



OIF TIPS – HELPING A SOLDIER IN DISTRESS Leader's Hip Pocket Training Guide



In Operation Iraqi Freedom, any Soldier can run into rough times. It could be any combinations of:

- Seeing destroyed homes, dead bodies, human remains;
- Hostile reactions from civilians;
- Being ambushed, receiving small arms fire, improvised explosive devices;
- Knowing or seeing someone seriously killed or injured; having close calls;
- Long deployments; lack of privacy and personal space;
- Separation from family, difficult communication home.

All of us can sometimes come to feel badly. **If you see a fellow Soldier who is upset, fuming or brooding alone, you can help them** through a painful and sometimes risky time. **Emotionally distracted Soldiers can endanger the mission, the unit and themselves. Often, just talking to a friend** (or leader) who listens, tries to understand, and praises their strengths, **is all that people need to find their own answers.** The following can be suggested to Soldiers in order to help a buddy:

1. **Be a good friend.** For example, say, "Something seems to be bothering you. How can I help? I can listen without being upset."
2. **Listen attentively** and encourage him or her to continue telling you what's wrong. **Stay calm and objective. Don't criticize or argue** with the Soldier's thoughts and feelings, but listen and allow silent time for him/her to find words.
3. **Acknowledge the Soldier's grievances** against others, **but don't amplify them** by agreeing with them too strongly.
4. **Ask questions to help you understand** the problem and the feelings. **If the talking stalls, try to summarize what has been said** and ask if you have it right.
5. **Delay offering different perspectives or practical advice until** you believe your Soldier knows that **you really know the situation**, and understand why he/she is upset.

6. **Plant the seeds of new ideas.** Don't drive them in with a hammer.

7. **Praise the soldier** for the work he/she has been doing under such difficult circumstances, and for talking with you.

Sometimes the problems are too big to resolve after one talk, or without additional, outside help. Remember the Army deploys in OIF additional help for Soldiers with such problems. Beyond **yourself and other NCO and officer leaders**, there are:

- **Unit Ministry Teams** in the maneuver battalion, brigade HQs, hospitals, and providing area support in Corps areas and Kuwait.
- The **primary medical providers** in battalion aid stations and medical companies should know where these helpers are and how to contact them, as well as being helpers, too.
- **Mental Health Officers, NCOs, and Specialists** at the brigade, division and area support medical companies.
- Mental Health officers and enlisted in **Combat Stress Control teams** that cover those areas and can come forward to battalions and companies.

If the Soldier seems preoccupied with death, hint at having thoughts of suicide, or makes threats toward others, remember your Suicide Prevention Training!

- **Say something like**, "I can see that you feel distressed." "Have you thought of hurting yourself or someone else?" or, "Do you wish you were dead?"
- Then "Have you thought of how you could kill yourself?" (or whomever);
- **Don't act shocked** or alarmed! Encourage the Soldier to talk using the techniques on this card.
- **If the Soldier is armed**, say, "Let me unload your weapon and keep it safe for you while we talk."
- **After the Soldier has talked** as much as he wants, say, "I need to get you help for this. There are people near who can help you."
- Don't leave this person alone. Secure any weapons. Take the Soldier immediately to your chain of command or to medical care.

A SUICIDAL PERSON NEEDS IMMEDIATE ATTENTION.

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