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If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?

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Riverside County, California

SAFE MESSAGING BEST PRACTICES

A guide for anyone communicating and writing about Veteran suicide



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Health Administration

This content has been adapted from reportingonsuicide.org.

Suicide is a serious national public health problem that affects communities everywhere. At the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), preventing suicide among all Veterans is a top priority — including among those who do not, and may never, seek care within our system. We are working to reach Veterans where they live, work, and thrive.

Suicide is preventable, and we all have a role to play.

Just as suicide has no single cause, no one strategy can end Veteran suicide. VA is using a bundled public health approach that involves multiple sectors, including media and entertainment industries. Research has shown that the way media covers suicide can influence behavior — either positively, by encouraging help-seeking, or negatively, by increasing contagion or "copycat" suicide, which occurs when exposure to suicide or suicidal behaviors contributes to another suicide. The Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide (**reportingonsuicide.org**) offers guidance to members of the media on covering suicide in a safe and ethical manner.

The following are recommendations for developing messages about Veteran suicide. When best practices are applied, messages can correct misconceptions, convey hope, and encourage help-seeking among those at risk for suicide.



Start Here:

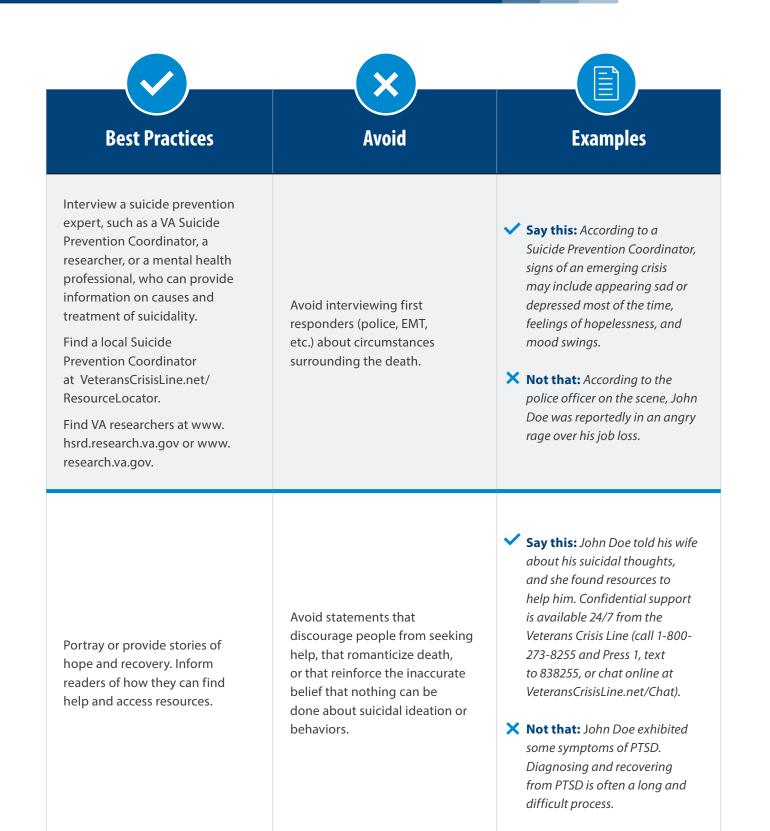
- 1. Find the most recent VA National Suicide Data Report at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp.
- 2. Find the most recent CDC national suicide statistics at www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/statistics.
- **3.** Download the National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/strategy.asp.

Best Practices	Avoid	Examples
Be informative without being sensationalistic. Use the terms "died by suicide" or "killed himself/herself."	Avoid detailing the method of suicide. Avoid terms such as "commit suicide," "successful/ unsuccessful suicide," or "failed suicide attempt."	 Say this: John Doe dead at 32. Not that: Navy hero John Doe, 32, commits suicide with shotgun in garage.
Report on suicide as a public health issue. Suicide does not discriminate; it is a leading cause of death among all Americans, not just Veterans. Use nonsensational, objective terms such as "higher" or "increasing" to refer to differences in suicide rates.	Avoid referring to suicide as an epidemic.	 Say this: Suicide is a national public health issue, with more than 45,000 Americans dying by suicide each year and rates increasing among people ages 10–75. New data shows a similar increase in deaths by suicide among Veterans. Not that: Suicide among Veterans is an epidemic in the U.S., with mortality rates skyrocketing.
Use current Veteran suicide data. When presenting statistics, provide the relevant context, such as information on suicide in the U.S. as a whole.	Avoid presenting the number of Veteran deaths by day as the only statistic, as it does not accurately reflect the full scope of the issue.	 Say this: From 2015 to 2016, the overall Veteran suicide count decreased. (Uses current data and indicates the suicide count per year) Not that: 22 Veterans a day commit suicide. (Uses outdated data and indicates the suicide count per day)



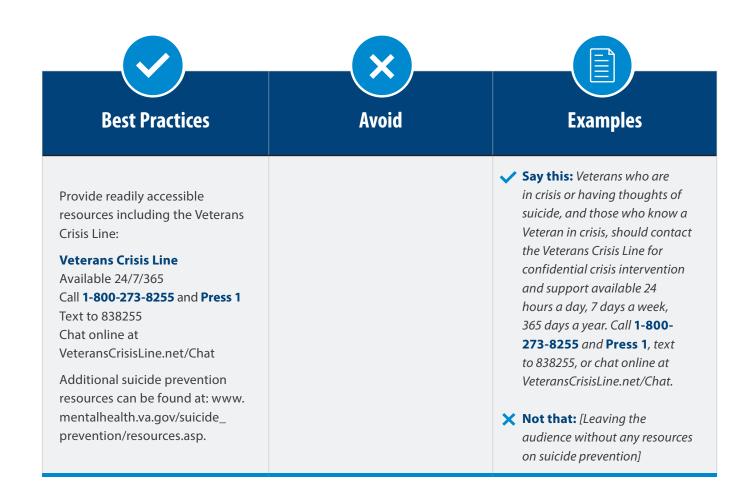








A guide for anyone communicating and writing about Veteran suicide



Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis,

should call the Veterans Crisis Line for confidential crisis intervention and support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year at **1-800-273-8255** and **Press 1**, chat online at **VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat**, or send a text message to **838255**.



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

Additional Safe Messaging Resources

- Safe Reporting on Suicide: reportingonsuicide.org
- Action Alliance Framework for Successful Messaging: suicidepreventionmessaging.org
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education: save.org/for-the-media

Resources for Family Members, Friends, and the Community

You do not need to be a professional in order to help a Veteran who may be going through a difficult time. There are a number of free, confidential, and vetted resources available 24/7/365:



S.A.V.E. training video:

Watch a free online suicide prevention training video at psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e.



BeThere campaign:

Learn how to help a Veteran in crisis at **bethereforveterans.com**.



Coaching Into Care:

Access this national hotline (1-888-823-7458) to find care or services for a Veteran. Learn more at **www.mirecc.va.gov/coaching**.



VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention:

Find additional suicide prevention resources at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/resources.asp.

