



## Start the Conversation: *Talking to a Veteran When You Are Concerned*

You don't have to be an expert to share your concerns with a Veteran who is going through a tough time, or even a Veteran in crisis. Starting a conversation is an important step that can help a Veteran to feel cared for and valued, and to recognize that help is available.

For a Veteran in crisis — one whose emotional struggles may lead to thoughts of suicide — these conversations can mean the difference between a tragic outcome and a life saved.

### **OPENING THE DOOR TO A CONVERSATION ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH**

If you notice changes in a Veteran's behavior or moods, it's time to open a line of communication. By starting a conversation about your concerns, you let the Veteran know you're there, you care, and you're ready to listen.

Veterans are 20% more likely to die by suicide than their civilian peers.

— Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016

**The goal is to provide support, not fix the situation. You should not feel that you need to solve the Veteran's problems. By simply sharing your concern and listening to what the Veteran is saying, you are making a big impact.**

**To start a conversation with a Veteran you're concerned about, focus on your own observations and share your feelings:**

- ▶ I've noticed you've been acting differently lately, and I'm wondering how you're doing.
- ▶ I wanted to check in with you because you haven't seemed like yourself lately.
- ▶ I've been worried about you lately.



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

## Once you've started the conversation, you can begin to ask questions like:

- ▶ When did you first start feeling like this?
- ▶ Did something happen that made you begin to feel this way?
- ▶ Are you having thoughts of hurting yourself?
- ▶ Are you having thoughts of suicide?
- ▶ What can I do to best support you right now?
- ▶ Have you thought about getting help?

## When responding to answers from a Veteran, remember that simple, encouraging responses go a long way:

- ▶ You're not alone, even if you feel if you are. I'm here for you, and I want to help you in any way I can.
- ▶ It may not seem possible right now, but the way you're feeling will change.
- ▶ I might not be able to understand exactly what you're going through or how you feel, but I care about you and want to help.
- ▶ When you want to give up, or feel overwhelmed by emotion, try to just focus on getting through the next minute, hour, or day — whatever you can manage.

Being yourself, staying calm and positive, and listening without judgment — these all create a safe, supportive space for the Veteran to speak openly about how they're feeling. Remember that you can't solve someone else's mental health challenges. The best thing you can do is support a Veteran on their journey.

**REMEMBER: YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE, AND IT STARTS WITH ONE CONVERSATION**



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)**