

# What is Operation SAVE?

**Operation SAVE** will help you act with care and compassion if you encounter a Veteran who is in suicidal crisis. The acronym SAVE helps one remember the important steps involved in suicide prevention:

1. **S**igns of suicidal thinking should be recognized
2. **A**sk the most important question of all
3. **V**alidate the Veteran's experience
4. **E**ncourage treatment and **E**xpedite getting help

Stand by a Veteran in crisis  
You can make a difference and help save a life



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

## Stand by Them

You can help a Veteran. Keep these tips in mind when talking with a Veteran who may be 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



# Operation SAVE

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## Stand by Them

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#### Additional Resources:

- **VA Mental Health Services:** Get information about inpatient and outpatient services available through VA at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov)
- **Online Resource Locator:** Find VA facilities, VetCenters, suicide prevention coordinators, and other VA resources at [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator)
- **Make the Connection:** Veterans and their loved ones can find out how to connect with VA resources at [www.MakeTheConnection.net](http://www.MakeTheConnection.net)
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** Locate the VA PTSD program nearest you at [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

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• • • • Confidential chat at **VeteransCrisisLine.net** • • • • Confidential chat at **VeteransCrisisLine.net** • • • •  
or text to **838255** or text to **838255**

# Operation SAVE: Supporting Our Veterans

## Signs of suicidal thinking

**There are behaviors that may be signs a Veteran needs help. 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 abuse
- Withdrawing from family and friends

**The presence of the following signs requires 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, weapons, etc.

## Ask the Question

It is important to ask direct questions. Know how to ask the most important question of all:

***"Are you thinking of killing yourself?"***

Other ways to ask the question include:

***"Are you thinking of suicide?"***

***"Have you had thoughts about taking your own life?"***

When asking the question, remember:

- DO ask the question if you've identified warning signs or symptoms
- DO ask the question in such a way that is natural and flows with the conversation
- DO NOT ask the question as though you are looking for a "no" answer (*"You're not thinking of killing yourself, are you?"*)
- DO NOT wait to ask the question until he/she is halfway out the door

## Validate the Veteran's Experience

As you listen to the Veteran, let him or her do the talking and use supportive, encouraging comments. Use the following steps to let the Veteran know that you are listening and acknowledge his or her 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



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or text to **838255**

## Encourage treatment and Expedite getting help

**If you think someone is suicidal, remain calm and reassure the Veteran that help is available.**

- DO NOT 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 or emergency room, or
- Call 911

You can also call the confidential **Veterans Crisis Line** at **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1**.

### **Safety Is Important**

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

