

#BeThere



S.A.V.E.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

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A little housekeeping before we start:

- Suicide is an intense topic for some people.
 - If you need to take a break, or step out, please do so, with one condition...
 - Let me know if you are okay, by giving me a “thumbs up.”
 - If you aren’t okay, give me a discreet “thumbs down” so I can follow up with you.
 - Resources (other than VCL listed below):
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: (800) 273 - 8255
 - Employee Assistance Program:

Overview

- Veterans and the VA
- Facts about suicide
- Myths/realities about suicide
- The steps of S.A.V.E. – Communicating with a person in crisis, who may be expressing suicidal ideation
- Safe messaging
- Resources and References

Who are Veterans?



Federal definition:

Any person who served honorably on active duty in the
Armed Forces of the United States

Support starts with understanding

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KKsC1jhxTY>

Department of Veterans Affairs



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

What is the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)?

- Veterans Health Administration
- Veterans Benefits Administration
- National Cemetery Administration

VA National Initiatives:

- Research
- Best practices in identification and treatment
- Educating employees at every level
- Partnering with community based organizations and the Armed Forces
- Veterans Crisis Line

How do Veterans know if they are eligible for care through VA?

VA benefits: <http://www.vba.va.gov/VBA/>

Suicide in the United States

- **More than 47,000** deaths from suicide per year among the general U.S. population.^{1,2} -- Every **12.3 minutes** someone dies by suicide.
- Suicide is the **10th** leading cause of death in the U.S.³
- It is estimated that close to **one million** people make a suicide attempt each year, one attempt every **35 seconds**.
- Gender disparities:


Women **attempt suicide 3 times**
more often than men.¹


Men **die by suicide**
4 times more often than women.¹

Suicide deaths per day

20 Veterans die by suicide each day.



14 *Of these Veterans are not under VHA care.*

6 *Are in VHA care.*

123

Americans die by suicide each day.

1-2

Active duty Service members die by suicide each day.

Veteran population

20.7

Million Veterans



18.9 Million
Males

1.8 Million
Females

Facts about Veteran suicide

- **14.8%** of all deaths by suicide among U.S. adults were Veterans.⁴
- Veterans are more likely than the general population to use **firearms** as a means for suicide.⁴
 - *69% of all Veteran suicide deaths is from a firearm injury.*
- On average, there are **764 suicide attempts** per month among Veterans receiving recent VA health care services.⁵
- **25%** of Veterans who died by suicide had a history of previous suicide attempts.⁵

2016 Key Data Points



The rate of suicide was

1.8 *times higher among female Veterans*

compared with non-Veteran adult women.

* after accounting for differences in age



The rate of suicide was

1.4 *times higher among male Veterans*

compared with non-Veteran adult men.

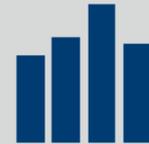
* after accounting for differences in age



Male Veterans ages

18–34

experienced the highest rates of suicide.



Male Veterans ages

55 and older

had the highest count of suicide.

69% *of all Veteran suicide deaths resulted from a firearm injury.*

Suicide Prevention



What do the statistics mean?

- Veterans may be at higher risk of suicide
- We need to do more to reduce their risk
- Realizing risk helps reduce bad outcomes

Common myths vs. realities

Myth

Reality

Asking about suicide may lead to someone taking his or her life.

Common myths vs. realities

Myth

Reality

Asking about suicide does **not** create suicidal thoughts. The act of asking the question simply gives the Veteran permission to talk about his or her thoughts or feelings.

Common myths vs. realities

Myth

Reality

If somebody really wants to die by suicide,
there is nothing you can do about it.

Common myths vs. realities

Myth

Reality

Making one form of suicide less convenient does not usually lead people to find another method. Some people will, but the overwhelming majority will not.

Death by Suicide is Preventable

Lethal Means Safety

- Safe storage of lethal means reduces suicide
 - e.g., Firearms, abundance of analgesic doses per bottle, etc.
- How did we figure this out?
 - e.g., Coal gas in the UK, placement of lethal items behind counters, fencing off bridges
- 85-90% of people who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide later.

Common myths vs. realities

Myth

Reality

He/she won't die by suicide because...

- He just made plans for a vacation.
- She has young children at home.
- He made a verbal or written promise.
- She knows how dearly her family loves her.

Common myths vs. realities

Myth

Reality

The intent to die can override rational thinking.

Someone experiencing suicidal ideation or intent must be taken seriously and referred to a clinical provider who can further evaluate his or her condition and provide treatment as appropriate.

S.A.V.E.

- S.A.V.E. will help you act with care and compassion if you encounter a Veteran who is in suicidal crisis.
- The acronym “**S.A.V.E.**” helps one remember the important steps involved in suicide prevention:

S

Signs of suicidal thinking should be recognized.

A

Ask the most important question of all.

V

Validate the Veteran’s experience.

E

Encourage treatment, and Expedite getting help.

Importance of identifying warning signs



- There are behaviors that may indicate/reveal that a Veteran needs help.
- Veterans in crisis may show behaviors that indicate a risk of harming or killing themselves.

S | Signs of suicidal thinking

Learn to recognize these warning signs:

- Hopelessness, feeling like there's no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
- Feeling like there is no reason to live
- Rage or anger
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from family and friends

S | Signs of suicidal thinking

The presence of any of the following signs requires immediate attention:

- Thinking about hurting or killing themselves
- Looking for ways to die
- Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- Self-destructive or risk-taking behavior, especially when it involves alcohol, drugs, or weapons

A | Asking the question

- Are you thinking of suicide?
- Have you had thoughts about taking your own life?
- Are you thinking about killing yourself?

A | Asking the question

Do's

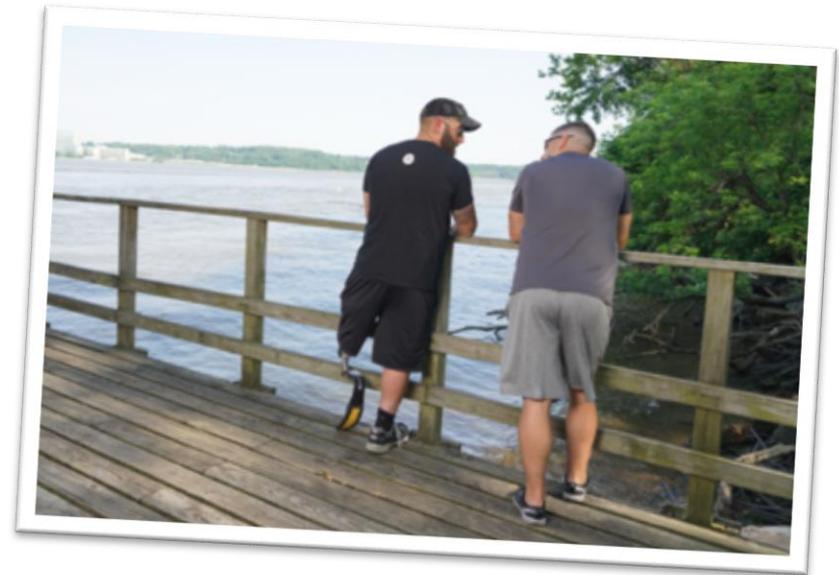
- DO ask the question if you've identified warning signs or symptoms.
- DO ask the question in a natural way that flows with the conversation.

Don'ts

- DON'T ask the question as though you are looking for a "no" answer.
 - "You aren't thinking of killing yourself. Are you?"
- DON'T wait to ask the question when someone is halfway out the door.

V | Validate the Veteran's experience.

- Talk openly about suicide. Be willing to listen, and allow the Veteran to express his or her feelings.
- Recognize that the situation is serious.
- Do not pass judgment.
- Reassure that help is available.



E | Encourage treatment, and expedite getting help.

- What should I do if I think someone is suicidal?
 - Don't keep the Veteran's suicidal behavior a secret.
 - Do not leave him or her alone.
 - Try to get the person to seek immediate help from his or her doctor or the nearest hospital emergency room.
 - Call 911.
- Reassure the Veteran that help is available.
- Call the Veterans Crisis Line at **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1**.

E | Encourage treatment, and expedite getting help.

Safety Issues:

- Never negotiate with someone who has a gun.
 - Get to safety, and call VA police, security, or 911.
- If the Veteran has taken pills, cut himself or herself, or harmed himself or herself in some way, call VA police, security, or 911.
- Call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, Press 1

E Encourage treatment, and expedite getting help.

- Remember: When a Veteran at risk for suicide leaves your facility, provide suicide prevention information to the Veteran and his or her family.
 - Veterans Crisis Line number **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1**
 - Veterans Crisis Line brochures and wallet cards



Things to consider when talking with a Veteran at risk for suicide:

- Remain calm.
- Listen more than you speak.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Act with confidence.
- Do not argue.
- Use open body language.
- Limit questions — let the Veteran do the talking.
- Use supportive, encouraging comments.
- Be honest — there are no quick solutions, but help is available.

Remember:

S.A.V.E.

- S** Signs of suicidal thinking should be recognized.
- A** Ask the most important question of all.
- V** Validate the Veteran's experience.
- E** Encourage treatment, and Expedite getting help.



IT'S YOUR CALL

Safe Messaging: Guide for talking and writing about suicide.



U.S. Department
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**Veterans
Crisis Line**

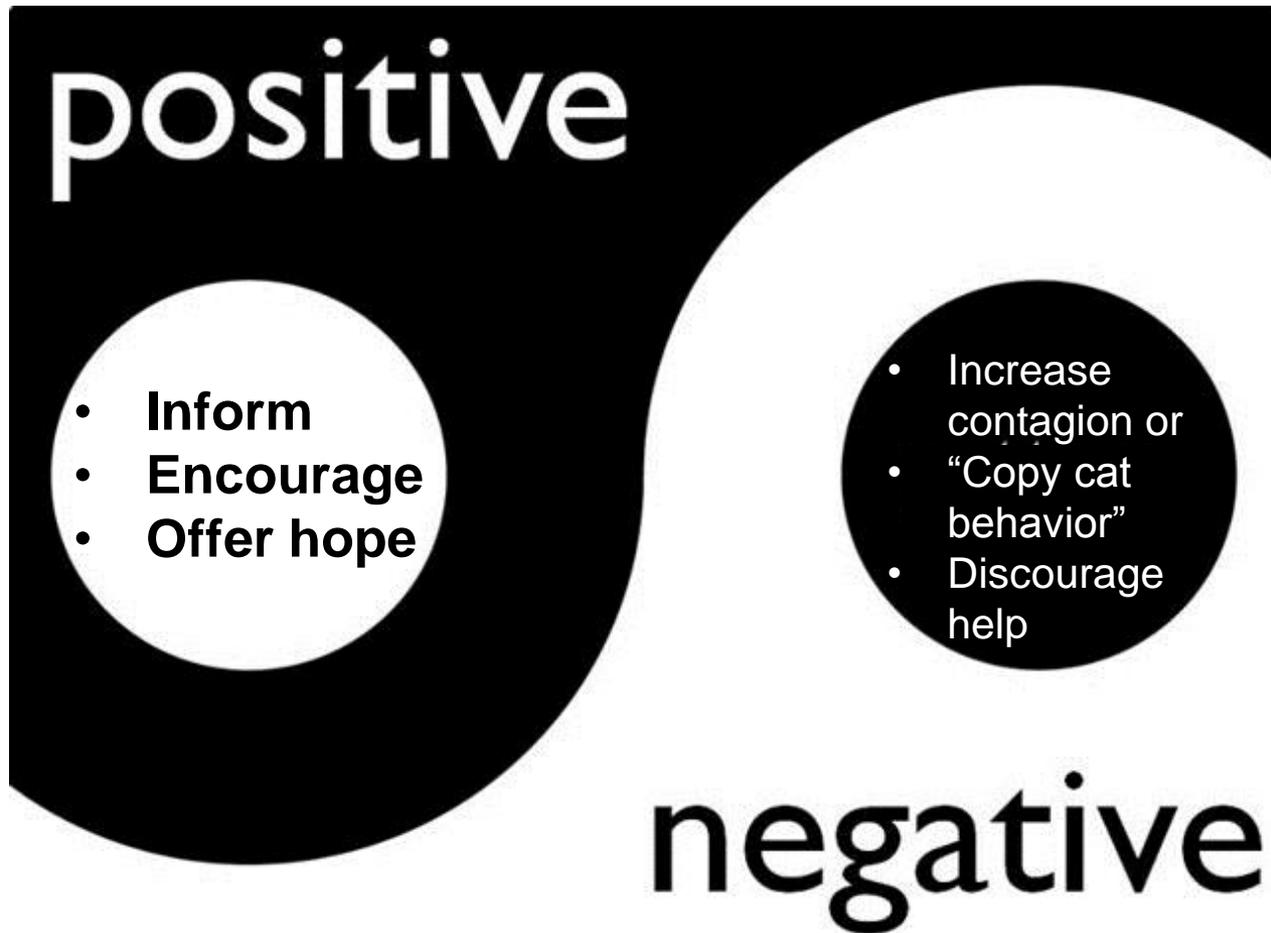


**1-800-273-8255
PRESS 1**

VeteransCrisisLine.net
or text to **838255**

Confidential help for Veterans and their families and friends

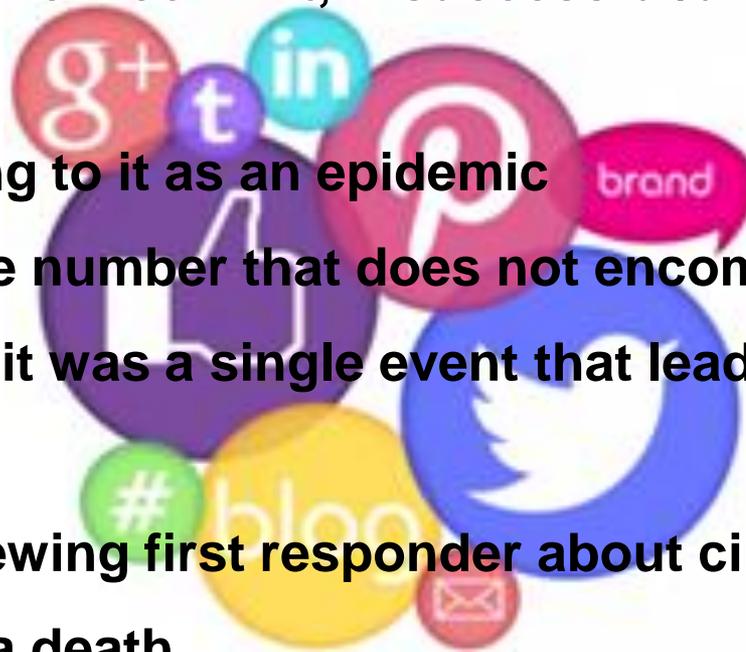
Safe messaging – for everybody



Safe Messaging: **Avoid**

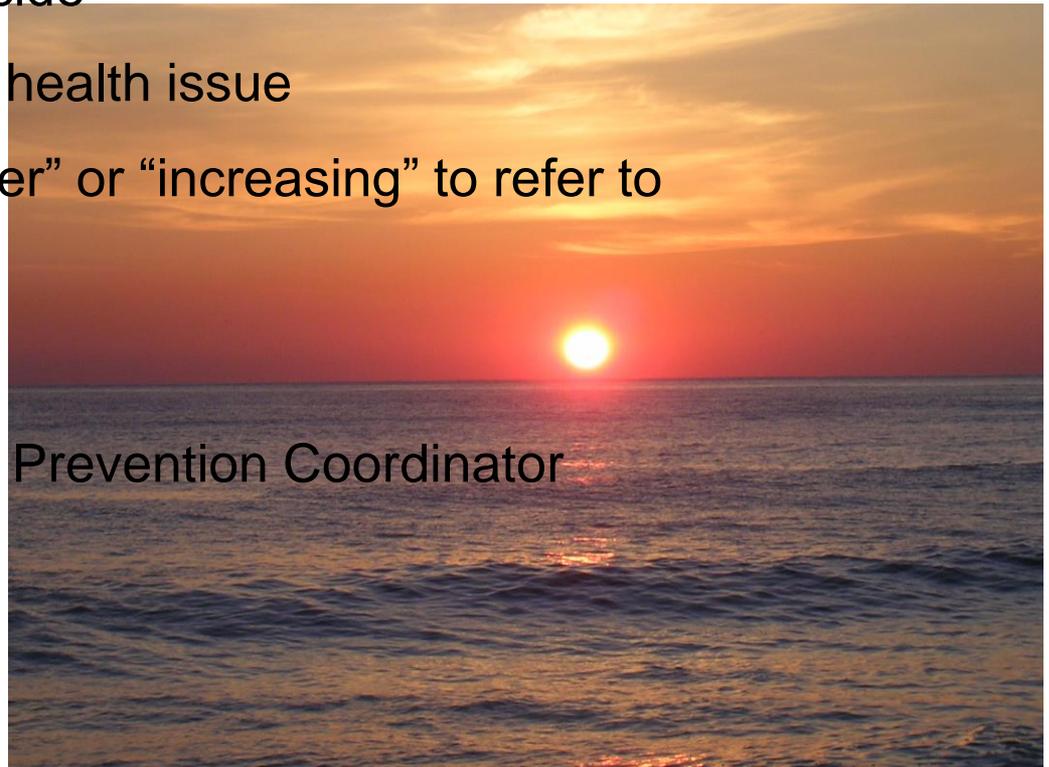
Guidelines for writing and talking about Veteran suicide

- x **Avoid details**
- x **Avoid terms like: “commit,” “successful/unsuccessful suicide, or failed”**
- x **Avoid referring to it as an epidemic**
- x **Avoid a single number that does not encompass the scope**
- x **Avoid saying it was a single event that lead to death by suicide**
- x **Avoid interviewing first responder about circumstances surrounding a death**
- x **Avoid statements that discourage help, ***Bust the myths*****



Safe Messaging: Best practices

- ✓ Be informative
- ✓ Use the term: “died by suicide”
- ✓ Report suicide as a public health issue
- ✓ Use objective terms: “higher” or “increasing” to refer to suicide rates
- ✓ Suicide is complex
- ✓ Reach out to local Suicide Prevention Coordinator
- ✓ Stories of hope



Suicide is a national public health issue, with about 47,000 Americans dying by suicide each year.

Safe Messaging: Examples



If you or a Veteran that you know is in crisis, or having thoughts of suicide, please contact the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, press 1, text 838255.

From 2015-2016 the overall rate of Veteran suicide has decreased.

Jane Doe, Army Veteran and mother, died by suicide.

By participating in this training, you have learned:

- Suicide prevention is everyone's business.
- General facts about suicide in the U.S.
- Facts about Veteran suicide.
- How to identify a Veteran who may be at risk for suicide.
- How to help a Veteran at risk for suicide.
- How to address a crisis situation.
- What resources are available and how to access them.
<http://spreadtheword.veteranscrisisline.net/materials/>
- Safe messaging



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Resources

Mental Health

- VHA provides specialty inpatient and outpatient mental health services at its medical centers and community-based outpatient clinics. All mental health care provided by VHA supports recovery, striving to enable a person with mental health problems to live a meaningful life in the community and achieve his or her full potential.
- For more information on VA Mental Health Services, visit www.mentalhealth.va.gov

Vet Centers

- Vet Centers are VA community-based centers that provide a range of counseling, outreach, and referral services.
- For more information about Vet Centers and to find the Vet Center closest to you, visit www.vetcenter.va.gov

Resources (cont.)



Make The Connection

- ***MakeTheConnection.net*** is a one-stop resource where Veterans and their families and friends can privately explore information about physical and mental health symptoms, challenging life events, and mental health conditions. On this site, Veterans and their families and friends can learn about available resources and support. Visit [MakeTheConnection.net](https://www.maketheconnection.net) to learn more.

Resources (cont.)



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- Each VA medical center has PTSD specialists who provide treatment for Veterans with PTSD. For more information about PTSD and to locate the VA PTSD program nearest you, visit www.ptsd.va.gov
- PTSD Coach App: The PTSD Coach application allows phone users to manage their symptoms, links them with local sources of support, and provides information on PTSD. Visit <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/materials/apps/PTSDCoach.asp>

Resources (cont.)



Veterans Crisis Line/Chat/Text

- **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1**
- [VeteransCrisisLine.net](https://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net)
- Text to **838255**

VA Suicide Prevention Coordinators

- Each VA Medical Center has a Suicide Prevention Coordinator (SPC) to make sure Veterans receive needed counseling and services.
- Find your local SPC at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator](https://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator)

Resources (cont.)

Additional Safe Messaging Resources

Safe Reporting on Suicide: reportingonsuicide.org

Action Alliance Framework for Successful Messaging: suicidepreventionmessaging.org

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education: save.org/for-the-media

Resources for Family Members, Friends, and the Community

You do not need to be a professional in order to help a Veteran who may be going through a difficult time. There are a number of free, confidential, and vetted resources available 24/7/365:

S.A.V.E. training video:

Watch a free online suicide prevention training video at psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e.

#BeThere campaign:

Learn how to help a Veteran in crisis at bethereforveterans.com.

Coaching Into Care:

Access this national hotline (1-888-823-7458) to find care or services for a Veteran.

Learn more at www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching.

VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention:

Find additional suicide prevention resources at

www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/resources.asp.

References

- ¹ Suicide facts. (2016). Retrieved August 1, 2016, from SAVE Suicide Awareness Voices of Education,
http://www.save.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.viewPage&page_id=705D5DF4-055B-F1EC-3F66462866FCB4E6
- ² United States Suicide Injury Deaths and Rates per 100,000 in 2014. Retrieved August 2, 2016, from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention WISQARS,
<http://webappa.cdc.gov/cgi-bin/broker.exe>.
- ³ Suicide Facts at a Glance. (2015). Retrieved August 1, 2016, from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/suicide-datasheet-a.PDF>
- ⁴ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2016). Suicide among Veterans and other Americans 2001-2014. Washington, DC: Office for Suicide Prevention.
- ⁵ Based on suicide/ suicide attempts reported within the VA Suicide Prevention Application Network (SPAN) during calendar year 2014.

Reference (cont.)

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2019). Safe messaging best practices: A guide for anyone communicating and writing about Veteran suicide. Retrieved June 5, 2019 from https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/docs/OMH-086-VA-OMHSP-Safe-Messaging-Factsheet-4-9-2019.pdf

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