

SOCIAL MEDIA SAFETY TOOLKIT

HOW TO SUPPORT VETERANS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Introduction

More and more Veterans are using social media as a major communications tool. The conversations that used to happen in person or over the phone are now taking place through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. If you use these or other platforms, it's vital to know what to do if you spot content that makes you concerned for a Veteran.

Everyone has a role to play when it comes to preventing Veteran suicide. This toolkit outlines the steps you can take to support a Veteran expressing emotional distress, feelings of crisis, or thoughts of suicide on social media. Whether you think the Veteran is being serious or joking, it's important to understand how you can help. If you notice someone on social media exhibiting signs of a potential crisis, use the guidance in this toolkit to take action.

How to recognize concerning content on social media

Every Veteran is different, and many may not show any signs of intent to harm or kill themselves. But some language and behaviors can be a sign they need help. To provide the right support, you should learn to recognize the difference between a crisis—which means someone is in a life-threatening situation and needs immediate intervention—and emotional distress—which means a person isn't in a life-threatening situation.

Signs of a crisis on social media (life-threatening situation)

A crisis is a direct threat to a person's life and requires immediate attention. Here are some examples of what a Veteran in crisis may write in a post or comment:

- **Direct statements about or hinting at suicide**



"I don't want to live anymore."

"I'm thinking about hurting myself."

"I'm going to a better place."

"Ending it all is the only way to feel better."

- **Self-harm or suicide methods**



"I have a knife."

"My gun is next to me, and I want to use it."

- **Violent language or threats against another person**



"I'm going to kill him."

"I want to strangle her."

- **Confirmation a suicide attempt or other violent action has taken place or will soon take place**

- **Inappropriate references to guns or other weapons, such as using a weapon while intoxicated**

- **Details about risky behavior, such as drug use or alcohol abuse**



If you notice posts containing signs of crisis, follow the steps on the next page.

Steps to take during a crisis

1. If you're concerned about the Veteran's safety or the safety of another person, call 911 immediately and provide as much information as possible. Don't interact with the Veteran. Even if you can't confirm self-harm or violence has taken place, but suspect a dangerous situation, call 911.
2. After calling 911, report the Veteran's crisis post to the social media platform using the resources on page four in this toolkit.



Signs of emotional distress on social media (not a life-threatening situation)

Someone experiencing emotional distress may not be in immediate danger. However, emotional distress may indicate a Veteran needs support. If you believe a Veteran is in distress, call the Veterans Crisis Line: **Dial 988 then Press 1.**

Emotional distress comes in many forms. The following are just a few signs of emotional distress you may see in a post on social media.



Hopelessness

"Nothing I do makes a bit of a difference. It's beyond my control."

Feeling trapped

"I can't see any way out of this mess. Life will never get better."

Feeling like a burden

"They'd be better off without me."

"I'd be better off dead."

Lack of belonging

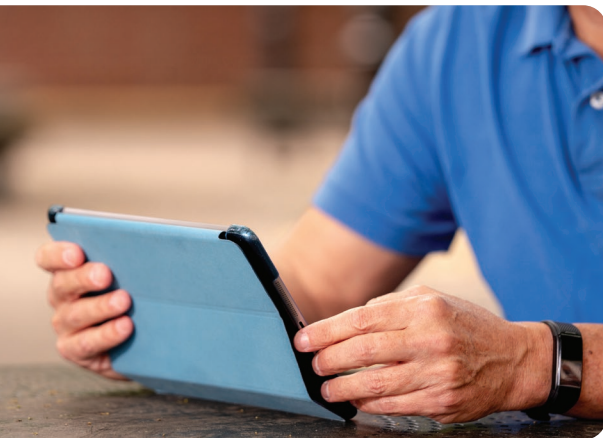
"No one cares. I just don't fit in anywhere."

Guilt, shame, or sense of failure

"It's all my fault. I'm to blame."

Feeling alone

"I'm on my own. No one cares about me."



If you notice posts containing signs of emotional distress, follow the steps on the next page.

How to respond to a Veteran showing signs of emotional distress

1. Shift the conversation to a non-public-facing tool, like direct message, phone call, or text

"I can tell you're having a hard time. I don't want you to go through this alone. What do you think about calling the Veterans Crisis Line? I can call them with you if you're comfortable with that."

*If the individual doesn't respond, connect with someone close to them who may respond.

2. Validate their feelings

"I saw your post. I've been there—please call me. I'm here for you."

3. Find common ground

"I saw what you posted, and no one should have to go through that alone. I'm here for you and want to help. Have you tried reaching out to the Veterans Crisis Line? If you don't want to call, you can chat or text with somebody who will listen."

4. Be authentic and conversational

"It sounds like you're going through a lot. I haven't told many people this, but when I was going through a bunch of stuff, I called the Veterans Crisis Line. They have people who you can talk to and who know what it's like. Talking can help. Check out their website: VeteransCrisisLine.net. You don't have to call if you'd rather chat or text."

5. Provide resources for support

"I know we don't talk a lot, but I care about you and don't want you to go through this on your own. Have you looked into the Veterans Crisis Line for support? Their number is 988, then you'd press 1 to talk to someone. You can check out their website, too: VeteransCrisisLine.net."



Reporting concerning content on social media

The following resources can help users access the policies and reporting forms developed by individual social media platforms to address suicidal content. For clarification on these policies or processes, contact the platform directly.



Facebook

- [Suicide and Self-Injury Resources](#)
- [Report Suicidal Content Form](#)



TikTok

- [Suicide & Self-Harm Policy](#)
- [What to do if You See a User Who Needs Support](#)



Instagram

- [Self-Injury Help Center Guide](#)
- [How to Report a Post or Profile](#)



Discord

- [Mental Health and Safety on Discord](#)
- [Trust & Safety Request Form](#)



Twitter

- [What to do About Self-Harm and Suicide Concerns on Twitter](#)
- [Form for Reporting Suicidal or Self-Harm Content](#)



Reddit

- [What do I do if Someone Talks About Seriously Hurting Themselves or is Considering Suicide?](#)
- [How to Report a Post or Comment](#)



YouTube

- [Suicide & Self-Harm Policy](#)
- [How-to Guide for Flagging](#)



Twitch

- [How to File a User Report](#)

Social Media Suicide Prevention Resources

- [Social Media Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention](#): To help reduce stigma and increase help-seeking, follow these tips for communicating about mental health and suicide on social media.
- [Support for Suicidal Individuals on Social and Digital Media](#): This toolkit from the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline helps digital community managers and social media platforms establish safety policies for helping individuals in suicidal crisis.

Additional Resources

- [Veterans Crisis Line](#): A free, anonymous, confidential resource available to Veterans in crisis, as well as concerned family members and friends. Dial 988 then **Press 1**, chat at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](#), or text **838255**.
- [VA S.A.V.E. Training](#): Training designed to teach anyone who interacts with Veterans how to recognize warning signs of crisis and what to do to help a Veteran who may be at risk.
- [VA Resource Locator](#): This tool can help Veterans find local mental health and suicide prevention resources, including their local suicide prevention coordinator.

Veterans
Crisis Line



DIAL 988 then
PRESS 1