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## FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

***These FAQs provide general information on how the 988 crisis system operates. 988 is available across the U.S., but additional crisis services are still developing and will depend on where you live — and they will likely change as states implement the full crisis continuum of care.***

***We encourage you to contact your local and [state mental health authorities](#) to learn the latest updates in your area.***

*“SAMHSA” is the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the federal agency in charge of overseeing the Lifeline. You can find SAMHSA resources on 988 at [SAMHSA.gov/988](https://www.samhsa.gov/988).*

***(Last updated 07/12/2023)***

### Overview of 988

#### What is 988?

[988 is the nationwide, three-digit number](#) available for anyone to contact to be connected to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. By contacting 988, a person will receive compassionate, accessible care and support from a trained counselor when they or a loved one are experiencing mental health-related distress—whether that is thoughts of suicide, mental health or substance use crisis or any other kind of emotional distress.

#### Is this number only for suicide-related crises?

No, 988 is a number to call for suicide, mental health and substance use-related crises or any kind of emotional distress—not just suicide-related crises. Despite developing out of the previous *National Suicide Prevention Lifeline*, anyone in any type of mental health-related distress can contact this line for themselves or their loved one if they need support.

#### What is a mental health, substance use or suicide crisis?

A mental health or suicidal crisis is any situation in which a person’s symptoms puts them at risk of hurting themselves or others and/or prevents them from being able to function well in the community. Some people worry they don’t meet the criteria for “crisis,” but there is no level of distress you have to be in to reach out. When you need help, contact 988.

#### Can I *only* call or text 988 if I am experiencing a life-threatening crisis?

No, you can contact 988 for yourself or a loved one if you are in any type of emotional distress. When in doubt, contact 988.

If you don’t feel you need to reach out to 988, there are other services that may meet your current needs better, including a peer-support [Warmline](#) for emotional support or the [NAMI HelpLine](#) (1-800-950-NAMI or [helpline@nami.org](mailto:helpline@nami.org)) for information, resources and support.

#### How can I reach 988? Only by phone?

You can call or send a text to 988 or chat with crisis counselors via the Lifeline’s website ([988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org)).

#### What happens when I contact 988? What information or help will I receive?

The goal of the 988 Lifeline is to provide free, confidential, immediate crisis intervention and emotional support. When you call 988:

1. You’ll hear a message that you’ve reached the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
  - If you are a veteran, you can press “1” to reach the Veterans’ Crisis Line.

- To access Spanish-language crisis services, you can press “2” to reach the Spanish subnetwork of the Lifeline.
  - Specialized services for LGBTQ+ youth (under the age of 25) can be accessed by pressing “3”.
2. If you don’t select any of the options above, a trained crisis counselor will answer.
  3. The counselor will listen to you to understand how your problem is affecting you or your loved one.
  4. The counselor will work with you to develop a plan—a support network you can leverage, next steps and a plan of action, and sharing resources and referrals to other support in your community.

In some communities, the crisis line may be able to connect you to additional services or follow up with you to ensure you’ve connected with care (note: not all communities have this capacity).

At this time, chat and text options differ slightly from call options. To access LGBTQ+ youth services by text, you can text “Q” to 988.

### **Can I only contact 988 for myself, or can I reach out for someone else I know in crisis?**

You can call, text or chat 988 if you are concerned about someone else who may need crisis support. The crisis counselor will work with you to identify next steps to support that individual.

### **What languages are offered through 988?**

The Lifeline currently provides live crisis center calling services in English and Spanish and uses Language Line Solutions to provide translation services in over 250 additional languages. Text and chat are currently available in English only.

### **Are there services available for a person who is Deaf or hard of hearing?**

In addition to text and chat services, teletype (TTY) is also available. TTY users can use their preferred relay service or dial 711 then 988. Lifeline is in the process of expanding to video phone service to better serve Deaf or hard of hearing individuals seeking help through 988.

### **Will there be culturally competent support available?**

As the workforce for the 988 Lifeline network is being expanded, there are ongoing efforts to improve cultural competency training for 988 crisis counselors. At present, not every counselor may have had this training but will be willing to provide support to the best of their ability.

### **Are there youth-specific supports available?**

Calling 988 and dialing “3” will connect callers to a counselor who has been specifically trained to support LGBTQ+ youth and young adults up to the age of 25. You can also text Q to 988 to be connected to this resource. Some states may have their own youth crisis line, but the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline network does not currently have a youth-specific hotline or dedicated crisis counselors for youth callers. Lifeline staff are trained to support anyone in a crisis and will work with you to get you the support you need. Expanded Lifeline trainings are being implemented to ensure 988 call centers can provide appropriate, culturally competent care, specifically focused on communities that are at higher risk for suicide, including youth.

Note that some states have youth crisis services in place, and there is a growing movement to provide more youth-focused crisis services across the country.

### **Will I be charged a 988 fee for calling the number?**

No. The support and services received from 988 crisis counselors is provided free of charge. However, standard messaging and data rates may apply to those who text 988 from their mobile phone.

## Do I need or will I be asked if I have insurance if I contact 988?

No. The support and services received from the 988 crisis counselors is provided free of charge, regardless of whether you have health insurance coverage.

## Will 988 show up on my phone bill? Is a call record created?

It will depend on your phone service whether a call or text to 988 will show up on your phone bill. Contact your phone service provider to learn more about how calls to 1-800 and other toll-free lines appear on your bill.

## Does 988 collect my information/data? What do they do with that information?

All contacts to 988 are confidential. According to the [988 Lifeline FAQs](#), information about callers/chatters/texters will not be shared outside the Lifeline without documented verbal or written consent from the person seeking help, except in cases where there is imminent risk of harm to one's self or someone else (as defined by the 2022 [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Suicide Safety Policy](#)), or where otherwise required by law. *Note: Less than two percent of calls meet the imminent risk threshold.*

Per the 988 Lifeline FAQs, "If a 988 Lifeline crisis counselor makes an effort to gather information during a call, text or chat, it will be to: 1) save lives; 2) connect people to ongoing support; and 3) evaluate 988 Lifeline services."

The 988 Lifeline protects all the confidential and identifying information shared. During your contact with the 988 Lifeline, you may voluntarily share certain information about yourself. The center may also have access to the phone number or IP address you used to contact 988. You will never be required to provide other identifying information to receive help.

## Why do we have 988? How is it different from the old ten-digit National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and 911?

988 was created to improve access to crisis services in a way that meets our country's growing needs around suicide, mental health and substance use-related crises—and make it easier to connect with a network of trained individuals ready to help without having to remember a 10-digit number. The 988 Lifeline also has a broader purpose than the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, its predecessor, had before by focusing on broader mental health crises.

With 988, your call, text or chat *is* the intervention. Trained crisis counselors answer you and provide support, resolving most crises and reducing the need for an in-person response.

911 serves as an emergency and public safety dispatch system, where the purpose is to collect information and dispatch Emergency Medical Services, fire and police, as needed. When someone calls 911 for a mental health crisis, call takers are often not trained to identify a mental health crisis or provide necessary support, and police are generally the only service that can be dispatched. However, people experiencing a mental health crisis need and deserve immediate access to mental health support.

Local, state and national advocacy efforts are ongoing to connect the 988 Lifeline with a continuum of in-person crisis services in every community, such as mobile crisis teams and crisis stabilization options for individuals who may need more support than can be provided over the phone. This effort is focused on diverting people with mental illness from the criminal justice system and emergency departments, and helping people in crisis quickly connect to effective mental health care. Unfortunately, not every community has these services yet, and they will take time to develop.

[SAMHSA](#), which oversees the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, states, "Currently, fewer than 2% of Lifeline calls require connection to emergency services like 911." Communities that currently have robust crisis services

estimate that they dispatch mobile crisis response teams to less than 10-20% of crisis line callers—with most mobile crisis response dispatches resolved in the community and not requiring further intervention.

**There are a lot of numbers in my community—211, warmlines, etc. How are they different from 911 and 988?**

211 generally serves as a health and social services information and referral line to help people connect with essential community services such as food banks, assistance paying for utilities, housing and much more. In some states, 988 call centers also answer 211 calls.

Warmlines provide emotional support and help people manage loneliness, mental illness symptoms and recovery. While the 988 Lifeline is meant to manage immediate crises, warmlines take an early intervention approach to easing struggle. Warmlines are typically free, confidential peer-support services staffed by volunteers or paid employees who have experienced mental health conditions themselves, but may not have the experience or training to respond to a crisis call. However, in some cases, warmlines may be a service that is part of a 988 call center.

The NAMI HelpLine (1-800-950-NAMI or [helpline@nami.org](mailto:helpline@nami.org)) is a free, nationwide peer-support service operating from 10 a.m. ET to 10 p.m. ET, Monday-Friday, providing information, resource referrals and support to people living with a mental health condition, their family members and caregivers, mental health providers and the public. HelpLine staff and volunteers are experienced, well-trained and able to provide guidance. The NAMI HelpLine is not part of the 988 Lifeline and is not a crisis line or suicide prevention line.

While individuals in a mental health-related crisis should now use 988, anyone experiencing an emergency that requires immediate medical attention should call 911.

All local helplines, warmlines and crisis/emergency lines should be working together to develop standard operating procedures to transfer calls to ensure that a person can connect to the help that best serves their needs, no matter what number they dial or text.

**Did the Veterans Crisis Line go away with 988 or is it still its own line?**

The Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) did not go away. Just like how 988 is making it easier for people in the U.S. to connect to the Lifeline, Veterans, Service Members and their families can call 988 and press “1” to be connected to the VCL, which is run and staffed by the Veterans’ Administration. The VCL is also available by chat ([VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat)) and text (838255).

**Did the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline’s ten-digit number (1-800-273-8255) go away?**

No. The 10-digit number 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) did not go away after July 16, 2022. Using either 988 or 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) will connect people to the same services provided by the 988 Lifeline, but 988 is the easier way to access those services.

**What training do 988 staff receive?**

All 988 Lifeline network call centers are required to meet specific standards regarding Suicide Risk Assessment and Imminent Risk interventions, but each 988-affiliated crisis call center may develop additional training for crisis counselors to meet organizational needs.

The Lifeline is currently developing the Lifeline Core Clinical Training, which will be a self-paced online training that will cover essential skills for crisis counselors who answer calls/chats/texts within the Lifeline network. More training is also being developed to address the specific needs of populations at higher risk of suicide.

When I call 988, how do I connect to a local call center? Will they know my physical location? Will they track me?

Your location information is not collected and used by the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Calls are routed to a 988 crisis call center based on the caller's area code, and more exact physical location data is not available to the 988 network. This is different from 911, which uses geo-routing to determine a caller's closest 911 call center.

According to the [988 Lifeline's FAQs](#), in some rare situations “[W]here emergency services must be contacted to prevent persons from seriously or fatally harming themselves, and the person is unwilling or unable to share their location information, Lifeline counselors must provide what information they have to 911 operators—the caller's/text user's phone number or the chat user's IP address—to enable them to do whatever they can to locate the individual”. However, this information is not always accurate or enough to locate an individual, and it is only used when someone's life is determined to be at risk. Knowing a person's exact location for purposes of sending emergency services is often referred to as “geolocation.”

As part of the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was required to submit a report to Congress about implementing geolocation and georouting for 988 to better determine a contact's location. The report recommended establishing an advisory committee to learn more about key issues related to 988 and georouting/geolocation. That committee has not yet been convened and the FCC has not taken action on georouting or geolocation for 988.

NAMI supports addressing georouting urgently to connect people to the resources closest to them by knowing their *general* area/region, but NAMI urges the FCC to convene stakeholders to address privacy concerns with knowing a person's exact location.

### What does 988 look like in my community?

The capacity of each community to answer 988 contacts and dispatch behavioral health crisis services varies. However, all 988 Lifeline call centers are connected to a national back-up network that can answer calls when a local center cannot. While a local response is ideal, back-up centers still provide the same crisis counseling and support to every help seeker.

We know that some people need more help than can be provided over the phone. Many communities are building up not only their call center capacity, but also related crisis services, like mobile crisis teams, which provide an alternative to law enforcement involvement, and crisis stabilization options, which provide an alternative to emergency departments. This is ongoing and the availability of these additional services continues to expand nationwide.

### What can I do to help my community improve crisis response?

You can do a lot. The work to successfully ensure there is a crisis system that supports 988 callers in your community is up to you and your local policymakers. Work with your state and local mental health agencies to learn more about their efforts to expand crisis services. Attend public meetings, share your personal story and stay up to date on local developments. If you have time and experience, also consider [volunteering at a local call center](#) that could use support to meet increased call volume.

We also need your help advocating for policies and funding that will support building a full mental health crisis care system in every community. Our policymakers — at the local, state and federal levels—need to act so we can #ReimagineCrisis. Some states have already passed legislation to start this effort, but many haven't. Learn about legislation or funding in your state specific to 988 and crisis services [here](#).

The work doesn't stop there—we need the federal government to act, too. Join our advocacy, contact your members of Congress and share your story at [nami.org/crisisadvocacy](https://nami.org/crisisadvocacy).

## I'm undocumented—is my communication confidential?

Your immigration status is not required information to receive help from 988. You are never required to provide your immigration status to receive health or mental health services. For more information about your rights, please visit the [National Immigrant Law Center](#) (NILC) or [League of United Latin American Citizens](#) (LULAC) resource pages.

## 988, 911 & Emergency Response

### It's an emergency. Should I call 988 or 911?

This will depend on your situation. When you call 911, you are connected to an emergency dispatcher who will consider whether to dispatch Emergency Medical Services, fire and/or police responders to your location. Often, in mental health crises, law enforcement is the primary service dispatched.

When you call, text [or chat](#) 988, you will be connected to a trained crisis counselor, someone who will listen to the person, assess the problem, provide support, help de-escalate the crisis, and connect to mental health resources as needed and available. For most contacts to 988, no in-person response is needed or dispatched.

When an in-person response is needed, NAMI and the [#ReimagineCrisis](#) partnership are advocating for mobile crisis teams to be available everywhere, focused on ensuring a behavioral health response. However, some communities may still only have law enforcement as an option for dispatch, and 988 counselors will coordinate with 911 and law enforcement to provide in-person response services for the small number (roughly two percent) of instances that meet the 988 [imminent risk standard](#).

If someone is in physical danger, 911 may be most appropriate in order to quickly dispatch Emergency Medical Services.

To get help planning for a crisis, please visit the NAMI website and learn more from NAMI's [Navigating A Crisis](#) guide or contact the [NAMI Helpline](#) for other resources and support.

### How is 911 connected to 988?

Crisis call centers within the 988 Lifeline have policies in place that guide how a call center might contact 911 if it is necessary to dispatch an in-person response to save someone's life. Please see the [988 policy on imminent risk](#) to better understand under what limited circumstances any available information might be shared with 911 to dispatch emergency services.

While there is no universal interoperability between 911 and 988, work is being done at the state and local levels to coordinate between local 988 and 911 centers. This work is focused on developing additional policies and procedures so that 911 operators can handoff to the 988 crisis system as often as appropriate.

### Will law enforcement respond when I call 988? Will there be an in-person response if I call 988?

As stated by [SAMHSA](#), "The primary goal of the Lifeline is to provide support for people in suicidal crisis or mental health-related distress in the moments they most need it and in a manner which is person-centered. The vast majority of those seeking help from the Lifeline do not require any additional interventions at that moment. Currently, fewer than 2% of Lifeline calls require connection to emergency services like 911. While some safety and health issues may warrant a response from law enforcement and/or Emergency Medical Services (namely when a suicide attempt is in progress), the 988 coordinated response is intended to promote stabilization and care in the least restrictive manner."

However, many communities do not have robust mobile crisis teams or non-law enforcement responses available if an in-person response is needed. A major goal of the [#ReimagineCrisis campaign](#) is to ensure this is available everywhere.

Learn what resources and services are connected with 988 in your community. Contact your department of behavioral health, [state mental health authority](#) or department of human services to learn more. You can also reach out proactively to your local crisis call center, or the nearest call center that is [part of the 988 Lifeline network](#), to ask them about resources, as well as their policies and procedures for interacting with local emergency response such as law enforcement.

## What does imminent risk mean?

The term “imminent risk” as it is used by 988 and the Lifeline Network, is defined in the [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Suicide Safety Policy](#). This policy defines “imminent risk” as the belief that there is a short time frame “between the person’s current risk status and actions that could lead to their suicide”. The definition also states that “The risk must be present in the sense that it creates an obligation and immediate pressure on center staff to take urgent actions to reduce the individual’s risk; that is, if no actions are taken, the individual is likely to seriously harm or kill themselves in the very near future”. This definition is used across the emergency response system, including Emergency Medical Services, law enforcement and behavioral health.

According to the policy, imminent risk is determined through engagement with the caller and a series of questions can be asked to determine the risk of the caller. If the call taker believes that the caller is at “imminent risk,” steps may be taken to contact local emergency response services to conduct an active rescue, which may include law enforcement involvement (see above).

## Can 988 share my information/conversations with law enforcement?

Calls to the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, and the information shared by callers, is confidential. However, if during a call, the 988 staff believes that the person calling is at imminent risk (see above for information on the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Suicide Safety Policy), the staff at the call center may determine that it is necessary to contact local emergency response services to initiate an active rescue. In these rare instances, the 988 call center will engage the caller to voluntarily provide their location, so the information can be passed on to 911. But if specific location information is not given, the 988 call center may provide what available information they have to 911 that is critical to saving the caller’s life.

## Links to Additional Resources

- [SAMHSA: 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#)
- [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Volunteer and Job Opportunities](#)
- [Veterans Crisis Line’s 988 webpage](#)
- [988lifeline.org](#)
- [988: Reimagining Crisis Response \(NAMI\)](#)
- [ReimagineCrisis.org](#)
- [NAMI’s 988 Crisis Response State Legislation Map](#)