

September 29, 2016

DIRECTIVE: JOB CORPS INFORMATION NOTICE NO. 16-09

TO: ALL JOB CORPS NATIONAL OFFICE STAFF
 ALL JOB CORPS REGIONAL OFFICE STAFF
 ALL JOB CORPS CENTER DIRECTORS
 ALL JOB CORPS CENTER OPERATORS
 ALL NATIONAL TRAINING AND SUPPORT CONTRACTORS
 ALL OUTREACH, ADMISSIONS, AND CTS CONTRACTORS

FROM: LENITA JACOBS-SIMMONS
 National Director
 Office of Job Corps

SUBJECT: Increased Mental-Health Awareness and Promotion During
 the Winter Holiday Season

1. Purpose. To encourage the Job Corps community to strengthen mental-health awareness and promotion activities to address students’ needs during the winter holiday season (Thanksgiving through Valentine’s Day).

2. Background. The holiday season can be a time of stress, anxiety, disappointment, and sadness. Due to holiday stressors, unhealthy behavior patterns emerge, and the ability to cope may disappear. This is of particular importance to students who experience emotional distress or mental-health symptoms in response to holiday anxiety. Common triggers may include:

- Having to remain on center due to home or family situation
- Having to deal with family dynamics and neighborhood influences when they return home
- Not having friends, family, or significant others present during celebrations
- Past traumatic events
- Lack of money to buy gifts
- Not feeling as “jolly” as the media say
- Overindulgence in food and alcohol

Contrary to the myth that suicides peak during the holiday season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Health Statistics Research states the suicide rate is lowest in December and peaks in the spring and fall.¹ However, individuals may feel sadder or depressed during the holidays.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “Holiday Suicides: Fact or Myth?” Accessed August 2016. Available from <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/suicide/holiday.html>

Though there is no evidence that depression or suicide rates are elevated during the holiday season, a phenomenon called the “Holiday Blues” can be present. Most students will manage through the “Holiday Blues” with proper coping strategies, but feelings of sadness and suicide threats and attempts remain a genuine risk during this time. Staff members should be aware of risk factors and warning signs.

3. Recommendations. Mental-health promotion and education events increase awareness of mental-health conditions, and reduce the stigma. This makes it easier for students to seek help. These efforts should be heightened during the winter holiday season. Attachment A, “Tips and Tools to Deal with Holiday Blues,” provides information on ways to support the emotional wellness. Centers should encourage students to:

- Practice healthy responses to negative situations
- Incorporate techniques for stress reduction
- Set reasonable expectations for the holiday season
- Focus on the positive and find enjoyment
- Recognize when to ask for help

In addition to equipping students with coping tools, Job Corps staff must be able to recognize and appropriately respond to students who may be at risk for suicidal behaviors. Attachment B, “Suicide Fact Sheet for Job Corps Staff,” contains specific warning signs of suicidal behavior, risk and protective factors.

As with other health-promotion efforts, suicide-prevention programs should be culturally attuned and locally relevant. Specific risk and protective factors for adolescents², and racial and ethnic groups³ should be considered when dealing with Job Corps students. Just as suicide has no single cause, there is no single prevention activity. To be successful, prevention efforts must be comprehensive and coordinated across the center environment. There are Information Notices, Program Instruction Notices, on-line center staff trainings, Web site resources,⁴ available regarding suicide awareness and prevention. Find other resources on the Job Corps Health and Wellness Web site:

<https://supportservices.jobcorps.gov/health/Pages/SuicidePrevention.aspx>.

Infographics like posters make for simple and powerful methods of increasing awareness. Order free posters and brochures from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) at <http://www.store.samhsa.gov/>; or from the American Association of Suicidology site, <http://www.suicidology.org/resources/infographics>. Centers should also continually develop and review operating procedures for responding to suicidal behaviors.

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC). “Adolescents - Risk and Protective Factors.” Accessed August 2016. Available from <http://www.sprc.org/populations/adolescents>

³ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC). “Racial and Ethnic Groups - Risk and Protective Factors.” Accessed August 2016. Available from <http://www.sprc.org/populations/racial-ethnic-groups>

⁴ American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. “A Model School Policy on Suicide Prevention.” Accessed August 2016. Available from https://afsp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Model-Policy_FINAL.pdf

4. Action. Addressees are to ensure this Information Notice is distributed to all appropriate staff.
5. Effective Date. Immediately.
6. Expiration Date. Until superseded.
7. Inquiries. Direct inquiries to Johnetta Davis at (202) 693-8010 or via e-mail at davis.johnetta@dol.gov.

Attachments

- A – Tips and Tools to Deal with Holiday Blues
- B – Suicide Fact Sheet for Job Corps Staff