



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs



# VA S.A.V.E. Training

## Supporting Our Veterans

### What is VA S.A.V.E. Training?

VA S.A.V.E. Training will help you act with care and compassion if you encounter a Veteran who is in crisis or experiencing suicidal thoughts. The acronym S.A.V.E. helps you remember the important steps involved in suicide prevention:

- S** **Signs** of suicidal thinking should be recognized
- A** **Ask** the most important question of all —  
*"Are you thinking of killing yourself?"*
- V** **Validate** the Veteran's experience
- E** **Encourage** treatment and **Expedite** getting help

**You can prevent Veteran suicide.**  
**Start by learning the VA S.A.V.E. acronym.**

## Supporting our Veterans

You can support a Veteran through a crisis. Keep these tips in mind when talking with a Veteran who may be at risk for suicide:

- **Remain calm**
- **Listen more than you speak**
- **Maintain eye contact**
- **Act with confidence**
- **Do not argue**
- **Use open body language**
- **Limit questions — Let the Veteran do the talking**
- **Use supportive, encouraging comments**
- **Be honest — There are no quick solutions, but help is available**

## Additional Resources

**VA Mental Health Services:** Get information about inpatient and outpatient services available through VA at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov).

**Online Resource Locator:** Find VA facilities, Vet Centers, suicide prevention coordinators, and other VA resources at [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator).

**Make the Connection:** Veterans and their loved ones can find out how to connect with VA resources at [www.MakeTheConnection.net](http://www.MakeTheConnection.net).

**Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Program:** Locate the VA PTSD program nearest you at [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov).



Confidential chat at  
[VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net) or text 838255

# VA S.A.V.E. TRAINING: SUPPORTING OUR VETERANS

## Signs of Suicidal Thinking

**There are behaviors that may be signs a Veteran needs support. Learn to recognize these warning signs:**

- Hopelessness, feeling like there is no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
- Feeling like there is no reason to live
- Rage or anger
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from family and friends

**The presence of the following signs in a Veteran requires immediate attention:**

- When asked, they express a desire to hurt or kill themselves
- When prompted, they reveal they are looking for ways to kill themselves
- They talk about death, dying, or suicide
- They begin to exhibit self-destructive behavior, such as increased drug or alcohol use, talking about acquiring/using weapons for self-harm, and stockpiling medication

## Ask the Question

**There are behaviors that may be signs a Veteran needs support. Know how to ask the most important question of all:**

***“Are you thinking of killing yourself?”***

**Other ways to ask the question include:**

***“Are you thinking of suicide?”***

***“Have you had thoughts about taking your own life?”***

**When asking the question, remember:**

- **DO** ask the question if you’ve identified warning signs or symptoms
- **DO** ask the question in such a way that is natural and flows with the conversation
- **DO NOT** ask the question as though you are looking for a “no” answer (“You’re not thinking of killing yourself, are you?”)
- **DO NOT** wait to ask the question until he or she is halfway out the door

## Validate the Veteran’s Experience

**As you listen to the Veteran, ask him or her to do the talking and use supportive, encouraging comments. Use the following steps to let the Veteran know that you are listening and acknowledge his or her experience:**

- Talk openly about suicide
  - Be willing to listen and allow the Veteran to express his or her feelings
- Recognize the situation is serious
- Do not pass judgement
- Reassure them that help is available

## Encourage Treatment and Expedite Getting Help

**If a Veteran is having suicidal thoughts, remain calm and reassure them that help is available:**

- **DO NOT** keep the Veteran’s suicidal behavior a secret
- **DO NOT** leave him or her alone
- Try to get the person to seek immediate help from his or her doctor or the nearest hospital or emergency room, OR
- Call 911

You can also call the confidential Veterans Crisis Line at **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1.**

## Safety is Important

Never negotiate with someone who has a gun. Get to safety and call 911. If the Veteran has taken pills, cut himself or herself, or has done harm to himself or herself in some way, call 911.

