

**“Honor the Dead by Helping the Living”**



**Department of Pennsylvania  
Veterans of Foreign Wars  
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**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS RESOURCES ON SUICIDE  
PREVENTION FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH**

One small act can make a difference in the life of a Veteran or Service member in crisis. Every year, organizations across the country recognize September as Suicide Prevention Month. This year, the Veterans Crisis Line is asking you to think about the power of one and consider the many ways a single act can give Veterans access to confidential support and resources.

For Veterans going through a difficult time and their loved ones who are concerned about them, a single call, chat, or text can be a critical first step. One conversation with a Veteran about how he or she is doing can open the door to services and support. Everyone can be the person who makes a difference in a Veteran's life, and connecting with support doesn't have to be hard.

**Every month should be Suicide Prevention for our Veterans, Families and Friends.**

**SUICIDE AND CRISIS**

The end of a relationship. Loss of a job. Housing instability. Feeling a loss of purpose. At some point, everyone will face a challenge. Some of those challenges may develop into a crisis. Recognizing a crisis in yourself or those you care about can help you know when to find support.

**CRISIS SIGNS**

**These signs require immediate attention**

- **Thinking about hurting or killing yourself**
- **Looking for ways to kill yourself**
- **Talking about death, dying, or suicide**
- **Self-destructive behavior, such as drug abuse, risky use of weapons, etc.**

## **WARNING SIGNS**

**These signs may indicate that a Veteran needs help**

- **Appearing sad or depressed most of the time**
- **Hopelessness**
- **Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings**
- **Feeling as if there is no reason to live**
- **Feeling excessive guilt, shame, or sense of failure**
- **Rage or anger**
- **Engaging in risky activities without thinking**
- **Increasing alcohol or drug misuse**
- **Losing interest in hobbies, work, or school**
- **Neglecting personal welfare and appearance**
- **Withdrawing from family and friends**
- **Showing violent behavior, like punching a hole in the wall or getting into fights**
- **Giving away prized possessions**
- **Getting affairs in order, tying up loose ends, or writing a will**

## **START A CONVERSATION**

You don't have to be an expert to talk to a Veteran facing challenges. You just need to show genuine care and concern. Here are some things to remember:

Make supportive and encouraging comments, don't ask invasive personal questions.

## **WHAT IS POST TRAUMATIC STRESS**

You feel on edge. Nightmares keep coming back. Sudden noises make you jump.

You're staying at home more and more. Could you have posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?

If you have experienced severe trauma or a life-threatening event — whether during a time of war or in a noncombat situation — you may develop symptoms of posttraumatic stress, or what is commonly known as PTSD. Maybe during the event you felt as if your life or the lives of others were in danger or that you had no control over what was happening. While in the military, you may have witnessed people being injured or dying, or you may have experienced physical harm yourself.

Some of the most common symptoms of PTSD include recurring memories or nightmares of the event, sleeplessness, loss of interest, and feelings of numbness, anger or irritability, or being constantly on guard, but there are many ways

PTSD can impact your everyday life. Sometimes these symptoms don't surface for months or even years after the event occurred or after returning from deployment. They may also come and go. If these problems persist or they're disrupting your daily life, you may have PTSD.

Some factors can increase the likelihood of a traumatic event leading to PTSD, such as:

- The intensity of the trauma
- Being hurt or losing someone you were close to
- Being physically close to the traumatic event
- Feeling you were not in control
- Having a lack of support after the event

### **WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF POST TRAUMATIC STRESS**

A wide variety of symptoms may be signs that you are experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder. The following are some of the most common symptoms of PTSD that you or those around you may have noticed:

- Feeling upset by things that remind you of what happened
- Having nightmares, vivid memories, or flashbacks of the event that make you feel like it's happening all over again
- Feeling emotionally cut off from others
- Feeling numb or losing interest in things you used to care about
- Feeling constantly on guard
- Feeling irritated or having angry outbursts
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Having trouble concentrating
- Being jumpy or easily startled

It's not just the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder but also how you may react to them that can disrupt your life. You may:

- Frequently avoid places or things that remind you of what happened
- Consistently drink or use drugs to numb your feelings
- Consider harming yourself or others
- Start working all the time to occupy your mind
- Pull away from other people and become isolated

## **AM I ELIGIBLE FOR VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION?**

You may be eligible for disability compensation if you have symptoms related to a traumatic event (the “stressor”) or your experience with the stressor is related to the PTSD symptoms, and you meet both of these requirements.

Both of these must be true:

- The stressor happened during your service, and
- A doctor has diagnosed you with PTSD

Note: If you get a disability rating, you may also be eligible for VA health care and other benefits.

## **WHAT DOES VA CONSIDER TO BE A TRAUMATIC EVENT?**

- Combat experiences, like engaging in combat with enemy forces, experiencing fear of hostile military or terrorist activity, serving in an imminent danger area, or serving as a drone aircraft crew member
- Sexual assault or harassment
- Traumatic personal interactions, like physical assault, battery, robbery, mugging, stalking, or harassment by a person who wasn’t part of an enemy force, or domestic abuse or harassment by a partner
- Other traumatic events, like getting into a car accident, witnessing a natural disaster, working on burn ward or graves registration, witnessing the death, injury, or threat to another person or to yourself, that was caused by something other than a hostile military or terrorist activity, or experiencing or witnessing friendly fire that occurred on a gunnery range during a training mission

Veterans are eligible for mental health services at the VA regardless of their discharge status. This includes:

- Emergency care

All veterans can access emergency VA mental health care.

Anyone can call or text the VA crisis line for a Veteran 988 press 1 or text 838255

Vet Center services- Vet Center Hotline [877-927-8387](tel:877-927-8387)

- All veterans are automatically eligible for Vet Center services at no cost.
- Spouses of veterans may be eligible for services at Vet Centers, including bereavement counseling.