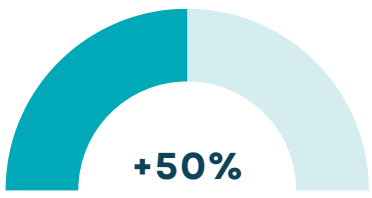
SUICIDE PREVENTION TOOLKIT

2ND

Suicide is the **second** leading **cause of death** among post 9/11 **veterans.** [1]



of those who die by suicide do **not** have a known **mental illness.** [1]



A significant portion of **veteran** suicides are **the** result of the use of **lethal means** (firearms/medication).[2]

WARNING SIGNS [3]

BEHAVIOR

- Withdrawing from activities
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting recklessly or aggressive
- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Giving away prized possessions
- Isolating from family and friends
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, such as searching online for materials or means

TALK

- Having no reason to live
- Experiencing unbearable pain
- Killing themselves
- Being a burden to others
- Feeling trapped

MOOD

- Irritability
- Loss of interest
- Depression or anxiety
- Rage
- Humiliation

TAKING ACTION



A **safety plan** is designed to guide you and the individual you're supporting through a crisis. Having a safety plan is vital for anyone who thinks about suicide. As you plan, consider and include warning signs, coping strategies, and people to ask for support. [4]

DOWNLOAD SAFETY PLAN

WAYS TO SUPPORT SOMEONE AT RISK

- ✓ Schedule time to talk and get together
- ✓ Encourage them to take a photo of the safety plan for easy access
- ✓ Add local resources and crisis lines as contacts on your phone
- ✓ Encourage them to reach out for support
- ✓ Brainstorm self-help and other supportive strategies



LETHAL MEANS SAFETY

Let's talk about lethal means.

It's crucial to **reduce access to lethal means** as it can save a life. Discuss options for out-of home or more secure in-home storage of firearms and medications. Watch a brief overview video from the VA on firearm safety.

LEARN MORE ABOUT GUN SAFETY

SAFE STORAGE OF LETHAL MEANS [5]

FIREARMS

Off-Site Storage

- Friends or Relatives
- Gun Range
- Self Storage
  - Check your state laws at Worried About a Veteran

In-Home Safe Storage

- Store firearms locked
- Unloaded in a safe
- Trigger or cable lock
- Secure locking device with trusted person
- Remove essential component (e.g. firing pin)

CREATING TIME & SPACE

MEDICATION

Safe Disposal

- Drop off disposal locations
  - Pharmacy
  - Police Station
- Out-of-date, unused, and excess medications including, over the counter

Reduce Quantities

- Use a lock box to secure lethal and additional medications
- Use refill pill box

TRAINING & SUPPORT

Every month, the Veteran Spouse Network (VSN) offers free, virtual, and national suicide prevention training and support opportunities for our network. You can learn more about critical warning signs and equip yourself with tools to intervene and support someone in crisis. To learn more and view upcoming opportunities, visit veteranspousenetwork.org.

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

Build the confidence to support someone facing mental health or substance use challenges before a crisis. MHFA is an evidence-based training that teaches you how to recognize and respond to signs of mental health challenges and substance use using the practical 5-step ALGEE action plan.

CONVERSATIONS ON ACCESS TO LETHAL MEANS

Gain practical, compassionate skills to reduce suicide risk by safely managing access to lethal means. CALM teaches evidence-informed strategies to discuss safe storage and limit access during crises, creating time and space between a person in crisis and potentially lethal methods.

SAFETY PLANNING INTERVENTION

Learn to create simple, personalized safety plans that can save lives during crises. This evidence-based, interactive training guides you through building safety plans, reducing access to lethal means, and connecting people to supportive resources.

LEARN MORE ABOUT VSN SUICIDE PREVENTION

ACTION STEPS

Initiating **action steps** involves evaluating the risk of suicide or harm to identify potential crises or immediate crisis situations. It's important to avoid pressuring or threatening individuals to disclose their emotions. Stay receptive until they are prepared to share and seek help.

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID ACTION PLAN: ALGEE [6]

- **A** **Approach, assess** for risk of suicide or harm.
- **L** **Listen** non-judgmentally
- **G** **Give** reassurance and information.
- **E** **Encourage** appropriate professional help.
- **E** **Encourage** self-help and other support strategies.

COLUMBIA PROTOCOL [7]

Use the Columbia Protocol also known as Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS) to help determine when someone is at risk for suicide and how to help.

DOWNLOAD



RESOURCES

WEBSITES

Worried About a Veteran	worriedaboutaveteran.org
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention	afsp.org
PSYCH/ARMOR	psycharmor.org/standing-the-watch
Suicide Prevention Resource Center	sprc.org
2024 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention	hhs.gov
National Alliance on Mental Illness Homefront	nami.org/support-education
VSN Resources	veteranspousenetwork.org/resources

APPS

PTSD Family Coach	US Department of Veterans Affairs
Safety Plan	US Department of Veterans Affairs
Suicide Safe	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Columbia Protocol	The Columbia Lighthouse Project
CALM Conversations	Counseling on Access to Lethal Means
How We Feel	The How We Feel Project

CRISIS SUPPORT

If you're struggling, help is available.

Call the 988 suicide and crisis lifeline:

988

If you’re a veteran or worried about a veteran, **press one**.

References:

(1) 2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, (2) National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide, (3) American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, (4) SAMHSA, (5) Counseling on Access to Lethal Means, (6) National Council of Mental Wellbeing, (7) The Columbia Lighthouse Project