

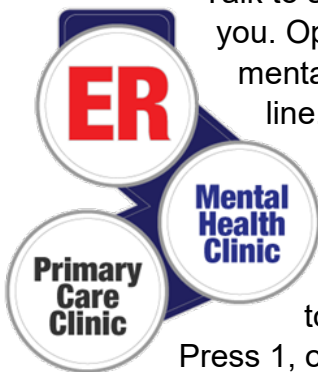


VA/DoD CLINICAL PRACTICE GUIDELINE FOR THE ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF PATIENTS AT RISK FOR SUICIDE

Department of Veterans Affairs
Department of Defense

Patient Summary

I. What should I do if I am having thoughts of suicide?



Talk to someone who can help. You have many options available to help you. Options include going to your nearest emergency room, mental/behavioral health clinic, primary care clinic, or calling a support line. These options usually have mental/behavioral health professionals to keep you safe and provide immediate care. Emergency rooms are available 24/7. Clinics are typically open during business hours and can often see you the same day. If you cannot access a clinic or would like to speak to someone immediately, you can talk to a trained responder by calling the Veterans Crisis Line at 988 then Press 1, or text 838255. You can also chat online at

<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help-now/chat/>. You do not have to have VA/DoD benefits or health care to call. The Veterans Crisis Line serves Veterans, service members, National Guard and Reserve members, and those who support them. If you or someone you know has thoughts of suicide, you should reach out.



Calling from Overseas?

Europe: Call +1 844-702-5495 (off base) or DSN 988 (on base)

Southwest Asia: Call +1 855-422-7719 (off base) or DSN 988 (on base)

Pacific: Call +1 844-702-5493 (off base) or DSN 988 (on base)

II. What should I discuss with my provider?

Tell your provider if you, or someone close to you, have noticed significant or concerning changes in your behavior or mood. Also, tell your provider if you have not felt like yourself lately. Just like physical health, mental/behavioral health is essential to your well-being.

It is also important to know:

- There are treatments that can help improve your symptoms and quality of life.
- Different types of treatment are available. You can work with your provider to select the one that is best for you. The VA and DoD are trained in caring for Veterans and Service members. They can help you find the right care for your needs.

III. How can others help me?

If you want to speak to someone in person you can talk to a provider at an emergency room or mental/behavioral health clinic. These providers are trained to help people experiencing suicidal thoughts. They will ask questions to understand the suicidal thoughts you are having. They will also make suggestions for next steps. Treatment may include talk therapy, medication, hospital care, or a combination. If you would like to speak to a trained professional over the phone, call the Veterans Crisis Line at 988 then Press 1 or text 838255.¹ Many of the crisis line professionals are also Veterans. You choose what or what not to share. Please continue reading to learn about possible treatment options.

IV. What are some of the risk factors that increase the risk of suicide?

Risk factors may be linked to a higher risk for suicidal behavior. They do not cause a behavior to happen. Research has found risk factors related to suicide include, but are not limited to:

- Chronic major mental illness or personality disorder
- History of prior suicide attempt(s)
- History of substance use disorders
- Chronic pain
- Chronic medical condition
- Poor coping skills

¹ <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

- Relationship issues or worries
- Housing or employment problems
- Difficulty finding reasons to live

V. What are some of the warning signs that increase the risk of suicide?

These signs may mean that a person needs help. If you or someone you know is experiencing any of these, call the Veterans Crisis Line now: **Dial 988, then Press 1.**

Warning signs may include:

- Feeling like there is no reason to live
- Engaging in impulsive, risky activities
- Making end of life plans, writing a will, or giving away important items
- Appearing sad or depressed most of the time
- Feelings of hopelessness, increased guilt, shame, or failure
- Increased anger or frustration

VI. What are some signs of crisis that require immediate attention?

Crisis signs require immediate attention. If you are experiencing any of the signs below, call 911 now. For immediate help in dealing with a suicidal crisis, call the Veterans Crisis Line now: **Dial 988 and then Press 1.**

- Thinking about hurting or killing yourself
- Looking for ways to kill yourself
- Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- Doing things to harm yourself, like increased substance use, dangerous use of weapons, etc.

VII. What treatments are available?

There are many helpful treatment options. Getting help is the first step. Your safety and improving your symptoms are the priorities. The goal is to decrease symptoms and lessen thoughts of hurting yourself, while planning for times when concerning thoughts happen. There are different interventions like talk therapy, medications, and decreasing access to lethal means that have been shown to help decrease the drivers and behaviors that could lead to harming oneself. In talk therapy, patients discuss thoughts and feelings with a mental/behavioral health provider. Patients develop skills and strategies in an individual or group setting. Medication may reduce your symptoms. You can talk to your provider for more information about one option or a combination of both. Other steps for care, like reaching out through phone calls, mail communications, and home visits, are also helpful. The best treatment may include working together to develop a Safety Plan or Crisis

Response Plan to help you cope in the future. You and your provider will work together to determine the best treatment.

Treatment often occurs in outpatient settings and can be in-person or through telehealth. Sometimes, people receive treatment through a more structured program, such as a residential program. Depending on your safety level, your care might occur in the hospital to ensure your immediate safety and to begin treatment quickly.

VIII. What can I expect from treatment?

Treatment is focused on:

- Your safety
- Your preferences
- Regular follow up
- Taking care of other symptoms
- Improving coping skills
- Education, therapy, and medications as needed

Treatment is aimed at:

- Decreasing suicidal thoughts
- Decreasing the risk of a future suicide attempt
- Increasing coping and reasons for living
- Building hope

You can find more information at the following websites:

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention/index.shtml>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml>

<https://department.va.gov/suicide-prevention-annual-report/>

<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>

https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/index.asp

<https://www.vetcenter.va.gov/media/Call-Center-PSA.asp>

<https://www.dspo.mil/>

<https://health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Centers-of-Excellence/Psychological-Health-Center-of-Excellence>