



988: What Professionals Need to Know

Physicians, Nurses, Physician Assistants, Physical, Occupational and Speech Therapists, and all staff in health care settings may encounter patients or colleagues who are experiencing a suicidal, mental health, and/or substance use crisis.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a resource available to help anyone experiencing emotional distress.

How does the 988 Lifeline work?

People can call or text “988” or chat at 988lifeline.org/chat when they are in crisis or need emotional support immediately. When you connect with 988 you will hear a pre-recorded message that provides service selection options, including:

- Veterans Crisis Line
- Spanish Subnetwork
- LGBTQ+ support for people under the age of 25

Via 988lifeline.org, services in ASL are available.

Once the call, text, or chat is responded to, a trained crisis counselor will:

- Assess the person’s immediate risk
- Listen, clarify the situation and plan for next steps
- Follow-up with the person

988 Lifeline Crisis Counselors are Trained to:

- Provide brief support interventions
- Offer referrals to mental health, substance use, or other community services
- Facilitate linkages to urgent or emergency care
- Connect with emergency services, after all other options are exhausted

What is the difference between 988 and 911?

988

- For people experiencing mental health or substance use crisis or emotional distress
- Trained crisis counselors provide “someone to talk to” when a person voluntarily wants to talk to someone
- 988 is the intervention to reduce emotional distress with 98% of contacts resolved at first point of contact
- 988 will connect with 911 in cases of imminent danger

911

- For people at imminent risk or danger and when time is of the essence
- Trained dispatchers send needed services (e.g., EMS, fire, police)
- Dispatchers provide support while the caller waits for emergency services to arrive

Note: If someone is in a life-threatening situation call “911” immediately.

How can health professionals use the 988 Lifeline?

- Encouraging a distraught or depressed patient, colleague or staff member, to call the 988 Lifeline - even sitting with them while they call
- Discussing the 988 Lifeline with patients and colleagues as a free resource for people experiencing mental health or substance use crisis or emotional distress to get connected to services
- Posting signs about the 988 Lifeline in patient and staff areas
- Calling the 988 Lifeline if a patient is having thoughts of self-harm or extreme emotional distress

Resources

[988 Lifeline](#)

[Suicide Prevention in Primary Care](#)

[988 Partner Toolkit](#)