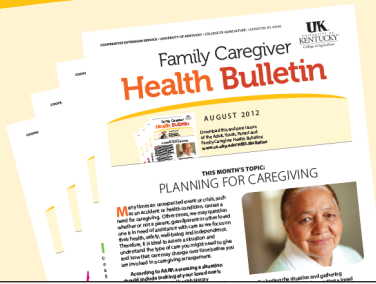


Family Caregiver Health Bulletin



NOVEMBER 2014

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: VETERANS AND SUICIDE

Since 2007, the Department of Veterans Affairs has been involved in a concentrated effort to reduce suicide among veterans. Twenty-two percent of overall deaths by suicide are attributed to veterans. Veterans are at greater risk for suicide due to the heavy mental and physical toll that war can cause. Veterans' risk factors for depression, hopelessness and post-traumatic stress disorder are also increased. In addition, veterans can experience challenging periods of readjustment as they mix back into life as a civilian with a history of trauma and access to firearms.

The Veterans Crisis Line, 1-800-273-8255, is a confidential help line for veterans and their families. Care professionals are trained to help people of all ages and circumstances. They are available 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Since its launch in 2007, the Veterans Crisis Line has answered more than 1.25 million calls and made more than 39,000 life-saving rescues. Today, the line includes anonymous online chat (VeteransCrisisLine.net) and text-messaging (838255) services.



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The Veterans Crisis Line also includes online chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net and text messaging at 838255.

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According to the VA, you can help save a life by following four simple steps:

1. Look for the warning signs of suicide:

- Hopelessness
- Loss of control
- Anger, rage
- Anxiety, agitation
- Feeling trapped
- Lack of concentration
- Sleeplessness
- Aggression
- Mood swings
- Risky decision making (reckless driving)
- Feeling like there is no way out
- Withdrawing from family, friends and/or activities
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs

The Veterans Crisis Line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-273-8255 (then press 1).

Immediate attention should be sought if someone is:

- Thinking about hurting or killing him/herself
- Looking for ways to kill him/herself
- Talking about death, dying or suicide
- Engaging in self-destructive behavior (drug use, weapons)

2. Assess for risk and protective factors.

Certain factors may increase the risk of suicide:

- Previous suicide attempts
- Alcohol/substance abuse
- Thoughts, intent or means to commit suicide
- Impulsiveness
- Poor decision-making or self-control
- Family history of suicide
- Recent physical, personal, financial loss
- History of physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- Health problems
- Living alone
- History of mental health problems
- Feelings of hopelessness

3. Ask the questions:

- Does the veteran feel hopeless about the present/future?
- Does the veteran have thoughts about taking his life?
- When did she have these thoughts?
- Does the veteran have a plan to take her life?
- Has the veteran ever had a suicide attempt?

4. Respond in appropriate ways:

- Validate the veteran's experience.
- Let the veteran talk openly about suicide and/or her feelings.
- Use encouraging comments to let the veteran know you are listening and being supportive.
- Recognize that the situation is serious, but do not pass judgment.
- After ensuring a person's immediate safety (do not negotiate with someone holding a gun); you can encourage treatment or expedite getting help.
- Call 911 right away if a person has done harm to him/herself.
- You may need to make a referral to a mental health or treatment center, inform and involve those close to the person, limit access to means of suicide or increase contact and make a commitment to helping through the crisis.
- If you think that the person is suicidal, it is important to remain calm and reassure the veteran that help is available; do not keep suicidal behavior a secret; do not leave the person alone and seek immediate assistance by calling 911 or the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (then press 1).

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Health Bulletin

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