



Suicide Prevention:

Risk Factors and
Warning Signs for
Family Members
and Caregivers



What can I do if I think my loved one is having thoughts of self-harm or suicide?

If you think a loved one is suicidal, you may be feeling scared and helpless. But because you are a family member or caregiver, you are often able to tell when a loved one is in crisis, because you know that person best. There are ways you can help. This guide will help you recognize when someone is at risk for suicide and know the actions you can take to help.

What factors might put my loved one at risk for suicide?

Challenging life events such as unemployment, divorce, retirement, illness, or injury can be stressful and at times feel overwhelming. In some cases, service members and veterans may experience despair and depression and may have thoughts of suicide.

There is **help**.

There is **hope**.



Risk Factors

Risk factors alone do not cause suicidal thoughts or behaviors but they may be associated with an increased risk for suicidal thoughts and actions. Some of the risk factors associated with suicide include:

- Current or past depression or other mental health condition
- Substance use disorders
- Prior suicide attempt
- Recent transition of care (e.g., discharge from inpatient facility, change in medication)
- Exposure to a traumatic event
- Social isolation
- Loss of a relationship
- Legal or disciplinary issues
- Financial problems
- History of moderate to severe traumatic brain injury
- Access to firearms
- Risk of unstable housing
- Serious/life threatening illness, including chronic severe pain

Reference

The Assessment and Management of Patients at Risk for Suicide Work Group, Department of Veterans Affairs & Department of Defense. (2019). VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for the Assessment and Management of Patients at Risk for Suicide. Version 2.0

Warning Signs

Warning signs are a person's "red flags" that may mean a person is at an increased risk for suicide in the immediate future. Three warning signs are considered "direct" (very serious). If you see any of these, reach out for professional help:

- Seeking access to lethal means such as firearms or medications
- Saying final goodbyes to friends and family
- Putting personal affairs in order (e.g., giving away possessions or making a will)

In many cases, individuals will exhibit one or more warning signs at a time. Some other warning signs may include:

- Hopelessness
- Agitation
- Shame
- Insomnia





Help is Available

If someone you care about shows any warning signs or if you are concerned, take action. Your role is to:

- Recognize the warnings signs of possible suicide crisis
- Be supportive and non-judgmental to your loved one
- Stay involved, ask questions and express your concerns to professionals
- Contact mental health professionals or agencies for help



**In an emergency,
call 911!**

Call the **Veterans Crisis Line** for support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Dial **800-273-8255** (**press 1**) or text **838255**



1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**

Additional Information and Resources



National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

National network of local crisis centers that offers free and confidential emotional support to people who are at risk for suicide

800-273-8255

suicidepreventionlifeline.org



Military OneSource

Department of Defense's 24 hour a day, 7 days a week connection to information, answers, and support to service members and their families

800-342-9647

militaryonesource.mil



Real Warriors Campaign

Free materials, resources, and video profiles to help combat the stigma of reaching out for psychological health concerns

realwarriors.net



inTransition

Free, confidential coaching and assistance for service members and veterans who need access to mental health care

pdhealth.mil/intransition



Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense healthcare providers who use this information are responsible for considering all applicable regulations and policies throughout the course of care and patient education. Created March 2020 by the Psychological Health Center of Excellence.