

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

VA S.A.V.E. Training

*VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
(OMHSP)*

Suicide Prevention Program

(updated December 2023)

Before We Begin:

- Suicide is an intense topic for some people.
 - If you need to take a break, or step out, please do so.
 - Immediate Resources:
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: **988**
 - Service members and Veterans: **Press 1 to connect with the Veterans Crisis Line.**
 - LOCAL RESOURCES (e.g., EAP, Community Partners, Counselor Onsite, etc.)

Overview

- Objectives
- Facts about Veteran Suicide
- Common Myths vs. Realities
- VA S.A.V.E. Steps
- Resources

Objectives

By participating in this training, you will:

- Have a general understanding of the scope of Veteran suicide within the United States.
- Know how to identify a Veteran who may be at risk for suicide.
- Know what to do when you identify a Veteran at risk.

Take a moment to consider:

What are your biggest questions around suicide and talking to people in crisis?



Facts About Veteran Suicide

Suicide is a National Public Health Problem

- Suicide is a national issue, with rising rates of suicide in the general population.
- For every death by suicide, approximately 135 individuals are impacted.

Suicide is a Complex Issue with No Single Cause

- Suicide is often the result of a complex interaction of risk and protective factors at the individual, community, and societal levels.
- Risk factors are characteristics that are associated with an increased likelihood of suicidal behaviors. Protective factors can help offset risk factors.
- To prevent Veteran suicide, we must maximize protective factors while minimizing risk factors at all levels, throughout communities nationwide.

Risk and Protective Factors

Risk

- Prior suicide attempt
- Mental health issues
- Substance abuse
- Access to lethal means
- Recent loss
- Legal or financial challenges
- Relationship issues
- Unemployment
- Homelessness

Protective

- Access to mental health care
- Sense of connectedness
- Problem-solving skills
- Sense of spirituality
- Mission or purpose
- Physical health
- Employment
- Social and emotional well-being



Goal: Minimize risk factors and boost protective factors

Percentage of Suicide Deaths and Methods Involved, 2019

Method	Non-Veteran U.S. Adults	Veterans	Non-Veteran Women	Veteran Women	Non-Veteran Men	Veteran Men
Firearm	47.9%	69.2%	31.3%	49.8%	53.0%	70.2%
Poisoning	13.9%	8.4%	31.0%	26.3%	8.5%	7.5%
Suffocation	29.6%	16.9%	27.7%	20.5%	30.2%	16.8%
Other	8.7%	5.4%	10.0%	3.4%	8.3%	5.5%

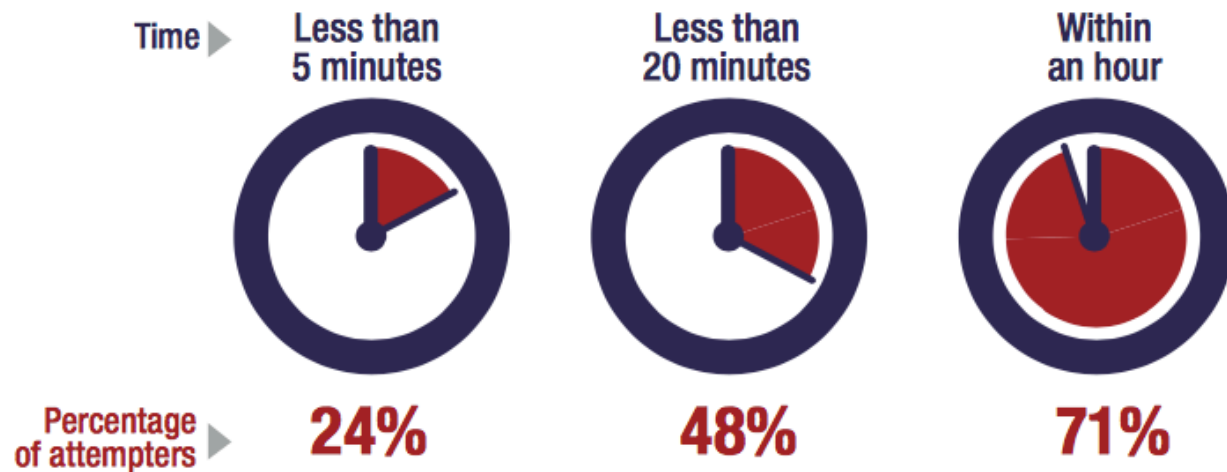
- Firearms accounted for nearly **70%** of all Veteran suicides in 2019
- Suicide deaths involving firearms is higher for both men and women Veterans compared to Non-Veterans

What is Lethal Means Safety?

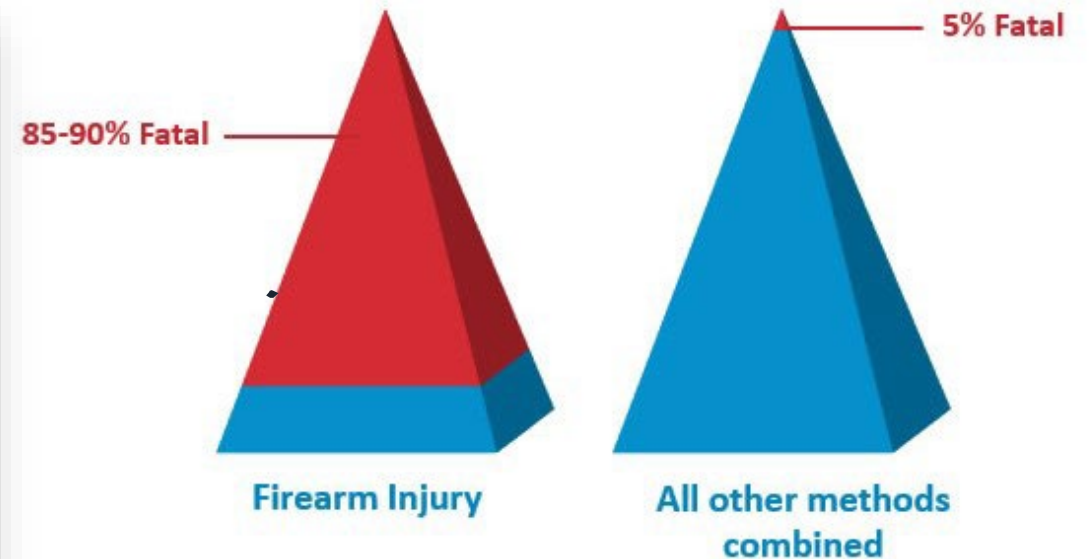
- In the context of suicide prevention, safe storage of lethal means is any action that builds in time and space between a suicidal impulse and the ability to harm oneself.
- Effective lethal means safety education and counseling is collaborative and Veteran-centered. It respects the important role that firearms and medications may play in Veterans' lives and is consistent with their values and priorities.

Most Suicidal Crises are Brief

Time from Decision to Action < 1 hour



Source: Simon, T.R., Swann, A.C., Powell, K.E., Potter, L.B., Kresnow, M., and O'Carroll, P.W. Characteristics of Impulsive Suicide Attempts and Attempters. SLTB. 2001; 32(suppl):49-59.



CDC WISQARS: Deaths from death certificate data; nonfatal incidents estimated from national sample of hospital emergency departments.

Source: CDC WISQARS and US Dept. of Veterans Affairs
<https://www.mirecc.va.gov/lethalmeanssafety/facts/>

Lethal Means Safety Works

- Reducing access to lethal suicide methods is one of the few population level interventions that has been shown to decrease suicide rates.
- About **90 percent** of people who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide.
- If we can collaborate with Veterans **ahead of time** to help them survive a suicidal crisis, we have likely prevented suicide for the **rest of their lives**.

**Suicide
is preventable.**

Common Myths vs. Realities

Common Myths vs. Realities

Myth	Reality
People who talk about suicide are just seeking attention.	

Common Myths vs. Realities

Myth	Reality
	<p>No matter how casually or jokingly said, suicide threats should never be ignored and may indicate serious suicidal feelings.</p> <p>Someone who talks about suicide provides others with an opportunity to intervene before suicidal behaviors occur.</p>

Common Myths vs. Realities

Myth	Reality
<p>The only one who can really help someone who is suicidal is a mental health counselor or therapist.</p>	

Common Myths vs. Realities

Myth	Reality
	Special training is not required to safely raise the subject of suicide. Helping someone feel included and showing genuine, heartfelt support can also make a big difference during a challenging time.

The Steps of VA S.A.V.E.

VA S.A.V.E.: Teaching Communities How to Help Veterans at Risk for Suicide

VA S.A.V.E. will help you act with care and compassion if you encounter a Veteran who is in suicidal crisis.

- **S**igns of suicidal thinking should be recognized.
- **A**sk the most important question of all.
- **V**alidate the Veteran's experience.
- **E**ncourage treatment and **E**xpedite getting help.



Signs of Suicidal Thinking

Learn to recognize these warning signs:

- Hopelessness, feeling like there is no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
- Feeling like there is no reason to live
- Rage or anger
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from family and friends

Signs of Suicidal Thinking

The presence of any of the following signs requires immediate attention:

- Thinking about hurting or killing themselves
- Looking for ways to die
- Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- Self-destructive or risk-taking behavior, especially when it involves alcohol, drugs, or weapons

Asking the Question

**Know how to ask
the most important question of all...**

A Asking the Question

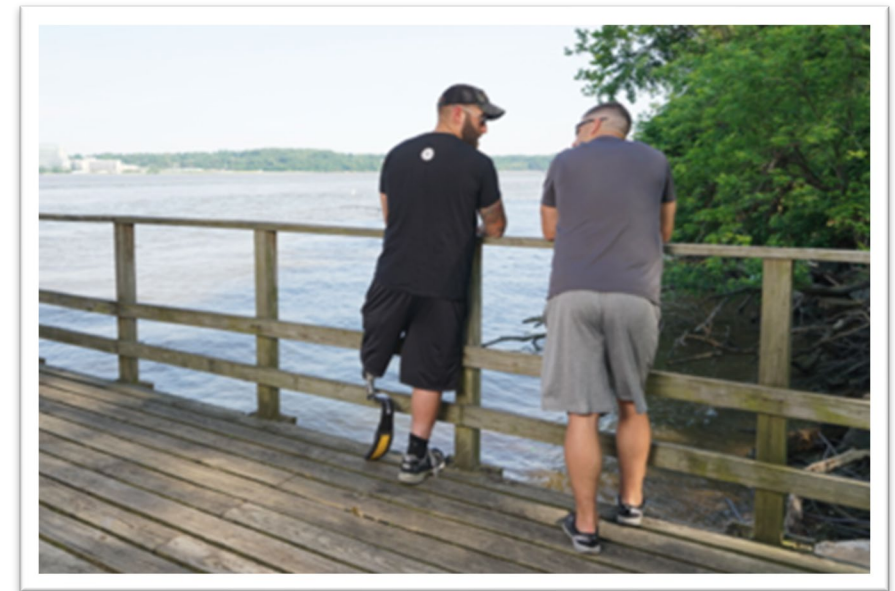
“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”

A Asking the Question

Do's	Don'ts
DO ask the question if you've identified warning signs or symptoms.	DON'T ask the question as though you are looking for a "no" answer. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "You aren't thinking of killing yourself, are you?"
DO ask the question in a natural way that flows with the conversation.	DON'T wait to ask the question when someone is halfway out the door.

V Validate the Veteran's Experience

- Talk openly about suicide. Be willing to listen and allow the Veteran to express his or her feelings.
- Recognize that the situation is serious.
- Do not pass judgment.
- Reassure the Veteran that help is available.



Encourage Treatment and Expedite Getting Help

- What should I do if I think someone is suicidal?
 - Don't keep the Veteran's suicidal behavior a secret.
 - Do not leave him or her alone.
 - Try to get the person to seek immediate help from his or her doctor or the nearest hospital emergency room.
 - Call 911.
- Reassure the Veteran that help is available.
- Call the Veterans Crisis Line at **988 and Press 1**.

When Talking with a Veteran at Risk for Suicide

- Remain calm.
- Listen more than you speak.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Act with confidence.
- Do not argue.
- Use open body language.
- Limit questions — let the Veteran do the talking.
- Use supportive, encouraging comments.
- Be honest — let the Veteran know that there are no quick solutions, but help is available.

What to Do if a Veteran Expresses Suicidal Ideation During a Phone Call

- Keep the caller on the line (do not hang up or transfer).
- Remain calm.
- Obtain identifying information on the caller (name, phone number, and current location).
- Conference call to VCL (don't hang up until VCL responder has the call).
- Enlist co-workers for assistance via Instant Messaging in Teams.
- If caller disconnects, call back immediately.
If no answer, dial 911 and VCL (**988 and Press 1.**).

Tip: Practice conferencing in calls at your desk with coworkers.

Remember

VA S.A.V.E.

S

Signs of suicidal thinking should be recognized.

A

Ask the most important question of all.

V

Validate the Veteran's experience.

E

Encourage treatment and Expedite getting help.

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Resources

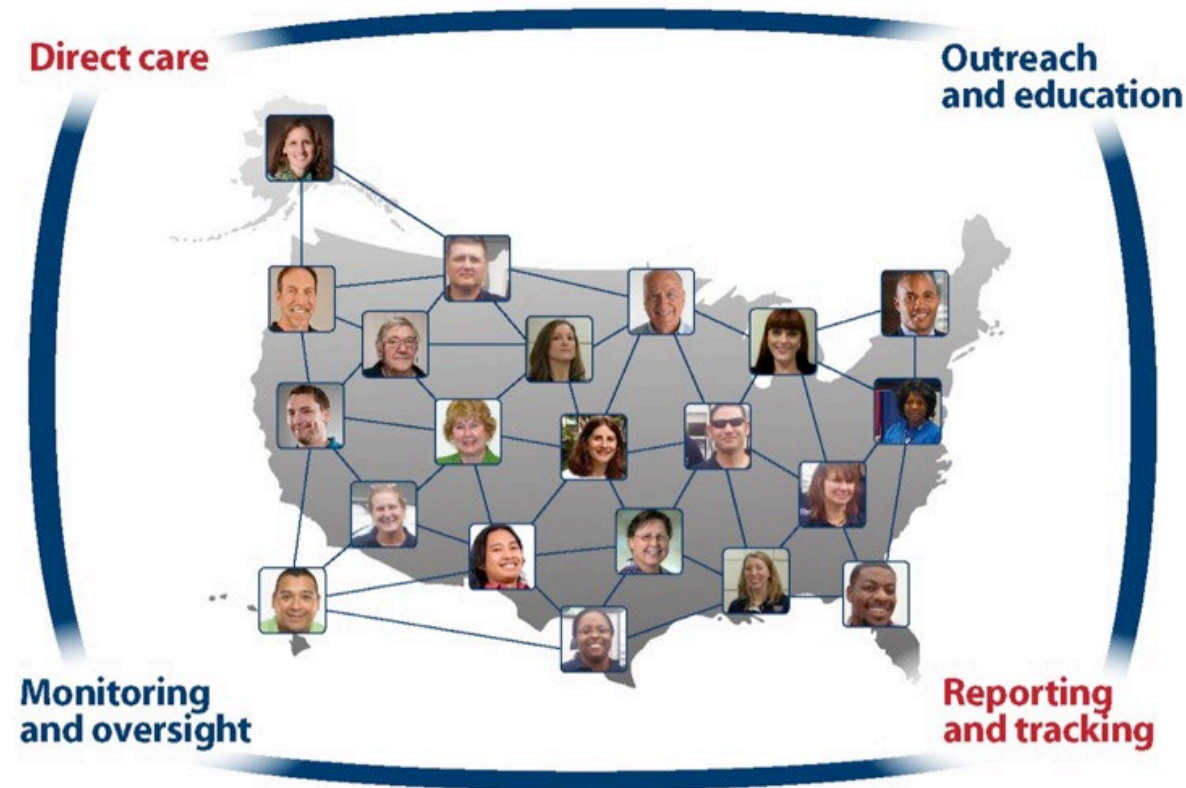
Free, Confidential Support 24/7/365



- Veterans
- Family members
- Service members
- Friends

Find a Local VA SPC at VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator

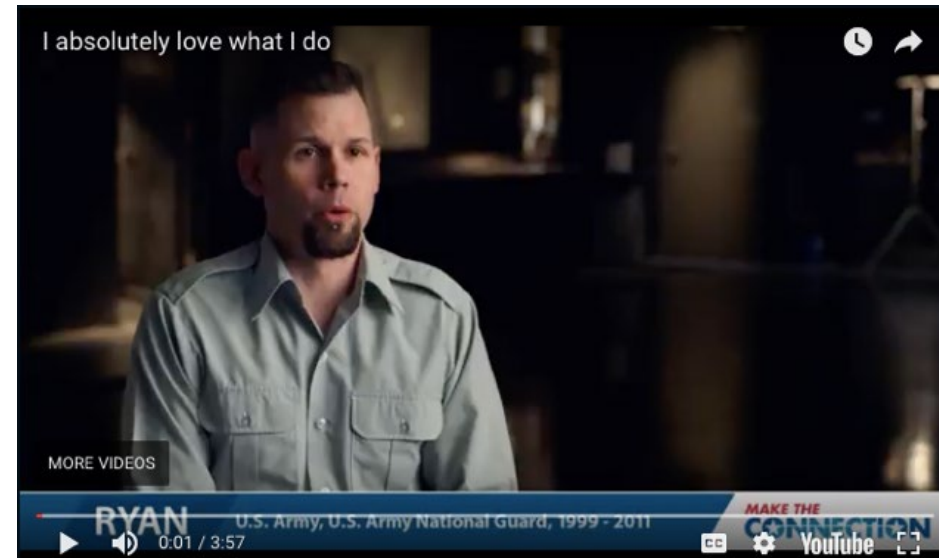
More than 400 SPCs nationwide.



Make the Connection

- Online resource featuring hundreds of Veterans telling their stories about overcoming mental health challenges.

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**



<https://maketheconnection.net/conditions/suicide>

Practice safe storage of firearms, medications and other lethal means

- Visit www.KeepItSecure.net to learn more about the importance of firearm and other lethal means safety.
- Nearly half of all Veterans own a firearm, and most Veteran firearm owners are dedicated to firearm safety.
- Firearm injuries in the home can be prevented by making sure firearms are **unloaded**, **locked**, and **secured** when not in use, with ammunition stored in a separate location
- There are several effective ways to safely secure firearms. Learn more and find the option that works best for you and your family from the National Shooting Sports Foundation at www.nssf.org/safety

VA » Health Care » REACH » Firearm Suicide Prevention & Lethal Means Safety

REACH

► Mental Health
► More Health Care


QUICK LINKS


Hospital Locator
Zip Code Go

Health Programs


Protect Your Health

A-Z Health Topics

 **Veterans Crisis Line**
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1

 **My healthvet**
My Health, My Care: 24/7 Access to VA

FIREARM SUICIDE PREVENTION & LETHAL MEANS SAFETY



KeepItSecure.net

PRACTICE SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS, MEDICATION & OTHER LETHAL MEANS

Lethal means are objects like guns, medications, alcohol, opioids or other substances, ropes, cords, or sharp objects that can be used during a suicidal crisis. If a Veteran is in crisis or having suicidal thoughts, these items can become deadly when they are easily accessible. For example, nearly 7 out of every 10 Veteran deaths by suicide are the result of firearm injuries (Dept. of Veteran Affairs, 2018).

Increasing the time and distance between someone in a suicidal crisis and access to lethal means can reduce suicide risk and save lives. There are simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family. On this page, you'll find:

- How to identify and handle a suicidal crisis
- Helpful tips for storing guns, medications, and other lethal means
- Additional resources about safe storage

New Lethal Means Safety Resources

Reducing Firearm & Other Household Safety Risks Brochure

provides best practices for safely storing firearms and medications along with advice for loved ones on how to talk to the Veteran in their life about safe storage.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

Reducing Firearm & Other Household Safety Risks for Veterans and Their Families



Firearm safety is an important public health issue that can affect your health and your family's well-being.

If you own a firearm, or live in a household where there are firearms, the following information can help keep you and those around you safe. Similarly, reducing access to other household risks, like medications, can help ensure your family's safety.

Mental Health Mobil Apps. Mobile Apps - PTSD: National Center for PTSD (va.gov)

Self-Help

These apps provide support and guidance in living with PTSD.



PTSD Coach



PTSD Family Coach



Beyond MST



Mindfulness Coach

Treatment Companions

These apps offer additional help for PTSD treatments.



CPT Coach



PE Coach



CBT-i Coach



ACT Coach

Related

These apps help with related issues affecting people with PTSD.



COVID Coach



Couples Coach



Insomnia Coach



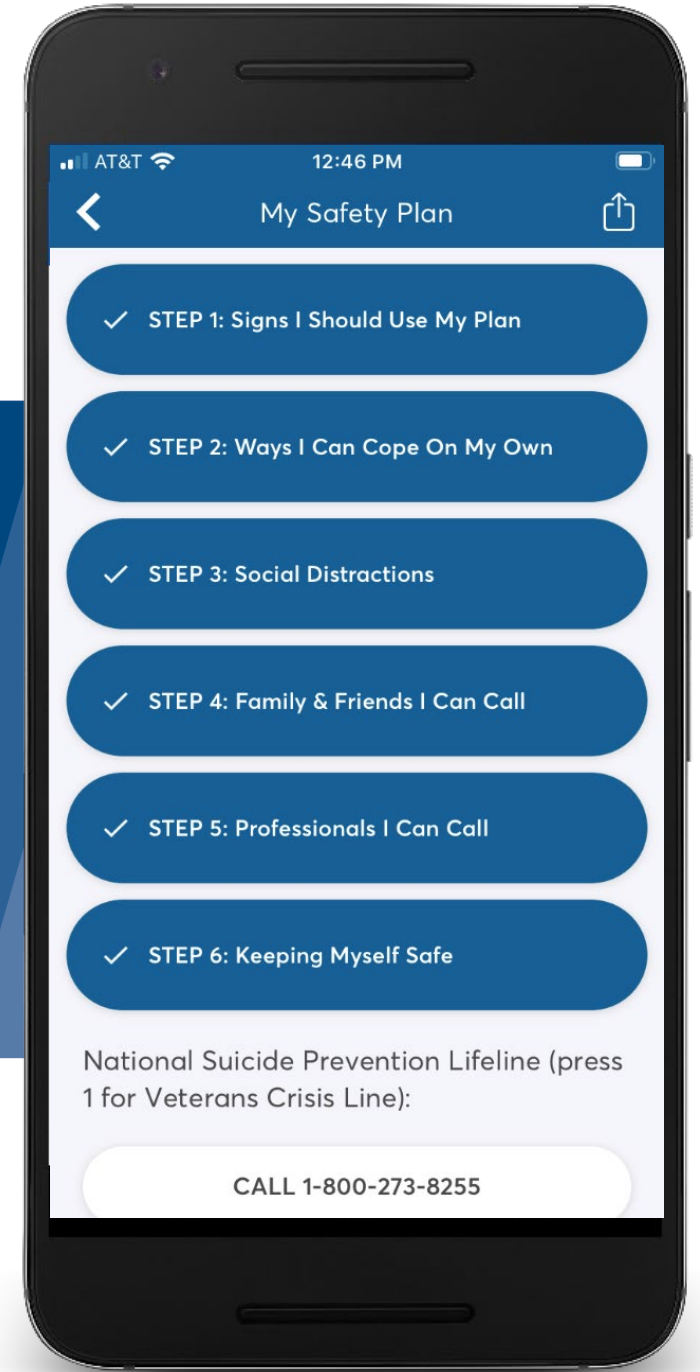
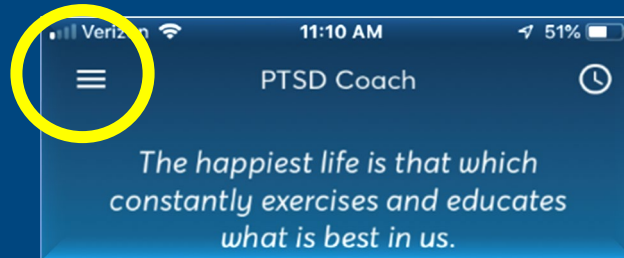
StayQuit Coach

Safety Plan now in PTSD Coach!



To access the Safety Plan:

1. Download* and open PTSD Coach
2. Tap the lateral menu
3. Tap Safety Plan



National Center for PTSD website:

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/appvid/mobile/ptsdcoach_app.asp

Coaching into Care

Program for families and loved ones of Veterans, helping them encourage the Veteran in their lives to seek support.



CALL 888-823-7458



Postvention Resources



COMMUNITY

PROVIDERS

WORKPLACE



Films



Infographics



Podcasts

Uniting for Suicide Postvention (USPV): <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/postvention/>

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

VA S.A.V.E. Training

This free suicide prevention training video is less than 25 minutes long and available to everyone, 24/7. It's offered in collaboration with the PsychArmor Institute.



Available online for free: <https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/>



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Questions?
