



## III MEF Support Battalion Commanding Officer's Policy Statement on *Suicide Prevention*



After two years of reduced incidents, the Marine Corps saw an increase in suicides during calendar year 2020. Suicide remains the second leading cause of death and is an irreversible reaction to life's problems. It is a tragic and preventable loss, causing untold grief to loved ones and units, and is of highest concern to the public, legislators, the Commandant, and all Marines and Sailors. Even one death by suicide is too many.

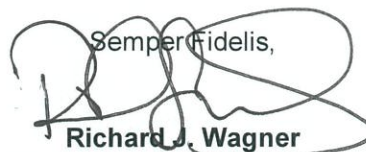
Suicide causes are varied: disruption of family and individual relationships, environmental influences, high-risk behavior, medical conditions, or a combination of these. Regardless, they clearly reflect stressors associated with two-decades of persistent conflict and an unprecedented operational tempo. Suicide and suicidal behavior at all levels can take a tremendous toll on readiness and resources of the unit involved. Tragedy can be averted if leaders and peers begin to identify potential risk factors and take appropriate action. Early recognition, prevention, and intervention to assist at risk Marines and Sailors is key to preventing suicide and must be one of our highest priorities.

Suicide is a permanent "solution" to a temporary problem. It must be emphasized to anyone at-risk there are people who care about them and will be left behind if they act on a passing impulse. The people who care about you will have all of the associated guilt and doubt as to what they missed or did wrong. We must further discard some of our misconceptions regarding those who contemplate suicide, even in jest -- particularly that people who joke about suicide are not serious about acting. The exact opposite is true! Almost everyone who attempts suicide has given some sort of indication in the past.

Make no mistake, preventing suicide is a challenge that will require a serious individual, organizational, and positive, engaged leadership commitment. Do not hesitate to help someone who is in a downward spiral. Get involved -- an upset friend is better than a dead friend. If you are the one experiencing depression or thoughts of suicide -- do not hesitate to talk to someone. Do NOT keep a problem that is eating away at you to yourself.

The III MEF Support Battalion Chaplain, Lieutenant Anthony Westerman, is always available and is an integral part of our Battalion with unique trust and confidence. Being outside the chain of command and having 100% confidentiality makes him especially valuable as an advisor if you are unsure on what course of action to take. Chaplain Westerman can be reached at DSN (315) 623-4519 or cell phone 080-2699-3187.

I am committed to ensuring every Marine or Sailor is taken care of, and I ask for your commitment in this effort. You must know your Marines and Sailors! Vigilance is critical to the early detection of those at risk for suicide. **Observe, listen, empathize, and act!** I charge every member of this Battalion to do their part to remove the lingering stigma attached to seeking behavioral health assistance. I expect leaders to ensure all those who need assistance get it promptly. Listen to and help any Marine or Sailor, anytime. This is the standard for myself and I expect all in this command to do the same. However, every Marine or Sailor must reach out and grab the "offered hand". Each life lost to suicide is one life too many and each one of us has a role to play in preventing suicides. This Battalion needs every single Marine, Sailor and civilian to achieve balanced excellence. And remember, take care of each other and everything else will take care of itself.

Semper Fidelis,  


**Richard J. Wagner**  
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps  
Commanding Officer  
III MEF Support Battalion