

Connection and Sense of Purpose

Feeling connected and having a sense of purpose helps protect Veterans against suicide.

Together We Can. 

*Suicide Prevention Information for Veterans,
Their Families, and Caregivers*

A Connection to Others and a Sense of Purpose is Essential to Well-Being

Feeling connected to others and having a sense of purpose are fundamental to our emotional and mental well-being. We find joy and satisfaction in having a heart-to-heart talk with a loved one, going on a picnic with friends, participating in a community volunteer event, achieving a long-sought goal, and other activities that bring us closer to others.

When you don't have — or believe you don't have — these experiences, it's natural to feel lonely, isolated, sad, angry, hurt, anxious, or depressed. You may also have trouble enjoying the things that once brought you pleasure and have feelings of hopelessness or emotional pain. If left unaddressed, these feelings may lead to suicidal thoughts.

It's common to experience loneliness after leaving the military, losing a loved one or close friend, or moving to a new job or community. A feeling of being all alone is sometimes a consequence of conflict or tension in a family. Loneliness can also result from a broader sense of disconnection from society or a sense of purpose. Sometimes, loneliness in others is easy to recognize — you may notice that someone keeps to themselves or doesn't seem to have many friends. It can be harder to recognize in ourselves and can be easily overlooked. It's not necessary to be alone to feel lonely. People who are surrounded by others and who have support, such as from family and friends, can still feel lonely.

Sometimes, it may be difficult to reach out to others, especially if the relationship has a lot of conflict and tension. Unfortunately, family conflict is also a risk factor for suicide, so working to improve relationships with one another can be one way to reduce suicide risk. VA offers family counseling options to help.

Strengthen Connections of Support to Combat Loneliness

Although at times it may seem unavoidable, loneliness can be overcome. With a variety of sources of loneliness, there are a number of ways to combat it. These include:

- Deepening and strengthening the relationships you already have
- Seeking out new connections
- Developing new interests, such as taking on a volunteer position, exploring your spirituality, or finding meaning in other ways

If you're concerned that someone you know may be feeling lonely, small gestures can start to make a difference. Examples include:



Watching a movie together



Inviting the person out to coffee



Trying out a new activity together



Sending an encouraging text message



Telling the person how much they mean to you

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VA



U.S. Department
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Be There for a Veteran in Your Life

You don't need special training to **Be There** for someone who may be in crisis. Everyone can play a role in preventing Veteran suicide. Approaching the subject may seem difficult, but it is crucial to start the conversation. For more information, visit BeThereForVeterans.com.



Get Immediate Help



Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, should contact the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year:

- Call **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1**.
- Send a text message to **838255**.
- Chat online VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat.

For more ways to find help, visit www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/local-resources.



Know the Signs

Signs of a suicidal crisis may vary for each person but could include changes in mood and activities, an increase in alcohol or drug use, expressions of hopelessness, agitation, or withdrawal from others. If you notice these behaviors, **Be There** for the person in need.



Ask the Question

VA, in collaboration with PsychArmor Institute (psycharmor.org), developed the S.A.V.E. online training video, which describes how you can act with care and compassion if you encounter a Veteran who is in suicidal crisis.

- S** – Recognize the **signs** of suicidal thinking.
 - A** – **Ask** the question: Are you thinking of ending your life?
 - V** – **Validate** the Veteran's experience.
 - E** – **Encourage** treatment and **expedite** getting help.
- Access the S.A.V.E. training at BeThereForVeterans.com.

Resources for Veterans, Families, Friends, and Caregivers

- **VA Caregiver Support** can connect you with a local Caregiver Support Coordinator and offer additional resources. Visit www.caregiver.va.gov or call 855-260-3274.
- **Coaching Into Care** aims to educate, support, and empower family members and friends who are seeking care or services for a Veteran. Call 888-823-7458 or visit www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching.
- **Make the Connection** connects Veterans, their family members and friends, and other supporters with information and solutions to issues affecting their lives. Visit MakeTheConnection.net.
- **CaringBridge**, a social networking platform helps service members, Veterans, and their caregivers and families communicate with and support loved ones during their health journeys. Visit military.caringbridge.org/a/.
- **Objective Zero**, a free mobile app from the Objective Zero Foundation, connects service members, Veterans, their families and caregivers with suicide prevention resources and peer support through videoconferencing, voice calls, and text. Download the app: www.objectivezero.org/app.