

VA S.A.V.E. Training

Transcript

[Male Narrator] Welcome to Buddy Check Training and thank you for stepping up to carry out buddy checks.

The acronym VA S.A.V.E. can give you an easy way to remember the simple steps that anyone can take when talking with Veterans who are at risk for suicide.

Let's get started.

[Kristen] Hello and welcome to VA S.A.V.E.

This course is brought to you by the Department of Veterans Affairs in collaboration with Psych Armor.

My name is Kristen Vescera and I am a clinical psychologist and an Army combat Veteran enlisted.

We are all on a journey.

Sometimes we need a guide to help navigate our path when challenges appear.

Each of us has the opportunity to be that one person who makes a difference.

The person who asks the critical question that can save a Veteran's life, or the life of any person who has thoughts of suicide.

Suicide is a serious national public health issue, with rising rates in the general population.

Among military Veterans, suicide rates are higher and are rising faster than among non-Veterans.

The estimated number of Veterans who die by suicide each day in America has changed from year to year.

But this we know for sure.

Our nation grieves with each life lost.

For each person who dies by suicide, it's estimated that over a hundred others are impacted by their death in some way.

The VA is committed to preventing suicide among our country's Veterans and VA S.A.V.E. is an important part of that effort.

The journey to understand suicide is a complex one and navigating that path can feel overwhelming.

Think of VA S.A.V.E. as your compass, a suicide prevention training intended to help people identify and assist a Veteran at risk.

S.A.V.E. as an acronym to help you act when encountering a Veteran in suicidal crisis.

Think of VA S.A.V.E. as a way to help you navigate through your support for the Veteran, and clear path for them to get help.

We all have a role to play in suicide prevention.

Let's get started by discussing five pieces of accurate information about suicide in the Veteran community.

Number one, suicide is a complex issue with no single cause.

There can be many factors that contribute to thoughts of suicide.

Risk factors increase the chance that a Veteran attempts suicide.

Some risk factors and Veterans include prior suicide attempts, some mental health conditions, access to lethal means, and stressful life events such as divorce, job loss, or the death of a loved one.

Protective factors decrease the chance of a suicide attempt.

Some protective factors for suicide include access to mental health care, feeling connected to other people, and positive coping skills.

To prevent Veteran suicide, we must maximize protective factors while minimizing risk factors at all levels.

Number two most suicidal crises are very brief.

While some people have thoughts of suicide for a long time, many suicide crises last only moments.

This makes it even more critical that we intervene during a crisis.

Number three, limiting access to lethal means can save lives.
Lethal means are those objects or methods that individuals consider using to end their lives.
These items can become deadly if accessible to someone experiencing a suicide crisis.

Contrary to popular belief, if a person in crisis cannot access the method they plan to use, they generally do not find or substitute another method.

So if we build time and space between the Veteran and their planned method, we can help them survive.

In fact, we might have prevented suicide for the rest of their lives.

Number four, for Veterans, this includes honest conversations about firearms.

We know that military service members and Veterans are more likely to use firearms in suicide attempts than nonmilitary, connected people.

Why is this important?

Because during a suicide attempt, all other methods combined are fatal 5% of the time.

While attempts with firearms are fatal 90% of the time.

Number five, you don't have to be an expert to talk about suicide.

Do not be afraid to talk to Veterans you meet who might be at risk.

Please know when suicide is brought up in conversation, even casually, it should be taken seriously.

Use it as an invitation to find out more.

Direct, open and honest communication, and collaboration can be the key to saving someone's life.

Suicide is preventable.

That's what VA S.A.V.E. is based on.

The compass that leads us to believe.

We can all be part of the solution.

Follow the VA S.A.V.E. steps as you navigate the journey to do your part.

VA S.A.V.E. will help you act with care and compassion.

If you encounter a Veteran who is in a suicidal crisis, think S.A.V.E. to remember the important steps to preventing suicide.

S is for spot the signs that a Veteran might be thinking about suicide.

A is for ask the critical question are you thinking about killing yourself?

V is for validate the Veterans' experience.

E is for encourage and support next steps with the Veteran.

Let's go through the VA S.A.V.E. compass to learn in more detail.

S: spot the signs if you know what to look for, you will be better able to recognize a Veteran who might need extra support.

Sometimes we notice a change in the person.

Pay attention to these changes and trust your gut feeling.

You may notice statements like, "I feel like there's no way out or no reason to live," "I feel hopeless," or "People would be better off without me," anxiety, mood swings, rage or anger, changes in sleep, engaging in impulsive, risky activities, increasing alcohol or drug use, or withdrawing from family and friends.

Other warning signs require immediate attention, such as talking about death, dying, or suicide, saying they wish to kill themselves or that they have a plan to do so, or self-destructive behavior such as increased drug or alcohol use.

A: Ask the critical question.

Know the important question to ask a Veteran.

It can be lifesaving.

Are you thinking about killing yourself?

Use direct words and phrases such as killing yourself and suicide when asking about suicidal thoughts.

Avoid using vague phrases such as hurting yourself, as these can have different meanings to different people.

Ask a direct question if warning signs are evident.

Some of these signs are invitations to gather more information.

For instance, you might say, I want to understand what you mean by ending at all.

Are you thinking about killing yourself?

Raise questions in a way that shows you are open to listening and stay non-judgmental, no matter the answer.

This is extremely important.

It will help the Veteran know you are willing to listen.

Don't delay a conversation about suicide.

The question should not be an afterthought.

It should be asked right away.

Once a Veteran indicates they may be at risk, ask in a way that fits naturally with you and the Veteran.

We understand it may be uncomfortable.

Ask anyway.

V: validate the Veterans' experience.

Be willing to listen and allow the Veteran to express their feelings.

Talk openly about suicide.

Treat the Veteran with respect.

Listening more than you speak.

Stay as calm as possible.

Express your concern and let the veteran know that help is available.

Recognize that the Veteran has unique experiences from the military.

They may or may not feel connected to their military past.

Follow the Veterans lead if they bring it up and acknowledge their perspective.

We can all be part of making Veterans feel heard, supported, and validated.

Encourage and support next steps with the Veteran.

What should you do if you think someone is having thoughts of suicide?

Be honest about your concern while you reassure the Veteran that help is available.

If the Veteran admits to thoughts of suicide, stay with them until they're connected with help.

You and the Veteran can contact the Veterans Crisis Line together.

Dial 988 and press 1 for Veterans.

You can also text the Veterans Crisis Line at 838255 or visit VeteransCrisisLine.net, click on the upper right corner of the screen to enter the confidential Veterans chat.

A few important safety issues to cover.

Never negotiate with someone who has a gun.

Get to safety and call 911.

If the Veteran has taken pills, cut themselves, or done harm to themselves in some other way, call 911 immediately.

In addition to remembering VA S.A.V.E., we recommend VeteransCrisisLine.net, KeepItSecure.net, VA.gov/REACH, as resources to assist you in being ready to support the Veteran in your life.

For all of us with Veterans in our lives, we have the ability to save a life.

You have the ability to save a life.

Each of us, if we follow the compass of VA S.A.V.E. acting with confidence and calmness can make the difference that gives a Veteran hope in a time of crisis.

Remember the steps of VA S.A.V.E. as you navigate your role in suicide prevention for the Veteran in your life.

Spot the signs, ask the critical question, validate the Veterans' experience, and encourage and support next steps with the Veteran.

Now with VA S.A.V.E., you can be the person who makes that all important difference in a Veteran's life.

Thank you for taking the time to learn this essential information and joining us on this journey.

[Male Narrator] Make sure you incorporate what you've just learned from the VA S.A.V.E. video into the buddy checks that you'll be doing.

[On Screen] Thank you for watching this training.

The Veterans Crisis Line is available 24/7.

Dial 988, press 1 for Veterans.

www.VeteransCrisisLine.net

Don't wait. Reach out.

VA.gov/REACH