Stronger Together: Why Belonging Matters for EOD Veterans and Techs

Many of us know what it feels like to be surrounded by people yet still feel alone. In suicide prevention research, this feeling is referred to as thwarted belongingness, a psychological state where a person feels disconnected, isolated, or like they no longer truly belong.

Thwarted belongingness is more than simply being alone. It is the painful belief that meaningful connection, support, and understanding are missing. It often includes:

- Feelings of loneliness or isolation
- Believing others do not understand what you are going through
- Feeling disconnected from friends, family, or community
- Struggling to find meaningful reciprocal relationships

Researcher Thomas Joiner identified thwarted belongingness as one of the major contributors to suicidal thoughts within the Interpersonal Theory of Suicide. When combined with perceived burdensomeness, the belief that one is a burden to others, these feelings can become especially dangerous.

Last quarter, we discussed perceived burdensomeness and how individuals may begin to believe others would be "better off without them." Thwarted belongingness often reinforces those thoughts. When someone feels disconnected from others, it becomes easier to believe they are alone in their struggles or that no one truly cares. Over time, loneliness and hopelessness can feed each other.

Within the EOD community, connection matters! The nature of the work and experiences can sometimes make it difficult to relate to others outside the community, especially after transition, injury, loss, or significant life changes. Rebuilding connection is not always easy, but it is an important protective factor for mental health.

Some ways to combat loneliness and strengthen belonging include:

- Reaching out to another EOD Tech, even for a simple conversation
- Attending local EOD community events or gatherings
- Participating in peer support opportunities
- Volunteering and staying engaged with purpose-driven activities
- Applying for retreats or programs that encourage reconnection and healing
- Allowing trusted people to support you, even when it feels uncomfortable

At the EOD Warrior Foundation, we are committed to creating opportunities for connection across the EOD community. We currently host monthly gatherings in 20 locations, provide retreats and wellness opportunities, and offer volunteer opportunities through our Flag Program. Fundraising events, memorial events, and peer gatherings are all intended to help strengthen the bonds that make this community unique.

Connection does not have to begin with a big step. Sometimes it starts with showing up, answering a text, attending an event, or simply allowing yourself to be around people who understand.
If you or someone you know is struggling, support is available. Reaching out is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Resources

If you or someone you know is struggling, confidential help is available:

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline – Call or text 988 (24/7 confidential support)
- Veterans Crisis Line – Dial 988 and press 1
- After the Long Walk (EOD Peer Support – 24/7) – 1-888-412-0470
- Local behavioral health providers.

For more information about how to find a monthly gathering near you, please contact Leah at leah@eodwarriorfoundation.org. For all other questions, please contact Michelle at michelle@eodwarriorfoundation.org.









