



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of Mental Health & Suicide Prevention (OMHSP)
Suicide Prevention Month 2018
September 2018**

Year-round, and particularly during Suicide Prevention Month in September, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) empowers communities to take action to support our Nation's Veterans. Each community across the country plays a role in supporting Veterans, but as an individual you may not know what to do or where to start.

You don't need to have special training to support the Veterans in your life, and we can all do something to help a Veteran who is going through a difficult time. Even seemingly small actions can have a huge impact: Preventing suicide begins with just the willingness to ***Be There***.

Showing your support can be as simple as sending a Veteran a text message — inviting someone over to catch up or sharing a positive thought are both great ways to communicate that you care. Your words could be exactly what a Veteran in crisis needs to hear, and could be a reminder of the many people out there who are willing to listen.

Here are some sample text messages:

- “Hey Tom, haven't seen you around in a while! We should grab coffee this week. How about tomorrow?”
- “Just letting you know I'm here for you if you need anything. Call me anytime!”
- “Hey Amy, hope all is well with you! Been thinking about you today. I miss you!”

When you sense that a Veteran is not doing well, your words can help. You can make a difference by just starting a conversation. Although it can seem challenging, it is important to talk about difficult feelings and experiences. Keep in mind: Asking questions about thoughts of suicide ***does not*** increase a person's suicide risk. Instead, an open conversation can help someone feel less alone and let others into the Veteran's experience — and feeling connected is shown to reduce suicide risk.

Keep these best practices in mind when preparing for a conversation:

- **Show that you are really listening.** Remember to maintain eye contact and turn in toward the Veteran while they are speaking.
- **Validate the Veteran's experience.** Even if you can't relate to what a Veteran is experiencing, you can tell them you understand that they went through something difficult, and show that you respect their feelings about it.

If you believe a Veteran in your life may be contemplating suicide, call the Veterans Crisis Line at **1-800-273-8255** and **Press 1**, send a text message to **838255**, or [chat online](#). Qualified and compassionate VA responders are on call 24/7/365 to provide guidance on how to connect Veterans with support and help keep them from harm.



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- **Let them decide how much information to share.** Supportive and encouraging comments, rather than invasive personal questions, will create a space for open communication and avoid putting a Veteran on the defensive.
- **Don't be afraid to ask the question.** When you are concerned about suicide risk, it's OK to ask people if they have ever thought about hurting themselves or taken action to prepare for suicide. The answers can help you consider next steps to take.

Simply reaching out to a Veteran in need and opening the door for a discussion could make all the difference. Learn more ways to show your support and **Be There** by visiting [VeteransCrisisLine.net/BeThere](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/BeThere) to find more resources and information.