

Office of Administrative Review

Crisis Call Management



Purpose

This Tip Sheet provides critical information and helpful steps at crisis telephone call management.



Audience

All decision review operations center (DROC) personnel.



Resources

- Service members and Veterans can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by dialing (800) 273-8255 or **988 then press 1** to connect with the Veterans Crisis Line
- Text the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 838255
- Call 911, or E911 – a service to route 911 calls to emergency dispatch services in the caller's area by dialing (267) 908-6605
- Visit www.veteranscrisisline.net
- Visit <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Tips

Click on the applicable link to navigate to the section you need:

- [Call Preparation](#)
- [Use the S.A.V.E Initiative](#)
- [Crisis Call Management Steps](#)

Call Preparation

- **Learn how to do conference/three-way calls** from your telephone system. Read the manual providing this information or find the procedures on the internet, and practice with coworkers.
- **Identify a buddy** or partner at the start of your shift, or prior to making calls, and ask that person to be on stand-by should crisis situations arise.
- **Review the eFolder**, rating decision(s), and applicable systems (VBMS, JLV, CAPRI) for any flashes, notes, symptomology, or flags of suicidal behavior prior to making calls.
- **Note the Veteran's address and telephone number** prior to making a call, in case you need to contact them back or communicate with first responders or other trained personnel. It is good practice to confirm this information is accurate at the start of the call.



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Use the S.A.V.E. Initiative

- **Signs of suicidal thinking** should be recognized. 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
- **Ask the most important question** of all.
 - “Are you thinking of killing yourself?”
 - Ask the question in a natural and direct way.
 - Do not ask as though you are looking for a ‘no’ answer, e.g., “You aren’t thinking of killing yourself, are you?”
- **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 the Veteran that help is available.
- **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 by dialing **1-800-273-8255** or **988** then press **1**.

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Crisis Call Management Steps

Follow these steps to expedite help during a crisis call:

1. **Obtain/confirm caller information.** Ask the Veteran for their current location (“Where are you right now?”) if not already confirmed at the start of the call and confirm their telephone number. *Note:* The address in the eFolder and the Veterans current location can be different.
2. **Call 911 for immediate concerns.** If the caller is unable to maintain their or others’ safety at any point in the next 24 hours, call emergency services at 911, or E911 at (267) 908-6605 for immediate assistance. Be prepared to give the Veteran’s location, including the street address, city, state, and zip code. The operator will also ask your name and the nature of your emergency and may ask if you need fire or police services (state “police”). Your call will be directed to the appropriate emergent services. Remain on the phone until first responders arrive.
3. **Signal a coworker** (buddy) in person, or electronically in Microsoft Teams, that you are engaged in a crisis call. Attempt to provide information about the Veteran and the call to that coworker such as name, address, telephone number, and situation (i.e., suicidal ideation, immediate threat). Ask the coworker to alert management and to assist you in response measures that you have not taken yet, such as calling 911 or calling the Veterans Crisis Line (988 then press 1).
4. **Engage the caller.** Continue talking calmly with the caller. Do **not** hang up the call. Let them know you are sending help, or that you are helping them connect with the Crisis Line, and that you will stay on the phone with them. Try to engage them in a discussion around any positives that they may identify. Reassure them that help is available.
5. **Transfer to the Crisis Line.** Stay on the phone until help arrives from first responders, or until you successfully transfer the call to the Crisis Line. Do a warm hand-off (conference/three-way call) to the Crisis Line by dialing (800) 273-8255 or 988 and pressing 1 for the Veterans Crisis Line. Provide the Crisis Line with the Veteran’s contact information (current address/location of Veteran and telephone number) and a brief context of the situation explaining why you are transferring the call. **Important:** Do not leave the Veteran on hold for too long while introducing the call to the Crisis Line responder.

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Important Reminders



- Suicide is preventable.
- 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.
- When talking with a Veteran at risk of suicide
 - Remain calm.
 - Listen more than you speak. Limit questions – let the Veteran do the talking.
 - Act with confidence.
 - Do not argue.
 - Use supportive, encouraging comments.
 - Be honest — let the Veteran know that there are no quick solutions, but help is available.
- If you are concerned for a caller after a call has concluded, call the Crisis Line, relay the situation, and request they follow-up with the Veteran.
- Visit <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/local-resources> to find VA Medical Centers, Suicide Prevention Coordinators, and other resources local to the Veteran you are working with by searching with their state or zip code.

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Other Resources



- Training videos
 - <https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/>
 - <https://maketheconnection.net/conditions/suicide>
- Self-help and care tips
 - Take time to debrief with your supervisor after a crisis call
 - Try to step away for a few minutes after a crisis call to clear your mind and process the call
 - Use the [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP) to seek additional help and resources
 - Check out <https://www.vets4warriors.com/> or at (835) 838-8255 for a 24/7 confidential peer support network for Veteran and military communities, and their families and caregivers

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