



CONVERSATIONS ON ACCESS TO LETHAL MEANS

DEVELOPED BY



PRESENTED BY

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COUNSELING
ON ACCESS TO
LETHAL MEANS



**CALM Clinical
Workshops**



**CALM
Conversations**



**CALM-SAFE
Firearms
Literacy
Training**

Before We Begin

- Suicide is a sensitive and stressful topic. Practice self-care.
- You will not be asked to “treat” individuals.
- Your role is to recognize, respond, refer, and help in the moment.
- Suicide touches many of us personally; today is about learning how to respond.
 - This training is not designed to help you understand the past; its purpose is to prepare you for future situations.
 - Please refrain from sharing personal experiences or graphic details.
 - Please respect the privacy of others.



What CALM Conversations Is and Isn't

What CALM is

- A training for a general audience designed to help participants
 - Recognize when to act.
 - Learn what you can do to help keep friends and family safer and connect them to supportive resources and treatment if needed.
 - Understand that reducing access to lethal means for those at risk is an effective prevention tool (and how to go about it).
- CALM emphasizes safety **REGARDLESS OF PERSONAL VIEWPOINTS!**

What CALM isn't

- CALM is NOT the answer but should be part of all conversations regarding suicide risk.
- CALM is not meant to prepare you to be a crisis counselor.
- ***CALM is neither anti-gun nor anti-medication.***

A Word on Language

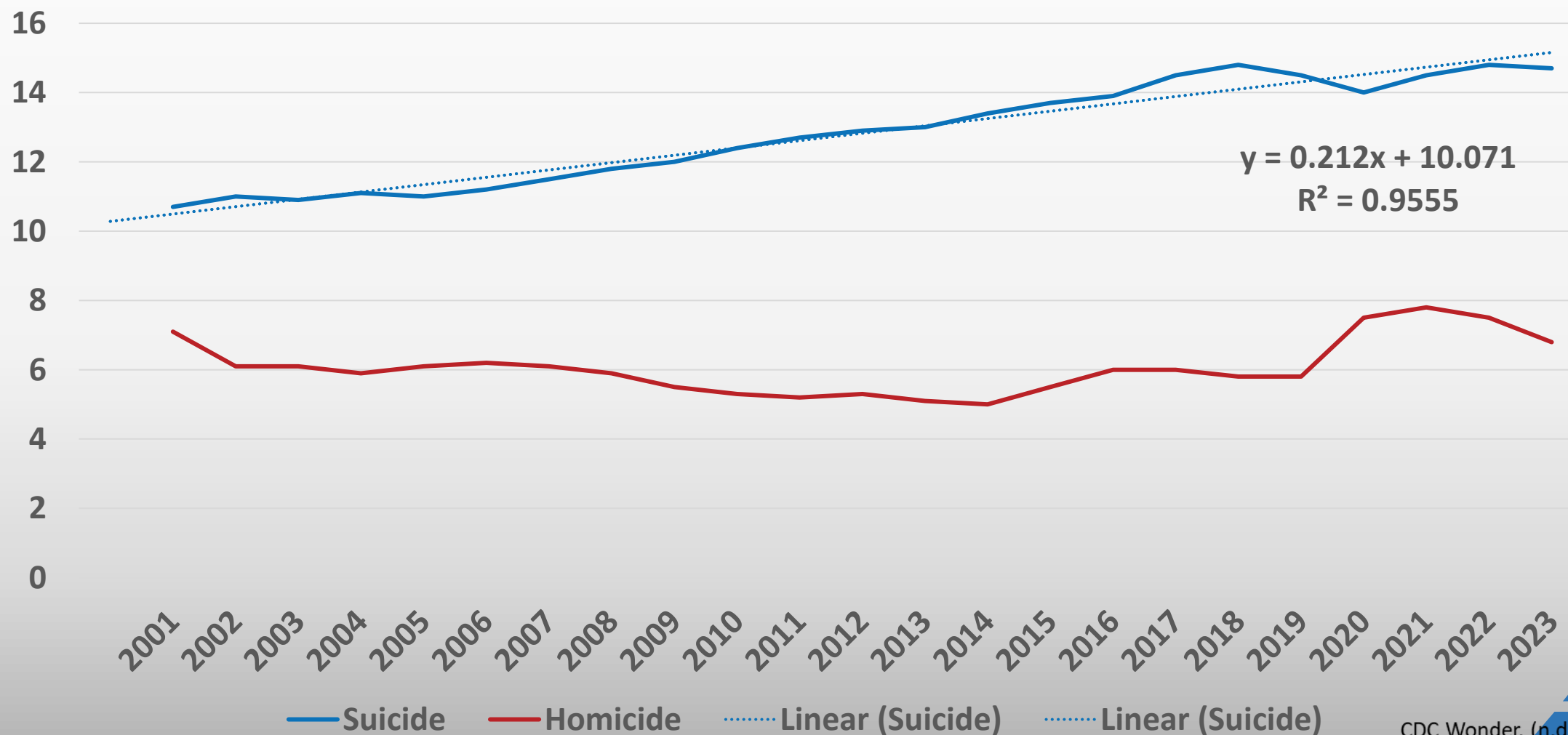
Suicide and firearms are sensitive topics.

Try neutral, non-judgmental language. Examples:

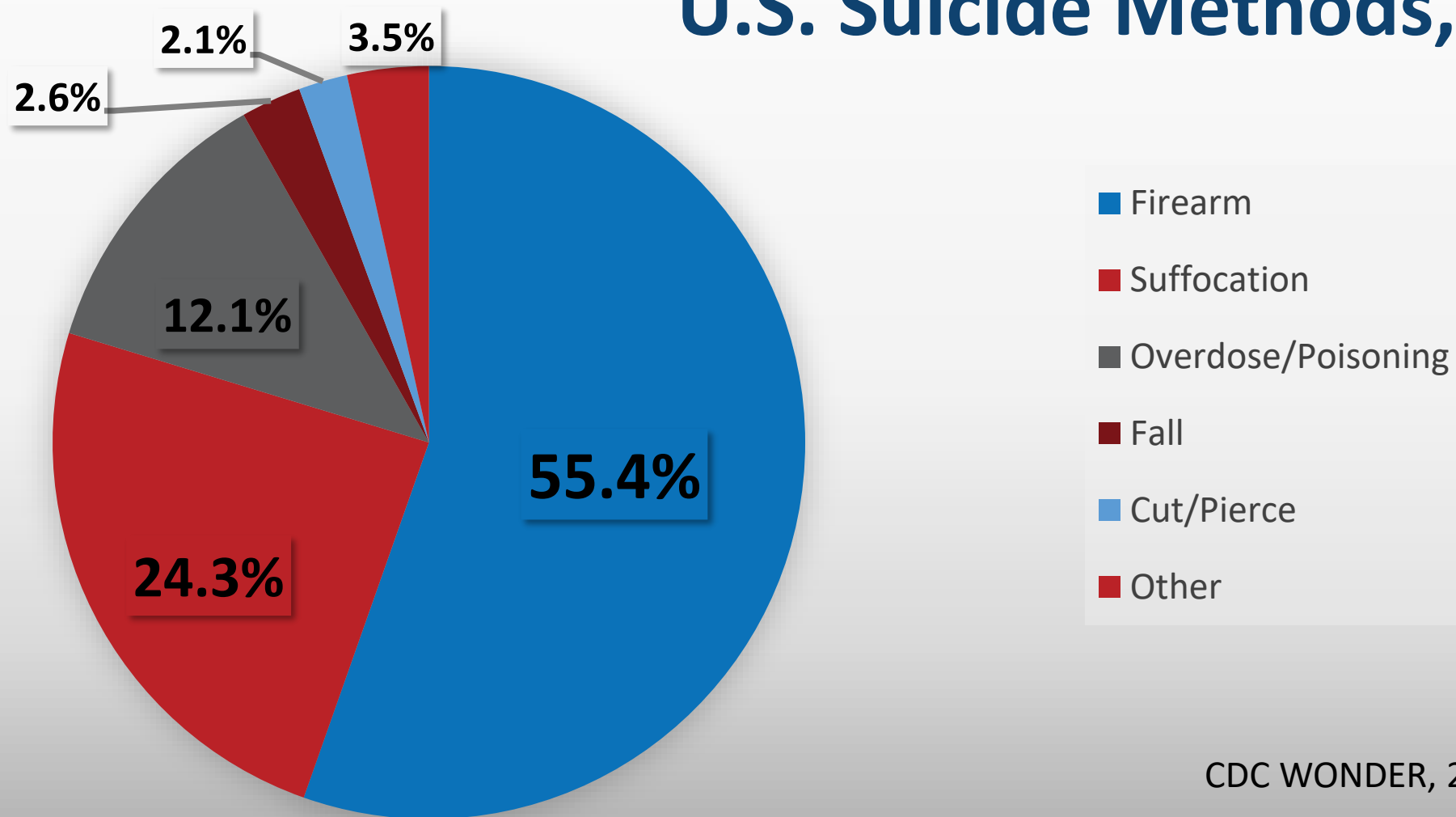
- There is a shift away from using the term “committed suicide” and toward using “died by suicide” because suicide is neither a crime nor a moral judgment.
- Some firearm owners see their firearms as “tools” rather than “weapons.”



U.S. Suicide & Homicide Rates, 2001 – 2023 (per 100,000)

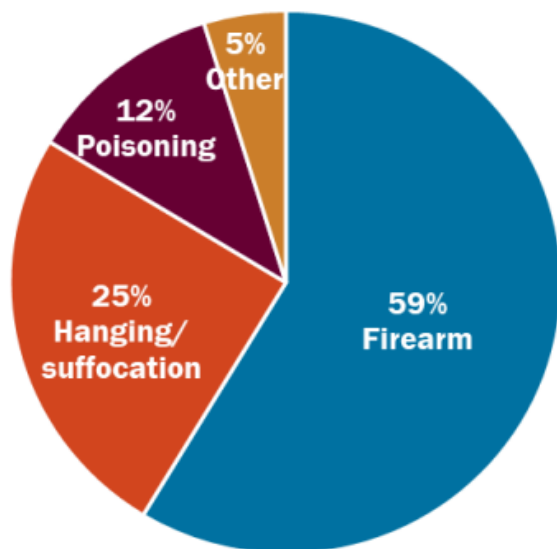


U.S. Suicide Methods, 2023



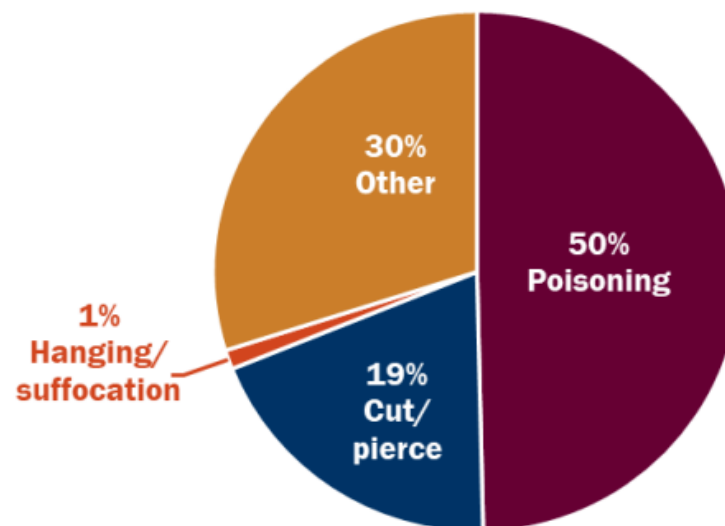
VT Suicide Methods, 2024

More than half of suicide deaths involve a firearm.

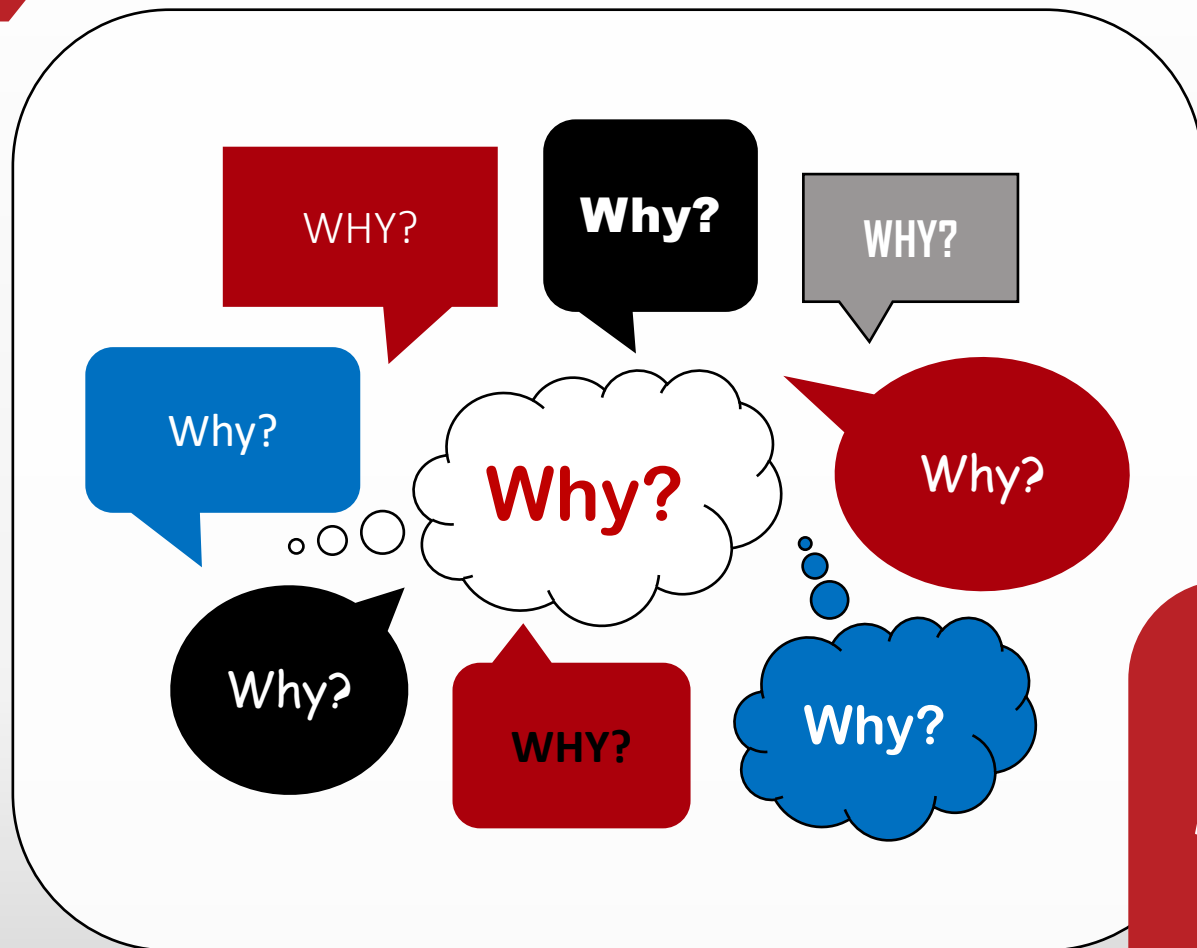


Source: Vermont Vital Statistics, 2024
2024 data are preliminary.

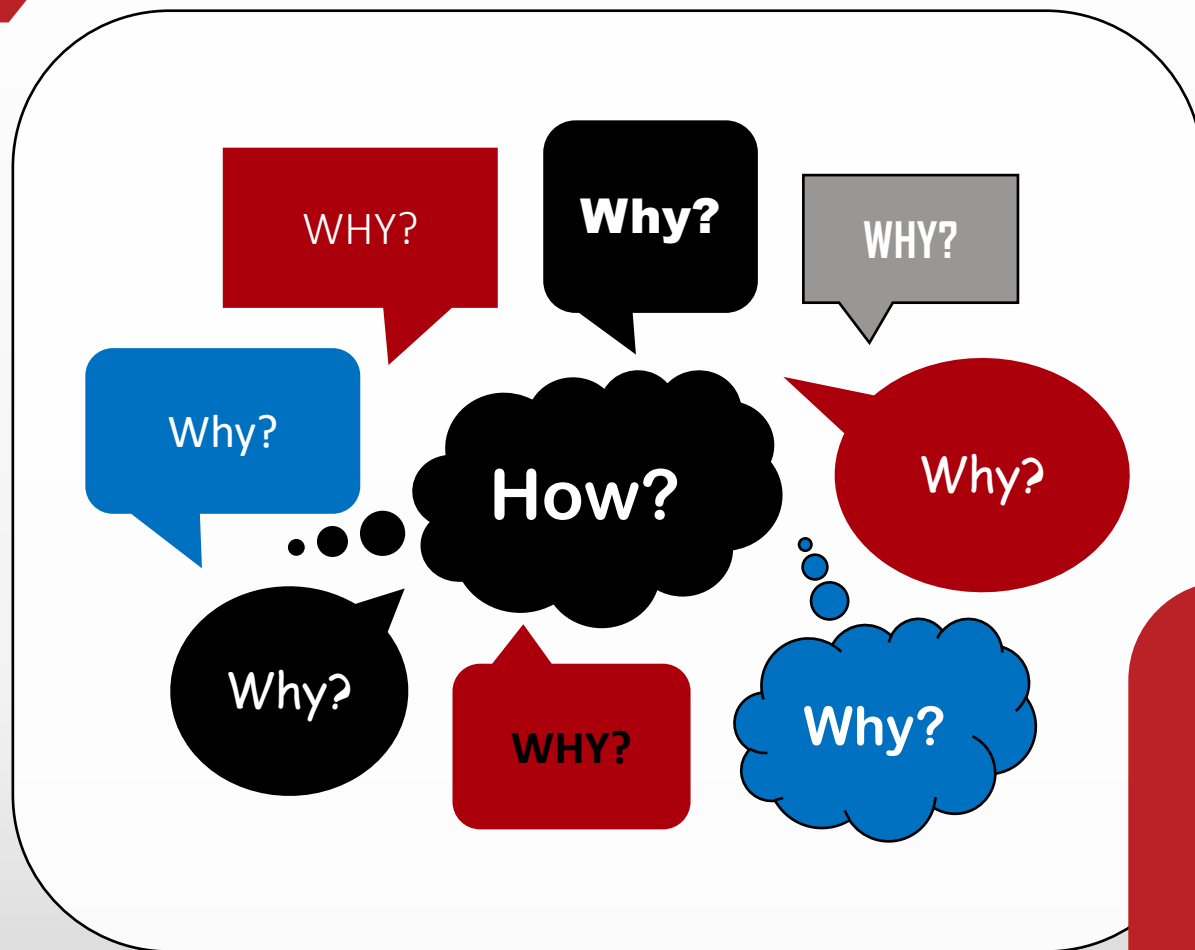
Half of emergency department visits for intentional self-harm are due to poisoning.



Source: ESSENCE, 2024

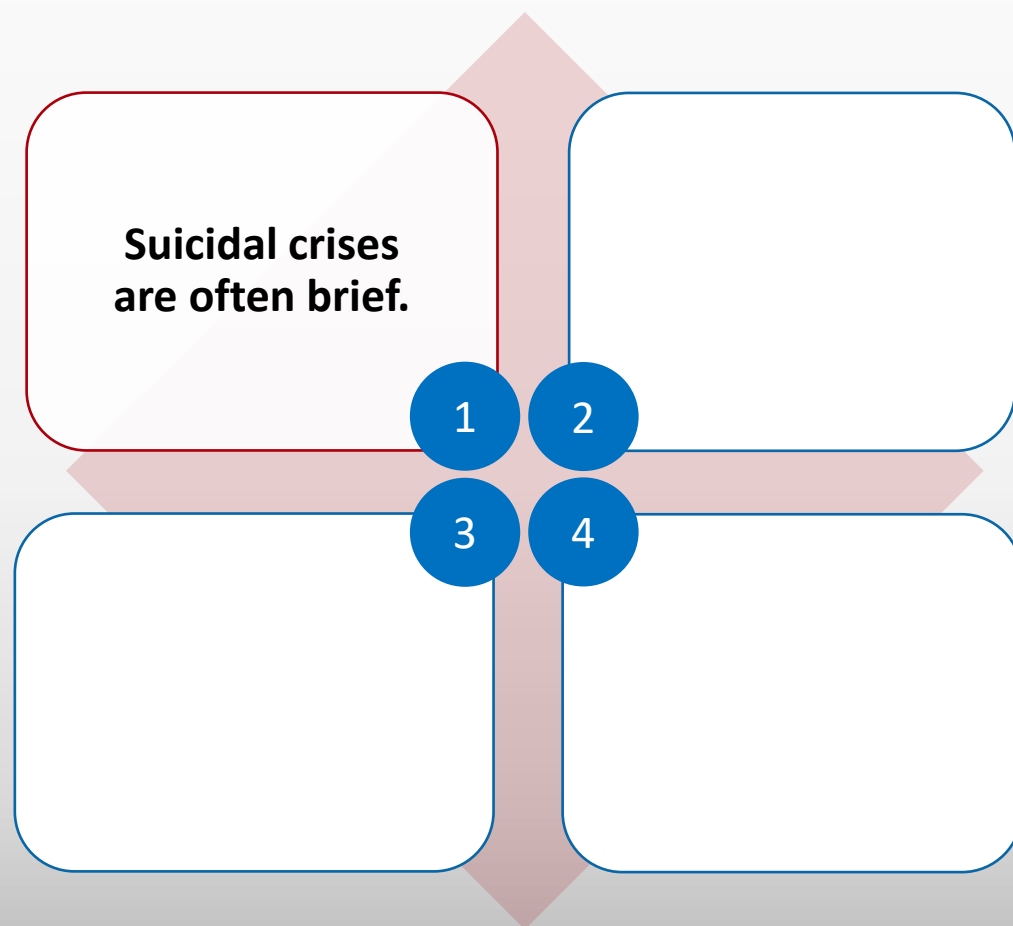


Much of the focus in suicide prevention is on why a person attempts suicide. We seek to relieve the mental distress that leads to a suicide attempt.



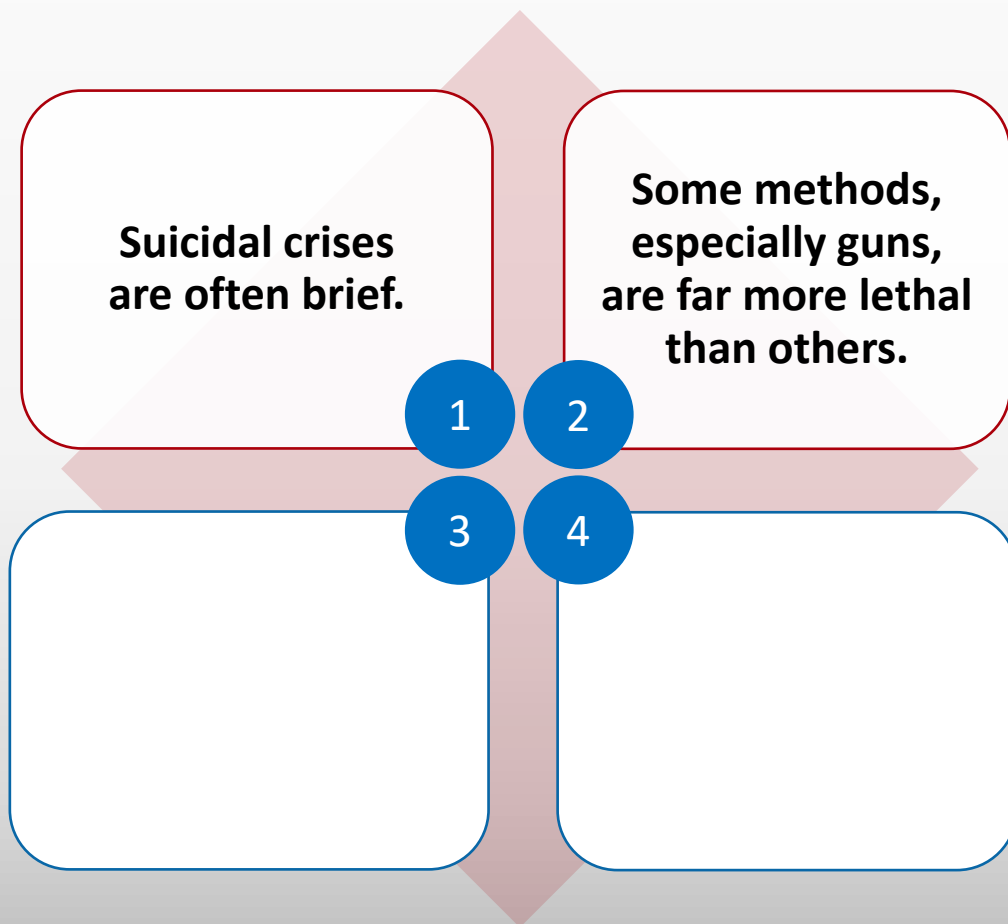
But HOW a person attempts plays a crucial role in whether they live or die as a result of an attempt. CALM covers “how to address the how” through discussing lethal means.

Four Reasons Why Means Matter



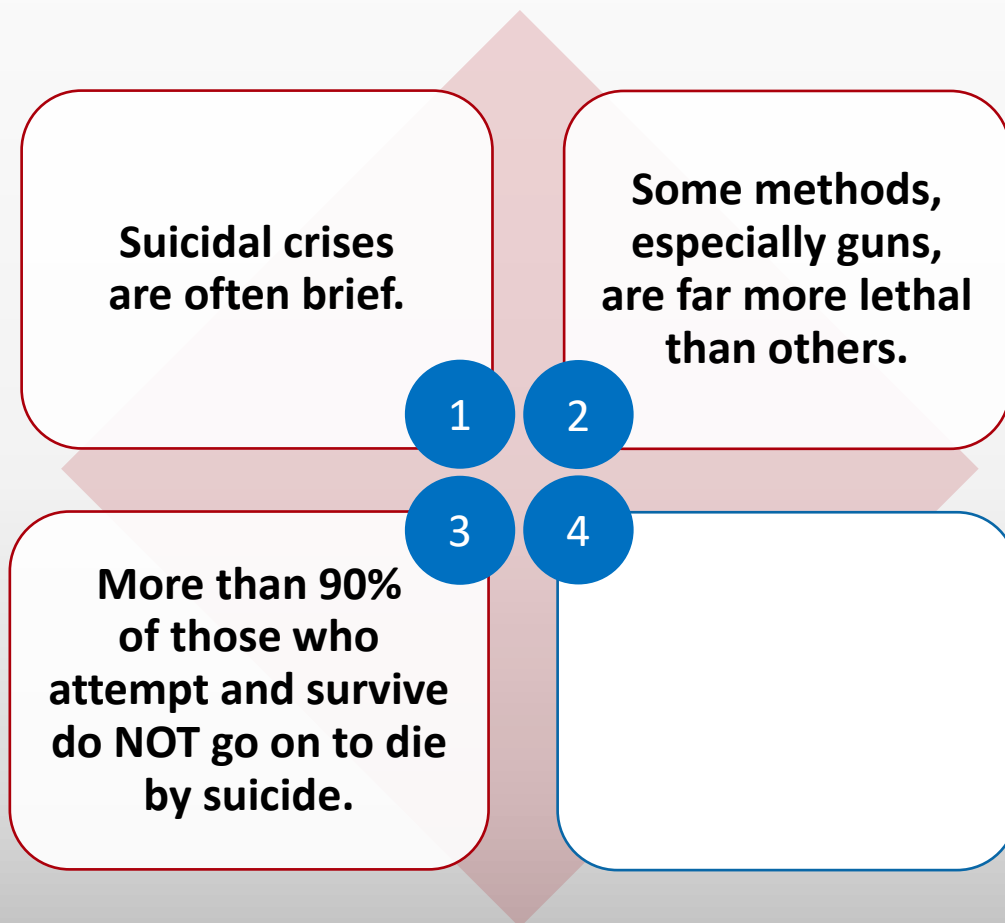
In one study, nearly half of people who attempted suicide reported *less than ten minutes* passed between their first thinking about attempting and doing it.

Four Reasons Why Means Matter



Precisely what is valued in guns makes them so deadly in an attempt: their ease of use and high lethality. Unlike most other methods, there's no chance for rescue or change of heart once you start the attempt.

Four Reasons Why Means Matter



A life save in the short term is usually a life saved, regardless of how serious the attempt was.

Four Reasons Why Means Matter

Suicidal crises are often brief.

1

Some methods, especially guns, are far more lethal than others.

2

More than 90% of those who attempt and survive do not go on to die by suicide.

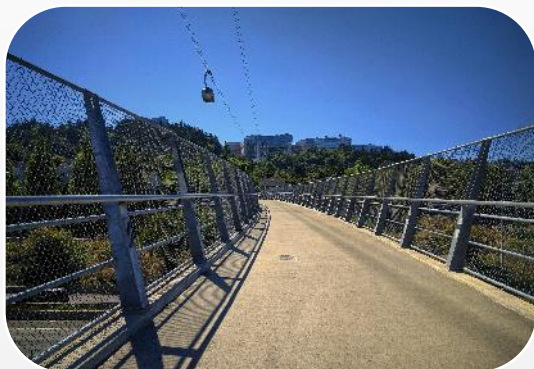
3

Most people who are suicidal are ambivalent.

4

It's usually more about wanting the pain to stop or to escape an unbearable situation than wanting to be dead.

Examples of Effective Means Reduction



Constructing bridge barriers where suicides are most frequent



Changing medication packaging to limit quantity



Providing Temporary out-of-home firearm storage

Why Firearms Are Important

In 2023, the firearm suicide rate was 8.2 per 100,000—highest since detailed CDC recordkeeping began in 1968.*

- Firearm suicides accounted for 55% of all suicides in the U.S.
- Firearm suicides accounted for the highest proportion of total suicides since 1998.

Data suggests these trends may remain stable or worsen in coming years.

- 2020 – 2022 were the highest 3 years of firearm sales in U.S. on record.**
- 1 in 20 adult Americans purchased a firearm for the first time between March 2020 and March 2022.***
- Handgun ownership is associated with enduring increase in suicide risk.****
- In most cases where firearms were used in a suicide, the firearms were “household” guns.

*CDC WONDER, 2025

** NSSF, 2023

***NORC, 2022

****Studdert et al., 2020

Why Do Means Matter?



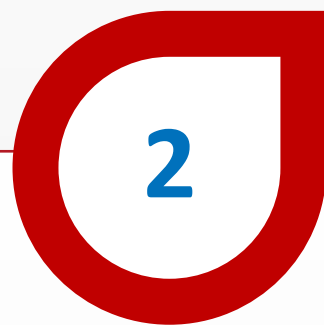
Note: Video begins with gunshots

Steps for Helping a Distressed Person



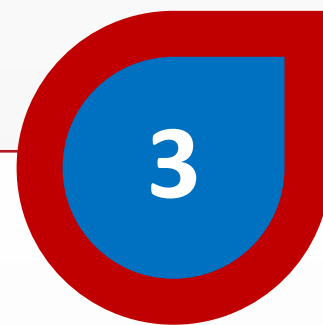
Recognize warning signs:

- *Changes in behavior*
- *Changes in life circumstances*



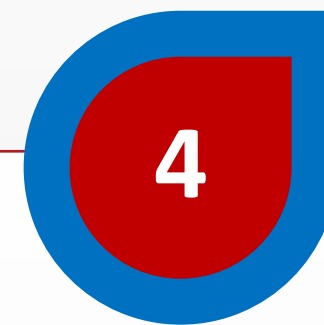
Ask about mood and suicide.

- *Show compassion and care.*
- *Build a connection with the person.*



Connect the person to support.

- *Support from professional and personal sources can help save a life.*
- *Involve others in preventing suicide and supporting both the individual and yourself!*



Focus on increasing safety.

- *It's about safety not judgment regarding firearms, drugs, or trust.*
- *Focus on the (hopefully) **temporary** nature of both the suicidality and limited access to means.*

If someone's life is in immediate danger, call 911.

Steps for Helping a Distressed Person

RECOGNIZE WARNING SIGNS

1

- Changes in behavior
- Changes in life circumstances



Recognizing Signs of Suicide Risk: What to Look for



NOTE: Clear warning signs are not always present, but there are several common indicators of increased risk.

<u>CHANGES</u> in Behavior	Major Life <u>CHANGES</u>	<u>PLUS</u> Having Easy Access to Lethal Means
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Negative mood/emotional state• Loss of interest in usual activities• Hopelessness/feeling like a burden• Withdrawal from friends/family/social activities• Sleep problems• Particularly persistent insomnia and/or nightmares	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Illness, loss of someone close, relationship difficulties• Legal trouble, job loss, loss of status• Changes in residence, marital status, health status (chronic illness or pain), etc.• Changes in substance use	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to firearms does not predict suicidal feelings or suicide attempt but does predict death by suicide

NOTE: This is not a checklist as risk is individual. Listen to your gut!

1 Examples

What People May Say . . .

“I can’t take this anymore.”

“Nobody cares what happens to me.”

“People would be better off if I wasn’t around.”

“Nothing’s going to change; I’m going to feel like this forever.”

“I wish I were already dead.”



What People May Do . . .

Appear agitated

**Seem less sociable/
more withdrawn**

Have difficulty sleeping

**Try to obtain means
(e.g., stockpiling medications)**

Exhibit changes in usual behavior

1

What Is Helpful or Protective



Connections to others:
family/friends/communities



Access to support/care



Spirituality/religiousness/purpose



Mental and physical health services



Healthy coping strategies

YOU!

*You can help by showing
you care, helping
them find support,
and reducing access
to lethal means.*



Keep in Mind

- There is not one thing people say or do that signals suicide risk.
- There is no one protective factor that guarantees safety.

When in doubt, ask!

Asking about suicide **does not** increase the risk of suicide.

1

Case Study: Mike



Mike is a 42-year-old maintenance worker. He married his high school sweetheart, Barbara, and the couple has two children. Mike has maintained the same group of friends and has attended the same church since he was a kid; he is a fixture at third base on the church softball team and enjoys deer hunting with his hunting club buddies.

The past year has been tough. He has been getting fewer hours at work, making money even tighter than usual. He has started drinking almost every night over the past two months. He and Barbara are fighting more and, according to her, he is having trouble controlling his anger.

- *Is there anything helpful?*
- *Are there warning signs?*

A large, stylized number "2" is positioned on the left side of the slide. The number is blue and is contained within a thick red outline that forms a partial circle on the left and a vertical bar on the right, resembling a drop or a shield shape.

Steps for Helping a Distressed Person

ASK ABOUT MOOD & SUICIDE

- Show compassion and care.
- Build a connection with the person.

2

Ask about Suicide

- ✓ Show compassion and care.
- ✓ Build a connection with the person.
- ✓ Express your concern for their well-being, and be specific:

"Because of X, Y, Z, I'm worried about you. What's been going on?"

- ✓ Ask as directly as possible:

"Are you thinking about suicide?"

Remember Mike?

Let's practice asking him:

"Are you thinking about killing yourself?"

2

Ask about Suicide

How do we respond to “Yes”?

- ✓ Express appreciation for being open to talking.
- ✓ Emphasize safety.
- ✓ Offer self as a resource.

“I’m worried about you and want to see you get through this difficult time. Can we figure out a plan to help things get better?”

“Thanks for letting me know how bad things have been lately. It sounds really tough. I want to help. Can we talk about some things that might be helpful?”

** You do not need to have the perfect response; just shift to connecting the person with help and keeping them safe!*

2

Ask about Suicide

How do we respond to “No”?

- ✓ Express appreciation for being open to talking.
- ✓ Emphasize safety.
- ✓ Offer self as a resource.

“That’s good to hear, but I’m still worried about you. What’s been going on?”

“Okay, but if you ever were, I want you to know I care about you and want you to be safe.”

** Even if nothing is going on, you can have the CALM Conversation to make the home safer for everyone.*

A large, stylized number "3" is positioned on the left side of the slide. The number is white and set against a blue circular background, which is itself surrounded by a thick red border.

Steps for Helping a Distressed Person

CONNECT THE PERSON TO SUPPORT

- Support from professional and personal sources can help save a life.
- Involve others in preventing suicide and supporting both the individual and yourself!

3

Case Study: Mike & Barbara



One night at 3 a.m., after an argument, Barbara woke up and Mike wasn't in bed. She went downstairs and found him sitting in the dark with his handgun on the table. When she asked him if he was okay, he sobbed, "Please just leave me alone... let me have some peace and quiet!"

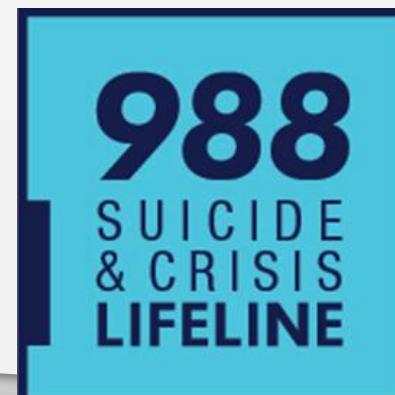
- How is Barbara feeling? What do you think she might do next?
- Scared, she called Mike's dad. Hearing the fear in her voice, he said he would come right over.

3

Options for Additional Support

Don't worry alone; enlist the help of others!

- Informal sources of support
 - Increasing visits with friends and family to reduce isolation
 - Identifying a “go-to” person
 - Creating a list of stress-reducing activities/distractions for difficult times
- Formal sources of support
 - Counseling, medication, spiritual support
 - Good to have local resources handy
 - Call 988!



3

Having the Conversation about Support

Any additional support you can get them might help to save a life!

- Try to connect the person to appropriate services.

“I know that it can be tough to ask for help, but I’d like to help connect you with some support. I know about some resources around here. What do you think?”

Regardless of their response, try to strengthen connections to existing support:

- Counseling, medication, spiritual support
- Good to have local resources handy—call 988!

“I’d like to see you get help, but I understand if you aren’t ready to take that step. What about hanging out with friends and family more often?”

A red speech bubble containing the white number "3".

Local Resources

This could be a list of

- Howard Center 802 – 488 - 6600
- First Call for Chittenden County 802 488 7777
- 988
- The Trevor Project: 1 866 – 488 - 7386

4

Steps for Helping a Distressed Person

FOCUS ON INCREASING SAFETY OF FIREARM & MEDICATION STORAGE

- It's about safety not judgment regarding firearms, drugs, or trust.
- Focus on the (hopefully) temporary nature of both the suicidality and limited access to means.

4

Case Study: Mike and His Dad Discuss Safety



Mike's dad is aware of Mike's recent struggles. He discusses various sources of help and support with Mike. He also asks Mike about ways they can store the firearms and medications to keep Mike and Barbara safer until things turn around.

4

Reducing Access to Lethal Means May Save a Life

- Begin with concern and empathy: “I care about you and want to help you through this.”
- Focus on increasing safety—not judgment regarding firearms, drugs, or trust.
- Focus on the (hopefully) temporary nature of both the suicidality and changes in storage practices.
 - Familiarity with firearms or medications may increase rather than decrease risk. People tend to use what they know
- Involve others in preventing suicide and supporting both the individual and yourself!

*Calling 988 can help determine next steps
for safety and support.*

4 Talk about Access to Lethal Means

Express concern for their safety.

“There’s one more important thing I want to talk about. How can we keep you safe while you’re feeling this way?”

Time and distance can REDUCE risk of death

- *“Can we talk about ways to safely store the guns and medications until things get better?”*

Explore access to lethal means—guns and medications.

“Sometimes when people are feeling like this, strong feelings can come on fast. So, it is important that we take steps to keep you safe—especially around guns and medications.”

Agree on a plan.

“So, we agree, that in order to keep you safe, we need to . . .”

4

Continuum of Safer Storage

Off-site Storage

- Friends or relatives
- Gun range
- Self-storage facilities
- Pawn shops

In-home Safe Storage

- Store firearms locked, unloaded in a safe or lockbox.
- Consider trigger or cable locks for added time.
- Secure locking device (keys, combination) with a trusted person.

Other Options

- Remove an essential component to make the gun inoperable.

What have you done in the past: photos, magnet for 988, freeze keys, etc.? Know your state's legal position on firearm transfer.



Self-Defense Firearms & Safe Storage

Self-Defense Firearms and Safe Storage

4

What If the Person Is Resistant?

DO

- Emphasize **safety**: “I just want to see you stay safe.”
- Emphasize **choice**: “If that doesn’t work, what steps would you consider?”
- Emphasize **temporariness**: “Would you consider this just until things get better?”

DO NOT

- Make it an argument: “You have to do this!”
- Make it a trust issue: “You aren’t capable of having a gun right now!”
- Escalate or threaten: “Give them up or else!”

“I understand that the guns are valuable and important to you, and it’s your choice. But I’m still worried about you. Are there other steps that you would consider to keep you safe?”

4

Practice

Imagine that you are Mike's dad. You suggest that he store his guns outside the home, and he is not open to that idea at all. "There is no way in hell those guns are leaving this house!" he says.

- *What are some ways that you can respond?*



4

Securing Medications

In addition to Mike and his dad talking about ways to safely secure the guns, Barbara worked on making sure that dangerous medications were stored safely.

What steps could she take to ensure that Mike stayed safe?

4

Securing Medications

To help keep Mike safe, Barbara . . .

- Cleaned out the medicine cabinet and dropped off all their old and unused medications at a pharmacy that offered free disposal services.
- Purchased a cash box from an office supply store to lock up their prescription medications as well as their over-the-counter sleep aids and pain medications, leaving just enough out for the next few days.
- Set a reminder in her phone to replenish the supply every few days.

She took these steps even though Mike never mentioned medication as a possible method of suicide.

4

Securing Medications

- Medications are the most common method of suicide attempt. While overdose attempts are less likely to be fatal, they are the third leading method of suicide death.
- Therefore, it is recommended that access to medications be limited to only what is immediately needed when a person is showing warning signs.

4

Secure Access to Medications

- **Safely dispose** of out-of-date, unused, and excess medications and over-the-counter remedies.
- **Reduce available quantities** of prescription and over-the-counter meds, especially those for pain and other meds of abuse.
 - Have only what is needed in the short-term on hand.
- Use a **lock box to secure lethal and additional medications.**
- Ask a **pharmacist or poison center** to determine “safe” levels.
- If opioid use/abuse is a problem, obtain NARCAN and learn how to use it along with other lifesaving methods.
- Think about any substance use that can impair judgment, such as alcohol.

4

Other Methods

- It is difficult to reduce access to everything that could be used.
- If a method is specified, take steps to remove, limit, or disable it (e.g., car keys).
- Focus on other ways of increasing safety—maintaining contact, following up on plan for safety, accessing support.

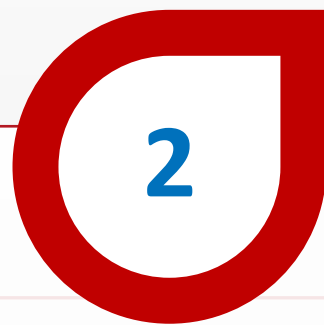
Reducing access to lethal means is only PART of suicide prevention.

You don't need to be a superhero to act.
Just remember that a few simple steps can save a life:



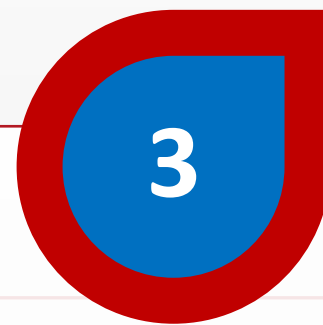
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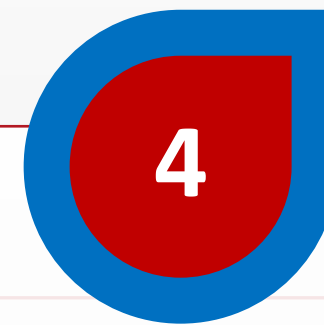
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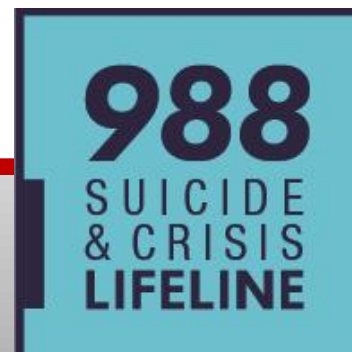
Finally, remember that you do not need to do this "perfectly." Don't let fear of making a mistake prevent you from acting!

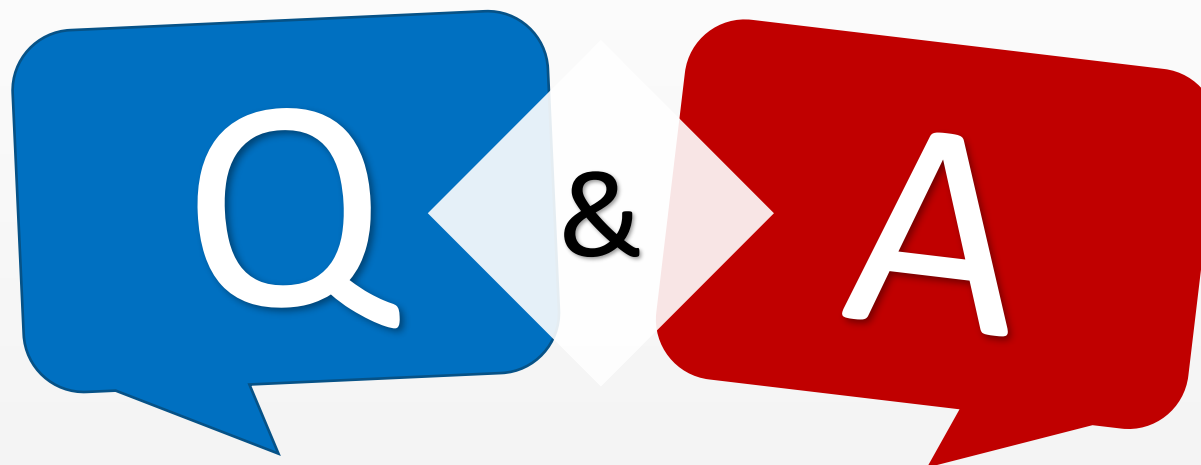


This video is used with permission from Worried About a Veteran

National Resources

- **Suicide Prevention Resource Center**
www.sprc.org
- **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention**
www.afsp.org
- **Means Matter, Harvard Injury Control Research Center**
www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter
- **Call 988 for assistance 24/7**





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