

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Suicide Prevention for Veterans

Veterans bring a lifetime of strength and leadership to their communities. But behind the uniform are real people with real stories, stories that often include invisible wounds. Mental health struggles, post-traumatic stress, and emotional isolation can affect anyone, regardless of rank, role, or years of service.

Military Service & Mental Health Impact

Veterans face unique challenges when transitioning to civilian life. The structure and identity from military service can be hard to replace, and some may still carry invisible wounds. While these experiences don't define them, they deserve compassion and support. Creating spaces where veterans feel seen, heard, and understood is essential to preventing suicide.¹

Understanding the Warning Signs

Recognizing warning signs can help prevent a crisis before it escalates. In veterans, some common signs of suicidal ideation include:

- Expressing hopelessness or having no reason to live
- Withdrawing from loved ones or community
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Engaging in risky or reckless behavior
- Talking about feeling trapped, being a burden, or wanting to die
- Mood swings or heightened irritability
- Giving away possessions or saying goodbye

These signs may look different for each person, and veterans may be especially skilled at hiding their distress. That's why trusted friends, peers, and family are essential in spotting these signals and encouraging support.²

Resources

Veterans Crisis Line

- Dial 988 and Press 1
- Text: 838255
- Confidential support 24/7 for veterans, service members, and their families.

Vet Centers (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs)

- Provide counseling services for combat veterans and their families.

Make the Connection

- Veteran stories and mental health resources.

Man Therapy

- A humorous yet practical mental health resource for men, including veterans.

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The Importance of Connection and Belonging

A sense of belonging and connection is one of the most protective factors against suicide. Many veterans report missing the camaraderie and shared mission they experienced in service. Civilian life can feel isolating by comparison, particularly when others do not understand the cultural norms or values of the military community. Creating opportunities for connection, whether through peer groups, veteran organizations, faith communities, or mental health support, can significantly reduce the sense of isolation. For some, even a single conversation can be a lifesaving turning point. Supportive relationships remind veterans that they are not alone and that their experiences and challenges are valid.

Changing the Conversation

Stigma is a major barrier to mental health care for veterans, who are often trained to be strong and self-reliant, making it hard to ask for help. Changing this requires compassion, education, and normalizing mental health care as equally important to physical health. Peer support and veteran-informed providers play a key role in building trust and breaking down myths.

Ways to Support Veterans in Your Community

Whether you are a healthcare provider, family member, caregiver, coworker, or friend, there are ways you can support veterans in your life:

- Listen without judgment. Validate their experiences without trying to "fix" them.
- Familiarize yourself with military culture. Understanding rank, terminology, and deployment experiences can build trust.
- Encourage connection. Help veterans find peer groups, social activities, or organizations that promote a sense of belonging.
- Be proactive. If you notice signs of distress, don't be afraid to ask directly if they're thinking about suicide.
- Know the resources. Help them access mental health support when needed and offer to assist with the process if possible.

References

- 1 U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. "Mental Health."
<https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/>
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- 2 Veteran Crisis Line. "Signs of Crisis."
<https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/signs-of-crisis/>
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- 3 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). "Combatting Stigma Knowledge."
<https://www.samhsa.gov/blog/combatting-stigma-knowledge>
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ABOUT

OHIO SUICIDE PREVENTION FOUNDATION

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation (OSPF) educates, advocates for, and builds connections and support for individuals, families, and communities to prevent suicide.



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