

988: when and how to reach out

Easy · 10 min to read; 30 seconds to save the number · Free (standard text rates may apply)

Call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org, 24/7. It's free, confidential, and you don't have to be suicidal: money stress, a breakup, loneliness, substance use or worry about a friend all count. A trained counselor asks about your safety, listens, and shares local resources. Most contacts are handled without 911; police or EMS are involved only when there's an immediate risk to someone's life. If a friend tells you about a plan to hurt themselves, don't keep it secret. Call 988 with them or for them.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ A phone or a device with internet

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 **Save 988 in your phone now, so it's there when you need it.**
- 2 **Reach out for any emotional distress, not only thoughts of suicide.** Reasons to call include substance use, money worries, relationships, identity, illness, partner violence, depression and loneliness.
- 3 **Pick how you want to connect: call 988, text any message to 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org.** All three are available 24 hours a day.
- 4 **Know what happens on a call.** You hear a greeting and a short menu; press 1 for the Veterans Crisis Line, 2 for Spanish, or 0 to skip the menu. Otherwise you're routed to a local crisis center based on your approximate location or area code, and to a national backup center if the local one is busy.
- 5 **When a counselor answers, they introduce themselves, ask about your safety, listen, and work to understand how the problem is affecting you.** Then they share resources that may help.
- 6 **Calling about someone else?** You can. Calls go to a local center that can tell you what resources are near you.

Watch out Call 911 for an attempt in progress, a plan someone is about to carry out with the means to do it, a suspected overdose, or physical symptoms like chest pain or trouble breathing. Don't leave a person who has attempted suicide alone.

DAD NOTE *Asking for help is the strong move. Save 988 in your phone today.*

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/body/mental-health-basics/988-when-and-how-to-reach-out/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; National Institute of Mental Health; MedlinePlus (National Library of Medicine).