

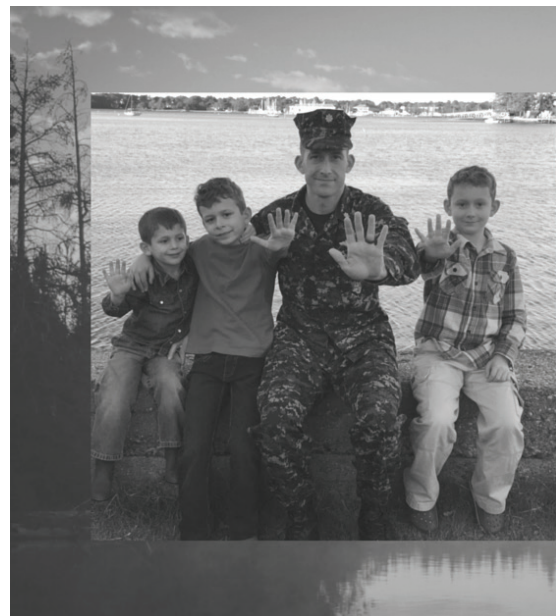


Military Families Can Help Change the Culture of Mental Health

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Mental health isn't a military issue: One in five Americans has a diagnosable mental health condition (SAMHSA 2014). But the men, women, and families who serve our country face challenges, stress, and sometimes horrific trauma that place them at significant risk for the development of mental health struggles and emotional suffering. In addition, our military families are like all families: They bring with them family histories and life experiences that leave them either more or less vulnerable to the development of these challenges.

On March 4, 2015, **Give an Hour™** — a national nonprofit organization providing free mental health care to those who serve, their families, and their communities — launched a national initiative to change the culture of mental health in America. Called the *Campaign to Change Direction*, this effort brings together concerned citizens and communities as well as corporate, government, and nonprofit partners in a nationwide movement with the following objectives: *to create a common language about the signs of emotional suffering; to ensure that mental health is seen as having equal value to physical health; and to encourage all Americans to*





pay attention to their mental well-being and to the mental well-being of those they love.

Creating a common language that everyone can understand is a critical step in changing the culture of mental health in our country. Often our friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even family members are suffering emotionally and don't recognize the symptoms or won't ask

The Five Signs are withdrawal, agitation, hopelessness, decline in personal care, and change in personality.

There is a critical need to engage youth in this conversation. We know that one-half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, three-quarters by age 24 (NIMH 2005). Over 50 percent of students age 14 and older with a mental disorder drop out of high school — the highest dropout rate of any disability group (NAMI 2011). Not only are the youngest members of our

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for help. By learning five key signs of emotional distress, we can reach out, connect, and offer to help. We can show compassion, caring, and a willingness to find a solution.

society directly affected, but they also represent an important voice in this effort. By reaching out to students, as well as teachers and administrators, the campaign will spark a discussion that will reduce suffering and save lives.

Culture change takes time, but we know what it looks like. There have been many successful cultural shifts in the last 50 years. There was a time when cars didn't have seatbelts, and no one talked about cancer publicly. Now every car on the road has seatbelts and air bags, and people wear their yellow wristbands and pink ribbons proudly. Not too long ago there were no "designated drivers," and communities all across the country lost far too many young people in drunk driving accidents. Now responsible young adults identify the person who will forgo drinking before the gang heads out to the party or bar.

Give an Hour and our partners in this collective impact effort will continue to do the heavy lifting as we grow this movement, but we can all do our part. We can all learn the Five Signs. We can teach our kids, start conversations with friends, and put posters up in classrooms, dorm rooms, offices, and community spaces.

Together, we can Change Direction. To learn more, visit www.changedirection.org

