAL & PHYSICAL FITNESS

There is no denying the connection between the mind and body. However, there is a disparity between this acknowledgment and the generalized attitude and reaction to mental and physical health. When physical issues happen, we treat them. When mental issues happen, it's an entirely different story. Denial. Complete disregard. Stigma. Double standards. Guilt. Shame. Miseducation. These are some reactions to how mental health is treated compared to physical health. In order to live a healthy, happy life this has to change.



## PREVENTION

Reducing the risk factors related to mental & physical health can be overwhelming but are manageable.

### THIS

**Take time to eat a healthy lunch**

**Process a hard day with a friend**

**Work out, strengthen your body**

### THAT

**Energy to work out**

**Sleep better that night**

**Release endorphins = happy feelings**

## TIPS TO SUPPORT YOUR FITNESS GOALS

### Plan for Success



Set intentional short-term goals for the week. This can include prepping healthy snacks, setting reminders for bedtime, or planning power naps when needed.

### Set Boundaries



Taking care of yourself and setting work-life boundaries is crucial for balance and health. Saying no and accepting help are signs of strength.

### Start a New Healthy Habit



Add a vitamin. Change your protein intake. Each month reevaluate your habits and decide if you want to keep it or ditch it.

### Set a Check-in Alarm



Every hour, take 4 minutes to breathe deeply and check in with your body. Note any tension, hunger, or tiredness. Then take action to feel better.

### Focus on You, Not Others



Do what works for you. Reframe self-talk to avoid draining comparisons. Be your own advocate, just as you are for others. It's okay to change what works for you over time.

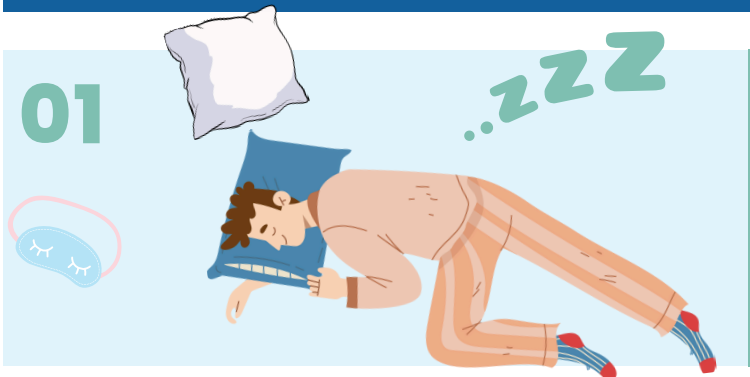
### Schedule Time For You



Self-care is essential and varies for everyone. Schedule it like a work meeting. Commit to at least one appointment each week. Activities that make you happy provide a brain break, boosting productivity.

# Establishing Sleep Health

Sleep deprivation leads to poor performance and weakened cognitive abilities. Learning to sleep well in stressful environments and managing anxiety can maximize wellness. Developing and prioritizing good sleep habits is crucial.



## DEVELOP SLEEP READINESS

- Train your circadian rhythm.
- Implement consistent routines.
- Avoid electronic devices before bed.
- Find your favorite pillow.
- Listen to calming music or take a shower before bed.

## FUEL YOUR BODY

- Exercise at least 3 times a week, staying fit helps you fall asleep faster and reduces nighttime awakenings.
- Work out for at least 30 minutes early in the day.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Stop eating 2-3 hours before bed.
- Limit caffeine, sugar, and other stimulants.
- Drink a full 8 oz glass of water before bed.

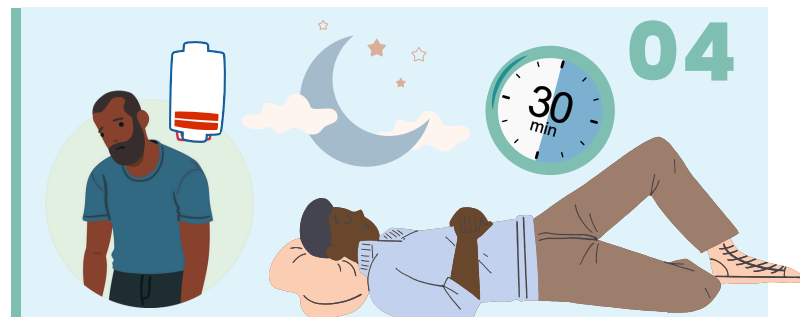


## FIND YOUR CALM

- Invest in comfort: You spend a 1/3 of your life in bed consider investing in a high quality mattress and pillows.
- Try a guided meditation.
- Try a weighted blanket to help sooth anxiety.
- Create a calming bedtime environment and routine.
- If thoughts keep you awake, journal to clear your mind.

## BANK YOUR SLEEP

- Only hit the hay when you're actually sleepy.
- If you aren't asleep in 20-30 minutes, get out of bed and do something else.
- Nap strategically - Short 30 minute power naps are highly effective and can boost alertness.
- Plan ahead: If you're expecting sleepless nights (e.g., night shifts), aim to get 10 hours of sleep per night for a week before.



**HELP**

[www.giveanhour.org/military](http://www.giveanhour.org/military)

## Giving Help and Hope Since 2005

### *Legacy of Support for Service Members*

Established in 2005, Give an Hour® has been at the forefront of suicide prevention and mental health support. We have a rich legacy of supporting the mental health and resilience of our service members - active duty, veterans, Guard - and their loved ones.

At Give an Hour, our mission is to help develop strong and resilient individuals and communities and equip soldiers and their loved ones with the skills they need for life. Skills that they then model and reinforce to their peers and their children. Give an Hour's Military and Veteran Programming provides customized mental health care services that create positive change on the service member, peer, and their families - a ripple effect that empowers healthy living for generations.

No cost, confidential mental health support is available to you at [giveanhour.org/military](http://giveanhour.org/military).

Learn More:



## One Suicide is Too Many

Equipping soldiers with the mental health skills, integrity, leadership, and empowerment tools to reinforce suicide protection



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Mental Health. For Life.

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### **SPONSOR A SOLDIER**

Fight Stigma  
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Provide Peer Support  
★★★★  
Access to Counseling

