

# Coping With a Suicide Loss

**Together We Can.** 

*Suicide Prevention Information for Veterans,  
Their Families, and Caregivers*

## When Someone You Know Dies by Suicide

Sadly, many people — including Veterans, service members, and their families — know someone who died by suicide.

Coping with death is hard. It can be especially hard when a loss is untimely and traumatic, as with suicide. As you grieve, it's normal to have intense and distressing thoughts and emotions, such as denial, anger, sadness, and loneliness. But with suicide, you may also struggle to understand why that person took their own life. You may worry that you missed a warning sign. As a survivor, you may feel guilt. You may feel shame about how the person died and find it hard to discuss your pain with others. And these thoughts and feelings may last a long time, change over time, and resurface on holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays.

In addition to grief, it's not uncommon to develop certain mental conditions, such as depression and anxiety, that make it even harder to cope. People who lose someone to suicide can also develop posttraumatic stress disorder. Symptoms include feeling stressed or frightened long after — months to years — you've experienced a traumatic event. And you may have suicidal thoughts yourself, especially if you feel lonely.

## What You Can Do to Cope With Loss

Losing someone to suicide is painful. And as personal as your grief is, you are not alone. Many people understand what you are going through, and they can help you cope.

VA Suicide Prevention Program team members are available to connect you with others who can help you in your healing process after a suicide. Find Suicide Prevention Coordinators at VA medical centers across the country at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Get-Help/Local-Resources](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/Get-Help/Local-Resources).

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) offers compassionate care to all those grieving the loss of a military loved one, including those who lost someone to suicide. TAPS has assisted thousands of surviving family members and caregivers. You can call TAPS 24/7 at 1-800-959-TAPS (8277) or visit TAPS online at [taps.org/suicide](https://taps.org/suicide).

There are mental health professionals available to help survivors of suicide loss. The Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) website has information on how to find a therapist in your community who specializes in working with people who have lost someone to suicide: [save.org/about-suicide/treatment/find-a-mental-health-professional](https://save.org/about-suicide/treatment/find-a-mental-health-professional).

You can also search for local support groups through the SAVE ([save.org/find-help/coping-with-loss](https://save.org/find-help/coping-with-loss)) and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention ([afsp.org/find-support/ive-lost-someone](https://afsp.org/find-support/ive-lost-someone)) websites. The Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center Uniting for Suicide Postvention – Community also offers information for suicide loss survivors: [www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/postvention/community](https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/postvention/community).

## You Are Not Alone

Mental health professionals can offer support. For example, therapists can help you explore your thoughts and feelings in a nonjudgmental way and work with you to alleviate the pain caused by unhelpful beliefs and negative thoughts. They can also help you identify ways to become more connected with others.

12/2019

## Be There for a Veteran in Your Life

You don't need special training to **Be There** for someone who may be in crisis. Everyone can play a role in preventing Veteran suicide. Approaching the subject may seem difficult, but it is crucial to start the conversation. For more information, visit [BeThereForVeterans.com](http://BeThereForVeterans.com).



## Get Immediate Help



Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, should contact the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential support available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year:

- Call **1-800-273-8255** and Press **1**.
- Send a text message to **838255**.
- Chat online [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat).

For more ways to find help, visit [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Get-Help/Local-Resources](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Get-Help/Local-Resources).

## Help VA Better Understand and Prevent Veteran Suicides

VA's Family Interview Program seeks to better understand why Veterans die by suicide to inform suicide prevention efforts and enhance care for all Veterans. If you've lost a Veteran family member to suicide, consider sharing your story with the program. Any information you share will be kept confidential. To participate in VA's Family Interview Program or get more information, call 585-393-7662.



## Know the Signs

Signs of a suicidal crisis may vary for each person but could include changes in mood and activities, an increase in alcohol or drug use, expressions of hopelessness, agitation, or withdrawal from others. If you notice these behaviors, **Be There** for the person in need.



## Ask the Question

VA, in collaboration with PsychArmor Institute ([psycharmor.org](http://psycharmor.org)), developed the S.A.V.E. online training video, which describes how you can act with care and compassion if you encounter a Veteran who is in suicidal crisis.

- S** – Recognize the **signs** of suicidal thinking.
- A** – **Ask** the question: Are you thinking of ending your life?
- V** – **Validate** the Veteran's experience.
- E** – **Encourage** treatment and **expedite** getting help.

Access the S.A.V.E. training at [BeThereForVeterans.com](http://BeThereForVeterans.com).

## Resources for Veterans, Families, Friends, and Caregivers

- **Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)** offers care to those grieving the loss of a loved one who died by suicide. Call 800-959-8277 or visit [taps.org/suicide](http://taps.org/suicide).
- **VA Office of Survivors Assistance** provides resources for survivors and dependents of deceased Veterans and service members at [www.va.gov/survivors](http://www.va.gov/survivors). The Office of Decedent Affairs at each VA medical center also offers support, including help with navigating the benefits and services available.
- **VA Caregiver Support** can connect you with a local Caregiver Support Coordinator and offer additional resources. Visit [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov) or call 855-260-3274.
- **Vet Centers (Readjustment Counseling)** provides bereavement counseling to family members of armed forces personnel who died while serving their country. Call 877-WAR-VETS (877-927-8387) anytime, 24/7, or visit [www.vetcenter.va.gov](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov).