



## Start the Conversation: *Identifying Signs of Stress*

Life after service can be challenging, no matter how long ago you served. Some Veterans may have a difficult time readjusting to civilian life or feel lost or uncertain about the future.

While these feelings may lessen with time, for some Veterans they do not. Challenging life events such as unemployment, divorce, retirement, illness, or injury can be stressful and at times feel overwhelming. In some cases, Veterans may experience feelings of despair and depression, and may even have thoughts of harming themselves. By detecting stress in your loved one early on and effectively communicating your concern for their well-being, you can connect the Veteran you care about with help well in advance of a crisis.

A key step in suicide prevention is understanding the risk factors that make people more likely to consider harming themselves, as well as signs that indicate they are in crisis. It is also critical to learn what factors may reduce the risk that suicidal behavior and suicide will occur.

### Who is at elevated risk for suicidal behavior?

Although risk factors do not cause a behavior or outcome to occur, they may be associated with an increased risk for the behavior or outcome. Ongoing research has identified the following risk factors for suicidal behavior:

- ▶ Male gender — suicide rates are higher among men than women
- ▶ Previous suicidal behavior
- ▶ A recent tragedy or loss
- ▶ A serious or chronic medical condition or illness
- ▶ Sleep deprivation
- ▶ Access to lethal means, such as a firearm or pills
- ▶ History of abuse or trauma
- ▶ Family history of suicide
- ▶ Family history of depression or mental illness
- ▶ Family history of substance misuse



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## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT SOMEONE IS IN SERIOUS EMOTIONAL PAIN?

While risk factors may increase the chances that a problem may occur, certain signs indicate that a problem may be unfolding. There are several red flags that signal a Veteran may be in crisis.

### WARNING SIGNS OF CRISIS

Some of the challenges that come with transitioning from the military can be difficult or stressful. They can put a strain on your relationships and may lead to feelings of despair.

*Learn to recognize these warning signs of a mental health crisis. If you notice any of the following, get help immediately or encourage your Veteran to do so:*

- ▶ Engaging in self-destructive behavior, such as drug abuse or reckless use of weapons
- ▶ Thinking about hurting or killing oneself
- ▶ Looking for ways or having a set plan in place to kill oneself
- ▶ Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- ▶ Saying final goodbyes to friends and family
- ▶ Putting personal affairs in order or giving away possessions

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## What can help to prevent a crisis?

Researchers have identified the following factors as likely to reduce the risk for suicidal behavior and suicide in a person going through a difficult time:

- ▶ Feeling connected (to a relative, friend, community, or job)
- ▶ Having people to rely on and to share personal experiences with
- ▶ Having a caretaker role (to children or cherished pets)
- ▶ Having skills to solve problems and manage challenges effectively
- ▶ Believing in a higher power or having a sense of meaning or purpose in life
- ▶ Being in good physical and emotional health
- ▶ Having restricted access to lethal means
- ▶ Being willing to seek treatment



It's important that you talk to someone right away if you have thoughts of harming yourself, death, or suicide. You can always contact the **Veterans Crisis Line** by calling **1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1**, using the online chat, or **texting to 838255**. These services provide free, **confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.**

For additional information and resources to help a Veteran you're concerned about, visit *Start the Conversation: New Tools for Veteran Suicide Prevention* at [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/starttheconversation](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/starttheconversation)