



## Start the Conversation: *Talking to a Woman Veteran When You're Concerned*

According to a 2016 report by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, women Veterans' risk for death by suicide is more than double that of their civilian counterparts. Among women Veterans, life events such as unemployment, divorce, retirement, illness, or injury can be stressful and at times feel overwhelming. In some cases, Veterans may experience feelings of despair and depression and may even have thoughts of harming themselves.

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— *Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016*

You don't have to be an expert to share your concerns with a woman 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 woman Veteran in crisis — one who is experiencing emotional challenges 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 woman Veteran's behavior or mood, 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.

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.



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

**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

**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?

**Remember that simple, encouraging responses go a long way:**

- ▶ You're not alone, even if you feel like 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 your loved one 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 them 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)**