



## Preventing a crisis before it occurs for my Veteran spouse

My spouse retired from military service in 2024. His active-duty career had seen him through years of combat deployments, duty assignments around the world, physical strains on his body and distance from his family.

But the mental toll of military life and transition is what deeply concerned me.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among Veterans under the age of 45, and more than 40% of Veterans say they experience high levels of difficulty when transitioning (Stop Soldier Suicide). I wanted to prepare us for the potential mental health challenges and adjustment to civilian life. (Read the 2024 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report).

I turned to Blue Star Families for guidance. As a trustworthy national nonprofit organization that works to support military connected families where they live and serve, they offer countless programs and opportunities for service members, families, Veterans and civilian supporters. Their Blue Star Support Circles Upstream Solutions to Crisis program was exactly what I was looking for.

Blue Star Support Circles are facilitated, non-clinical cohorts for Veteran and service member supporters.

Family members and friends are best positioned to identify and support a Veteran or service member heading toward crisis as we are the people who see the signs and symptoms firsthand. The free program is designed for anyone who wants to understand suicide and stress due to combat, military life and Veteran challenges. Even better, the program is virtual and confidential to allow participants to engage and ask questions in a safe environment.

I entered my cohort last year with a bit of trepidation and low expectations. I have attended suicide prevention training multiple times and felt like there was no more to learn. I'm happy to say that I was wrong. This program is unlike others and includes:

- **Peer Connection:** I felt that I could trust my fellow peers in my cohort and our leader. The virtual sessions always felt safe and confidential, and I could ask questions big and small. Participants also have access to a private, closed virtual group in the Blue Star Neighborhood, the organization's virtual platform for members. This only enhanced the connection between us.
- **Expert Presentations:** There were presentations from multiple partner organizations including Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), Psych Armor, American Red Cross, Lenny Learning and Spiritune. Each brought new information and strategies; whether it was about recognizing suicidal warning signs, learning how to talk about suicide, or a free membership to Spiritune for music therapy, all were amazing.
- **Free Resources:** I mentioned the free membership to Spiritune, but that is just the start. There were Blue Star Families resources like the Program Workbook to guide one through the program and free Psych Armor courses to continue one's learning. They also offer participants the opportunity to receive gun locks, firearms safes and medicine safes to promote lethal means safety at home and in their community.

After eight weeks of my cohort, I left feeling better prepared to see the signs and symptoms of a crisis. As my spouse and I navigated transition and our next phase of life, I felt better prepared to support him in his mental health because of Blue Star Support Circles. This free program changed my perspective and gave me the tools I will need to prevent a crisis before it occurs.

Learn more about the free, virtual [Blue Star Support Circles Upstream Solutions to Crisis](#), including how to sign up.

If you're a Veteran in crisis or concerned about one, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive 24/7 confidential support. You don't have to be enrolled in VA benefits or health care to connect. To reach responders, [Dial 988 then Press 1](#), chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](#), or text [838255](#).

**Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, being men of courage, be strong."  
1Cor 16:13**

Sincerely,

*William A. Harris, Jr.*

William A. Harris, Jr.

William A. Harris, Jr., USAF Retired  
President, Veterans for Christ, Inc.

[www.veteransforchristinc.org](http://www.veteransforchristinc.org)

### **Need to contact VA?**

[Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255](#) and press 1, [Chat](#), or Text 838255

[Homeless Veteran Resources: 1-877-424-3838](#) or [Chat](#)

[White House VA Hotline: 1-855-948-2311](#)

[1-800-MyVA411 \(800-698-2411\)](#) is never the wrong number