Navy Prioritizes Mental Health with New Playbook

The U.S. Navy has always been dedicated to ensuring that the bodies and minds of its Sailors are ready and prepared to win in combat. But there have been challenges over the years in helping Sailors with mental-health resources during active service, and as they transition out of the Navy into civilian life.

The Navy Culture and Resilience Office, N17, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations is addressing those challenges through its new Mental Health Playbook. This 28-page playbook, which was released in February, is designed to put mental health tools and resources into the hands of every Navy leader, no matter what their rank.

“Our goal is that everyone in our great Navy develops a shared understanding about how to conduct mental-health and preventative maintenance for our people, and then where to go for additional resources,” said Rear Admiral Brett Mietus, director of N17. “It’s an incredibly important topic to me and all of the Navy’s senior leadership.”

The Navy already offers a variety of mental-health resources. Navy N9 quality-of-life programs include Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR); Wounded Warrior; Mind Body Mental Fitness (MBMF); and Sailor Assistance and Intercept for Life (SAIL). There are also family advocacy programs, childcare and relocation programs, assistance programs, non-medical counseling at fleet and family-support centers, and more.

The Navy League of the United States has mental-health resources as well. For example, Sea-Air-Space’s Transition Connection Job Fair, which will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Monday in the Cherry Blossom Ballroom, is one of the ways

the Navy League helps with transitioning Sailors' overall well-being.

The Mental Health Playbook complements all these efforts through its mission to create a "climate of trust and respect with open, two-way communication; challenging inappropriate conduct or poor leadership; and eliminating stigma for seeking help." The Playbook is organized into five sections:

- Roles and Responsibilities, which is geared toward helping commanders create, "a community of support, where sailors feel connected to the mission, the command and each other."
- Conversations That Matter, which provides strategies for conducting mental-health discussions.
- Identifying and Responding to a Mental Health Related Concern, which discusses what to do when sailors are in mental or emotional distress.
- Navigating Support Systems, which helps sailors find the right support at the right time.
- Navy's Mental Health Capabilities and Resources, which describes the clinical and non-clinical tools available both inside and outside the military and provides contact information for a variety of programs.

"Most of the resources that are in the playbook have been out there, but they just haven't been put together in a way that's easily digestible and then usable by a fleet leader," Mietus said.

Mietus said the playbook is a response to requests and concerns from fleet members about the Navy's approach to mental health. He noted that while older Sailors aren't necessarily used to acknowledging or discussing mental-health issues, younger generations are much more attuned to their mental and emotional needs.

“Our goal is to eliminate stigma when it comes to mental-health care. I think the important thing for us all is to normalize conversations around it,” he said.