VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE
Lexington, Virginia

GENERAL ORDER)
NUMBER 78) 19 October 2026

Suicide Prevention Program Policy

Suicide is a public health issue of considerable proportion and concern resulting in loss of individual lives, as well as significant trauma for family members and friends of those who commit suicide. Some researchers claim that among college students, suicide is the second leading cause of death (behind accidents).

Virginia Code § 23.1-802(A) requires each public institution of higher education to develop and implement policies that advise students, faculty, and staff of the proper procedures for identifying and addressing the needs of students exhibiting suicidal tendencies or behavior, and provide for training, where appropriate. As a policy matter, VMI will not impose a disciplinary dismissal or suspension of a cadet solely for seeking mental health treatment for suicidal thoughts or behaviors. If a cadet indicates by words or actions a threat to self, VMI will make an individualized and objective assessment of the cadet's ability to safely participate in the VMI program, based on a reasonable medical and/or mental health practitioner judgment relying on the most current medical knowledge or the best available objective evidence. The assessment will determine the nature, duration, and severity of the risk; the probability that the potentially threatening injury will actually occur; safety or cadet conduct issues implicated by the cadet's actions or threatened actions; and whether reasonable modifications of policies, practices, or procedures will sufficiently mitigate the risk. In every case involving potential removal of the cadet or other similar action, the cadet will be afforded the appropriate notice and opportunity to respond.

1. Purpose

The VMI Suicide Prevention Program is based upon the premise that, while we will never be able to eliminate suicide, we can provide specialized services to identify cadets at risk for suicide and to provide crisis and/or on-going mental health services upon referral.

2. Program Components

The Suicide Prevention Program consists of three interrelated components administered by the Center for Cadet Counseling:

1. Community education regarding the manifestations of depression and suicide;
2. Clinical assessment and treatment of cadets at risk of suicide; and
3. Education of mental health staff regarding the assessment and treatment of suicidal cadets.

2.1 Community Education

The goal of community education is to promote the recognition of the physical, behavioral, and emotional signs of depression and suicidality within the Institute community and to provide

guidance regarding the procedures for notifying the Center for Cadet Counseling when a cadet exhibits suicidal tendencies or behavior and referrals for mental health services. This community education component provides:

- Ongoing publicity directed towards the Institute community regarding available mental health services and resources.
- Suicide assessment and intervention workshops for faculty and staff as requested by department head or senior executives.
- Suicide awareness and intervention workshops for various cadet groups, such as the Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT's), Regimental Staff, Officer of the Guard Association (OGA), Cadet Equity Association (CEA), etc.
- Online psycho-educational learning modules delivering information about healthy lifestyle issues and promoting access to Institute cadet services.
- Online self-assessment modules for cadet mental health-related conditions, such as depressive and bipolar disorders, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, etc.
- Online suicide prevention and intervention modules for cadets, faculty and staff.
- Daily walk-in crisis/consultation hours for cadets, faculty, and staff seeking advice as to how to manage, support, and appropriately refer cadets in emotional distress.
- Mental health awareness workshops as requested for cadet athletes, faculty, and staff (OC, AOC, TAC, Coaches, New Faculty, etc.) to assist with better identification and referral of cadets with mental health difficulties.
- Bystander Intervention Training module on mental health/suicide prevention with third class cadets.
- Ongoing consultation to Institute administration, faculty, and staff pertaining to complex and/or high-risk cadet mental health issues.
- Provide 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline information on each VMI identification card for employees, cadets, and other VMI community members.
- Individual, group, and Institute-wide "Postvention" services with faculty, staff, and cadets following incidents of suicide to facilitate community grieving.

2.2 Assessment and Treatment

The assessment and treatment of mental health issues is one of the most effective and yet underused means of suicide prevention. The Center for Cadet Counseling provides a range of mental health services to cadets at risk of suicide. These services include:

- Comprehensive clinical assessment of cadets at risk.
- The provision of treatment, including individual psychotherapy and referral to psychiatric services.
- A 24-hour emergency on-call service providing consultation, risk assessment, and crisis intervention.
- A Memorandum of Understanding with the Rockbridge Area Community Services Board to expand the scope of services available to cadets, to facilitate pre-screens for hospitalizations, and to assist with treatment planning and discharge recommendations to ensure continuity of care for high-risk cadets.
- A Memorandum of Understanding with Carilion Medical Center to expand the scope of services available to cadets, to facilitate pre-screens for hospitalizations, and to assist

with treatment planning and discharge recommendations to ensure continuity of care for high-risk cadets.

- Treatment Team meetings implemented on as needed basis. The treatment team provides an opportunity for discussion of high-risk complex cases and coordination of treatment between counseling center staff, Institute Physician, Nurse Practitioner, and any consulting psychiatrist.
- Monthly Staff Meeting for clinical staff, the Post Physician, and consulting psychiatrist to discuss high risk cases, risk management plans, and to provide a regular forum for communication and collaboration among staff when multiple providers are involved.
- Peer review of medical records charting to assess staff adherence to American Psychiatric Association's practice standards for the assessment and treatment of major depressive disorders.

2.3 Education of Mental Health Professionals
The VMI Suicide Prevention Program also provides continuing education to the Center for Cadet Counseling staff regarding the assessment and treatment of high-risk clients. Professional training includes workshops and conferences regarding:

- Assessment of the level of suicide risk
- Conducting psychotherapy with students at risk
- Risk management and malpractice liability issues
- Clinicians' experience of loss and bereavement
- Appropriate utilization of psychotropic medication
- Current trends in suicidology research

3. Cadet Behavioral Standards of Conduct
VMI will continue to hold all cadets to the same behavioral Standards of Conduct as prescribed in VMI regulations, including VMI Regulations Part III of the Blue Book. This includes the Institute's continued use of General Order 17, Suspension and Dismissal Procedures, whereby the Institute may, as needed, immediately place a cadet on interim suspension for behavior that poses a threat to the health and safety of other members of the Institute, to Institute property, or to the educational process. Those procedures include an opportunity to be heard by a hearing officer and the Superintendent and to demonstrate why the cadet's continued presence on Post does not constitute a physical threat to persons or property.

4. Cadets Threatening Harm to Themselves
VMI will continue to immediately respond in the manner detailed in this general order and in other established procedural guidelines to any evidence that a cadet is in danger of harming himself or herself. Appropriate treatment protocol and consultations with outside providers will be utilized as necessary. Outpatient and/or inpatient treatment referrals will be provided in those cases, and all necessary steps will be taken to mitigate the risk of harm as well as to return the cadet to full duty status.

5. Threat Assessment Team
In accordance with Virginia Code § 23.1-805, cadets that demonstrate threatening or aberrant behavior that may represent a threat to the Institute community may be referred to the VMI

Threat Assessment Team. Upon a preliminary determination that an individual poses a threat of violence to self or others, or exhibits significantly disruptive behavior or need for assistance, the

Threat Assessment Team may obtain the cadet's criminal history record information and health records. No member of the Threat Assessment Team shall redisclose any criminal history record information or health information obtained pursuant to this section or otherwise use any record of an individual beyond the purpose for which such disclosure was made to the Threat Assessment Team.

6. Notification of Parents of Tax-Dependent Cadets in Instances of Psychological Emergency

Virginia Code § 23.1-1303(B)(4) provides that the Board of Visitors of every public institution of higher education in Virginia shall establish policies and procedures requiring the notification of the parent of a dependent student when such student receives mental health treatment at the institution's student health or counseling center and such treatment becomes part of the student's educational record in accordance with the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and may be disclosed without prior consent as authorized by the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and related regulations. The notification is limited to the stipulations detailed below.

The Director of the Center for Cadet Counseling, Institute Physician, the Commandant, or their designee shall be primarily responsible for contacting the parent of a dependent cadet when there exists a substantial likelihood that, as a result of mental illness the cadet will, in the near future, (i) cause serious physical harm to him/herself or others as evidenced by recent behavior or any other relevant information or (ii) suffer serious harm due to a lack of capacity to protect him/herself from harm or to provide for basic human needs. Notification may be withheld if the cadet's treating physician or mental health provider licensed by a health regulatory board within the Virginia Department of Health Professions has made as part of the cadet's record a written statement that, in the exercise of his/her professional judgment, the notification would be reasonably likely to cause substantial harm to the cadet or another person.

FOR THE SUPERINTENDENT:

Travis Homiak
Colonel, USMC (Ret.)
Chief of Staff

DIST: E

OPR: FS, Cadet Counseling Center