

Talking with a Veteran in Crisis

You don't have to be an expert to ask if someone is going through a difficult time or having thoughts of suicide. If you notice changes in a Veteran's behavior or moods and you think they might be in crisis, it's time to respond. The simple act of having a conversation can help save a life.

Here are some ways to approach a conversation with a Veteran who may be suicidal.

First, assess the situation to determine if the Veteran may be in **imminent danger**. Check to see if there are any harmful objects in the area, such as firearms, sharp objects, or lethal drugs. Those at the highest risk for suicide often have a specific suicide plan, the means to carry out the plan, a time set for doing it, and an intention of following through with it.

Asking whether a Veteran is having thoughts of self-harm or suicide may seem extreme, but it is important. Although many people may not show clear signs of intent to harm themselves before doing so, they will likely answer direct questions about their intentions when asked. **Remember, asking if someone is having suicidal thoughts will not give them the idea or increase their risk.**

Want to learn more skills to for support and suicide prevention specifically tailored to those who have served, their loved ones and those who work with or support them?

Trainings

S.A.V.E.



LEARN



If you and/or the Veteran are not in imminent danger, start a conversation to help the Veteran open up and to find out how you might be able to help. You can ask questions such as:

- "When did you first start feeling like this?"
- "Did something happen that made you begin to feel this way?"

When responding to answers, remember that simple, encouraging feedback goes a long way in showing support and encouraging help-seeking:

- "You're not alone, even if you feel like you are. I'm here for you, and I want to help you in any way I can."
- "It may not seem possible right now, but the way you're feeling will change."
- "I might not be able to understand exactly what you're going through or how you feel, but I care about you and want to help."

Even for Veterans who do not appear to be suicidal, it is important to direct them to resources to help them face mental health challenges and more.

For more information about the Veterans Crisis Line, visit [VeteransCrisisLine.net](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net)

For more information about VA's mental health resources, visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov

For access to 400+ stories of strength and recovery from Veterans and their family members, visit [MakeTheConnection.net](https://www.maketheconnection.net)

SAFETY ISSUES:

If you believe a Veteran is at high risk and has already harmed himself or herself, you need to call local emergency services at 911

- Never negotiate with someone who has a gun. Get to safety and call 911.
- If the Veteran has taken pills or harmed himself or herself in some way, call 911.

Veterans who are in emotional distress and are showing warning signs for suicide can be connected to the 24-hour Veterans Crisis Line: Call 988 and Press 1 or text to 838255. Caring, specially trained responders are available to provide free, confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Responders are available to speak to Veterans and their caregivers, family members, or friends.

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs