

AIR FORCE & SPACE FORCE

HOPE SPIRITUAL FITNESS INITIATIVE HANDBOOK

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HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF CHAPLAINS
PLANS & PROGRAMS DIVISION**



Every Warfighter...Spiritually Fit and Ready!

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WELCOME TO HOPE

On behalf of your Chaplain Corps team, welcome to the HOPE Spiritual Fitness Initiative! This initiative is designed to develop and equip you to serve as an extension of the Chaplain Corps within your unit.

What sets HOPE apart is that you're not just a participant, you are stepping into a leadership role on the frontlines of your unit's culture and care. As a HOPE Specialist, you will help create an environment where connection, purpose, suicide prevention, and spiritual fitness thrives.

We want to leverage your unique personality, life experience, and skillset to further the mission and heart behind this initiative. In the pages that follow, you'll learn what HOPE is all about, our core foundations and values, how to join the program, what to expect, and how to operate effectively as a HOPE Specialist.

WHAT IS HOPE? AN OVERVIEW.

“A strong spirit promotes resiliency and enhances one’s ability to mitigate adverse responses to stress.”

Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

HOPE originated as the operationalization of the White Rope program. The White Rope program has long served training bases, equipping volunteers to invest in Airmen and Guardians and their units in ways that leave a lasting impact. The success of the White Rope Program in AETC, the growing demand for Chaplain Corps support in distributed, geographically separated and austere environments, and the emergence of Agile Combat Employment (ACE) and Deployable Combat Wings (DCWs), led operational bases to create their own versions of an operational White Rope program. Thus, HOPE was born out of operational necessity and the White Rope program concept.

The HOPE Spiritual Fitness Initiative is an Air Force Chaplain Corps volunteer program, which develops Airmen and Guardian spiritual fitness and warrior ethos. While each program will be adapted to the unique needs of your base, every program accomplishes these goals through combinations of spiritual fitness, professional development, volunteerism, peer leadership, and community involvement across the force. As a HOPE Specialist, you will earn a Special Experience Identifier and join a team of handpicked Airmen and Guardian leaders who are committed to personal growth and working toward healthier cultures within their units. You will also be a key asset to your unit command team as an embedded peer resource to help mitigate the stressors in your workplace and, when necessary, may be your team’s go-to as a suicide intervention expert.

These responsibilities are not just important; they are an operational necessity for fostering spiritual fitness, essential to a mission-ready force capable of meeting future challenges. As a HOPE Specialist, you carry the beacon of hope and serve as a light in the darkness wherever you go. While your AFSC/SFSC remains your primary duty and priority, your role as a HOPE Specialist is equally vital to strengthening our people and advancing the mission.

CHAPTER 1: FOUNDATION AND VALUES

Foundation. The HOPE Spiritual Fitness Initiative advances the Secretary of War’s priorities and is driven by the Air Force and Space Force Chaplain Corps’ “HC Ready!” Lines of Effort. We believe to restore warrior ethos and enhance mission readiness require whole-person involvement. It is simply not enough to be in top physical shape or to have adequate mental and social health. After grueling combat during World War II, General George C. Marshall recognized, “The soldier’s heart, the soldier’s spirit,

the soldier's soul are everything. Unless the soldier's soul sustains him, he cannot be relied on and will fail himself and his commander and his country in the end." Spiritual fitness is critical to developing mission-ready warfighters. This is the foundation for everything we do in this program.

Core Values. While every HOPE program will be adapted to the unique needs of your Wing or Delta, every program will involve these values that are fundamental to the HOPE Spiritual Fitness Initiative. How they are embodied will be up to your Chaplain Corps team, shaping the training, events, and community to best serve your location. You will find these values weaved throughout this entire handbook since they are the core of who we are.

Spiritual Fitness. Spiritual fitness is simply "the ability to adhere to beliefs, virtues or values needed to develop a fulfilling life with quality of service." This involves questions like "Where do I find meaning?" "How do I feel connected?" "How should I live?" Many people strengthen their spiritual fitness through traditional religion while others practice their spirituality in other ways. Therefore, while every HOPE Specialist should dedicate themselves to developing their spiritual fitness, there is no requirement that you express your spirituality through traditional religion.

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- General George C. Marshall

Authentic Community & Connection. The need for community and connection has never been greater, especially for young, first-term Airmen and Guardians far from home. For many spiritualities, community is a vital component for connectedness and encouragement. While individual spiritualities may differ, all HOPE Specialists are committed to authentic community. You

should expect to find a warm welcome in HOPE wherever you are, at this installation or any other assignment during a PCS, TDY, or deployment. In this community of like-minded Airmen and Guardians, you'll build connections that could turn into the deepest friendships of your career.

Professional Development. The HOPE Spiritual Fitness Initiative delivers 20 credit hours of core training that will equip you to serve as a HOPE Specialist. You should expect to be challenged as you grow alongside your peers in the program. This core training is a requirement to award the Special Experience Identifier and will be followed up with recurring training opportunities to keep your skillset sharp.

Leadership Development. Every HOPE Specialist is a leader, whether you hold a title or office. As an embedded resource, you are a leader of character, spiritual fitness, and promoter of healthy culture.

Most programs will offer you opportunities to lead major volunteer events and programs. Some larger programs may have leadership positions designed to work with the Chaplain Corps team to lead HOPE. Whatever opportunities exist at your installation, you should step out with courage as every HOPE Specialist is a leader.

Volunteerism. A warrior ethos requires the warfighter to possess beliefs or values that transcend themselves that motivate their service to enable them to face sacrifice.

Volunteerism not only embodies the Air Force Core Value of “service before self,” it also provides the spiritual opportunity to connect to something outside and larger than yourself. Your HOPE program should offer a variety of opportunities for you to exercise your spiritual fitness by giving back to your peers, units, and communities.

Peer-Resource. All other core values equip you to embody this final, vitally important value: to be the frontline defense for your brothers and sisters in arms. This program will provide you with the training and development to identify and connect hurting members to professional caregivers. You will be a trusted presence whom your peers can turn to and perhaps even save their lives.

CHAPTER 2: HOW TO JOIN THE PROGRAM

Your Chaplain Corps team is seeking members who are hungry to learn, develop, and give back to their community. It is okay if you are intimidated with what a HOPE Specialist is and does; so long as you are willing to put forth the effort, this program will equip you with the skills and confidence to perform your best. You do not need prior experience as a White Rope or other similar initiative to qualify.

When you are ready to join, simply contact your unit Religious Support Team or Chapel to request the HOPE application packet. This packet should contain the DD Form 2793 Volunteer Agreement, Privileged Communication Non-Disclosure Agreement, HOPE Handbook, and Statement of Understanding. While your HOPE program may allow you to join HOPE meetings before the paperwork is complete and turned in, full participation requires this paperwork along with unit leadership endorsement.

Your leadership’s endorsement reflects their awareness and support of your involvement in HOPE, a positive step for both you and your unit. It signals that they recognize you as an additional pathway of care and support within your unit. Their endorsement also acknowledges that HOPE responsibilities may occasionally involve your participation during regular duty hours. Keep in mind that local policies or requirements may apply before unit members are cleared to join programs like this, so always follow your chain of command’s guidance.

If you haven't already, now is the time to get involved! Attend HOPE meetings, participate in community events, and take advantage of volunteer opportunities. Most programs advertise these through a dedicated social media platform, be sure to stay connected and engaged.

CHAPTER THREE: WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE PROGRAM

Every HOPE program will engage our Core Values through a variety of means. Your Chaplain Corps Team will develop a battle rhythm of meetings and events that address the unique needs of your program and installation. HOPE meetings will usually focus on professional development with opportunities for community building and volunteerism.

The basic requirement to achieve the Special Experience Identifier is to complete 20 credit hours of core training and a 4-month trial period. Your final requirement is to interview with a Chaplain Corps team member—don't worry, it won't be intimidating! You will be officially designated a "HOPE Specialist" once you have completed these minimum requirements and awarded the SEI. This ensures everyone bearing this title is trained and fully prepared to carry out the responsibilities of the role.

Core Training. To ensure all HOPE Specialists receive consistent, standardized training, each trainee must complete the required courses outlined in this guide. Some installations may offer the full training over the course of a few days, while others may extend the sessions over several months. Check with your local Chaplain Corps team to learn how and when these courses will be offered at your base.

Foundations- 1 credit hour	Spiritual Fitness- 1 credit hour
Listening Skills- 1 credit hour	SafeTalk/ASIST- 4 credit hours
Moral Reasoning- 1 credit hour	Warrior's Calling- 1 credit hour
Privileged Communication- 1 credit hour	Ethical Warrior- 1 credit hour
Relationship Building- 1 credit hour	Character- 1 credit hour
Religious Accommodation- 1 credit hour	Helping Agency Integration- 1 credit hour

Recurring Training. In addition to the core training, your HOPE program will offer additional, "elective" style professional development trainings. These advanced training courses will be tailored to the needs of your installation and based on the resources available to the team. Once you have been awarded the SEI, this category of training is a great way to keep your skills sharp.

Community Events. Every time HOPE meets is an opportunity to build authentic community and relationships. Sometimes your program may host events where there is no other focus but community

formation. This could range from dorm-dinners, hikes, or social outings. While HOPE facilitates community within the program, it also can be a great resource to facilitate healthy community outside of the program across the installation. You might even have the next brightest idea for a community event for your installation or program!

A true warrior ethos calls the warfighter to embody beliefs and values greater than themselves, principles that inspire selfless service and sacrificial commitment to the mission and those they serve alongside.

Volunteerism. One of the best ways to inspire hope among your community is by serving them. Your program will be advertising volunteer opportunities throughout the year. Organizing one of these efforts is a great way to develop your leadership ability! Your program should also have a way to track your volunteer hours.

Honor Code. Being a HOPE Specialist or a trainee within the program sets you apart from your peers. While we understand no one is perfect, every member within the program strives to uphold the HOPE Honor Code:

As a HOPE Specialist, I represent my unit, Wing, Delta, Squadron, Chaplain Corps, and HOPE. I will strive to be a skilled and trusted resource for my peers, leadership, and base helping agencies. As such, my conduct will embody the Air Force or Space Force core values. I will dedicate myself to growth in Warrior Ethos. I will act honorably, honestly, and treat all people with respect on and off-duty. I will represent the Wing, Delta, Chaplain Corps, and HOPE community in the words I use and the image I project. If I receive paperwork for misconduct, I will notify my unit or HOPE RST and explain the circumstances.

CHAPTER FOUR: HOW TO OPERATE AS A HOPE SPECIALIST

Once you become a HOPE Specialist several opportunities are opened for your continued development and involvement.

Embedded Peer-Resource. The most important role for a HOPE Specialist is common to all who bear the SEI: being an embedded peer-resource within your unit. You are an extension of the Chaplain Corps to be the frontline of acute care for hurting members. This is something the Chaplain Corps simply cannot do without you! Remain alert and attentive to concerning situations within your unit or any member simply looking “off.” Maybe there is an unhealthy culture problem that needs addressed. Maybe a coworker needs someone to talk to about their stress. Or maybe a peer is contemplating ending

their life and YOU are there to intervene and get them professional care. Just remember you are not a HOPE Specialist “out there” on your own. You are connected to a supportive team that can help advise you through some difficult problems you feel led to address. And as always, while you are an invaluable resource as a HOPE Specialist, you are not a trained professional. Your Chaplain Corps team will advise you on situations that require handoffs to an appropriate helping agency.

HOPE Airman Leadership Positions. Your program may have leadership positions that assist with the program’s management and operations. As a HOPE Specialist, you will be eligible to fill one of these roles, which is an excellent way to develop your leadership ability. Of course, you don’t have to hold an official position to get involved or lead a program! Your HOPE program may have positions including but not limited to:

- HOPE Wing/Delta Leader—the Airman leader for the program; advises the Chaplain Corps team on the culture and direction of the program
- HOPE Vice Wing/Delta Leader— The HOPE Vice-Wing Leader supports the Wing Leader in all duties and is expected to step in as acting leader whenever the Wing Leader is deployed, TDY, or on leave
- Volunteer/Community Coordinator—develops and organizes opportunities for the program to serve the community
- Facility Coordinator—manages facility requests from the program and is responsible for the security and cleanliness of the facilities
- Publicity Coordinator—creates advertisement products and disseminates important information to the program and beyond as required and approved
- Training Coordinator—manages the training schedule and facilitates scheduling presenters for the content

Confidentiality. As you function in your role as a HOPE Specialist, you may be exposed to privileged or confidential communication. In legal terms, Military Rule of Evidence 503 protects communications made as a formal act of religion or conscience. That privilege may be claimed by the individual if they intended for what was spoken to be confidential. While as a HOPE Specialist you should not seek out counseling relationships with your peers, a member may speak to you under the impression you have confidentiality, or you may overhear privileged communication. In either case, it is of the utmost importance that you maintain confidentiality and notify a Chaplain Corps member of this exposure. The NDA, as part of the application packet, further outlines this important requirement. You will receive additional training on confidentiality and privileged communication as part of your core training requirements.

Removal from the Program. You may choose to leave the HOPE Program at any time through voluntary disenrollment by notifying a Chaplain Corps member. This will require the removal of the SEI if previously awarded. Chaplain Corps staff reserve the right to remove the HOPE SEI at any time.

Disciplinary Actions. If you violate the Honor Code, you should your HOPE RST as soon as you are able. Your status within the program will be handled according to the following procedures:

- 1st Violation: you will be placed on a 6-month probationary period. You will remain a HOPE Specialist and will be mentored by a Chaplain Corps member
- 2nd Violation: if you violate the Honor Code within the 6-month probationary period, you will cease functioning as a HOPE Specialist and meet with a Chaplain Corps member for monthly mentoring. You will still be invited to attend professional development training, community events, and volunteer opportunities
- 3rd Violation: if you violate the Honor Code again within the 6-month period, your SEI will be removed, although you may reapply to become a HOPE Specialist after one year and must reaccomplish all requirements
- 4th Violation: if ever a member violates the Honor Code a fourth time, they will be removed from the HOPE program permanently and may not reapply to the program
- Other cases: if a member is convicted of a serious crime, they will automatically be removed from the program and lose the HOPE SEI permanently

INSTALLATION HELPING AGENCIES

Base Chapel:

Area Defense Council:

Command Post:

Inspector General:

Mental Health:

Equal Opportunity:

MFLC:

Military OneSource:

SARC:

Suicide Hotline:

MFRC:

Additional Resource:

Legal Office:

Additional Resource: