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FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions

These FAQs provide general information on how the 988 crisis system operates. 988 is available everywhere in the U.S., but additional mental health crisis response services are still developing and will depend on where you live — and will likely change as states continue to expand crisis services.

Contact your local and [state mental health authorities](#) to learn the latest updates in your area and for specific information about the crisis continuum of care in your community.

“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 7/15/2025]

Overview of 988

What is 988?

[988 is the nationwide, three-digit number](#) for anyone to access the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, and it is available via call, text or chat ([988Lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)). By contacting 988, a person will be connected to a trained crisis counselor and receive compassionate, accessible care when they or someone they know are experiencing mental health-related distress, whether that means 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 contact for suicide, mental health and substance use-related crises or any kind of emotional distress—not just suicide-related crises. Anyone in any type of mental health-related distress can contact this line for themselves or someone else if they need support. Many people wonder if their situation is serious enough to contact 988. **There is no level of distress you have to be in to reach out**, and compassionate, caring crisis counselors are available to help anyone who is struggling.

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

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

Can I only contact 988 if I am experiencing a life-threatening crisis?

No, you can contact 988 for yourself or someone around you for any type of 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, text “Helpline” to 62640, or 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). Individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing may call [988 Videophone](#), and teletype (TTY) users can use their preferred relay service or dial 711 then 988.

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. You can press "0" at any time to be immediately connected to a crisis counselor.
2. 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.
3. If you don't select any of the options above, a trained crisis counselor will answer.
4. The counselor will listen to you to understand how your problem is affecting you or your loved one.
5. 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, and sharing your information is optional).

At this time, chat and text options differ slightly from call options. To access Spanish-language support via text, text "AYUDA" to 988. Veterans and service members can send a text to 838255 to be connected to the Veterans Crisis Line.

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 988 Lifeline currently provides live crisis center calling, text, and chat services in English and Spanish and uses Language Line Solutions to provide translation services in over 240 additional languages.

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

Yes, there are several options. 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. 988 also offers [video phone services](#) to better serve Deaf and hard of hearing individuals seeking help through 988.

Is there support available to meet diverse cultural and linguistic needs?

There are ongoing efforts to improve training for 988 crisis counselors on diverse cultural needs and cultural humility. The 988 Lifeline regularly works to improve trainings for the thousands of crisis counselors answering text, calls, and chats 24/7. A list of examples is available on 988Lifeline.org.

Are there youth-specific supports available?

Some states may have their own youth crisis line, but the 988 Lifeline network does not currently have a youth-specific hotline or dedicated crisis counselors for youth help seekers. Lifeline staff are trained to support anyone in a crisis and will work with you to get you the support you need. Expanded 988 trainings are being implemented to ensure 988 call centers can provide appropriate care with cultural humility, specifically focused on communities that are at higher risk for suicide, including youth.

As of July 17, 2025, Specialized Services for LGBTQ+ Youth and Young Adults within 988 will no longer be offered (as [announced](#) by SAMHSA on June 17, 2025). While 988 remains a resource for everyone, if any young person wishes to reach LGBTQ+ specialized resources, NAMI encourages them to contact The Trevor Project's crisis line. The Trevor Project offers a 100% confidential, 100% free crisis line 24/7/365 via text, chat, or phone, with trained counselors who understand the unique concerns of LGBTQ+ young people. Learn more at thetrevorproject.org.

Will I be charged a fee for contacting 988?

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 are 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. 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. 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."

According to the [988 Lifeline FAQs](#), information about help seekers 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 contacts meet the imminent risk threshold.

Why do we have 988? How is it different from the old ten-digit National Suicide Prevention Lifeline or 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—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 focuses on broader mental health crises, not just suicide-related crises.

With 988, the call, text, or chat is the intervention for most people. Trained crisis counselors answer you and provide support, resolving most crises without 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 immediate and necessary

mental health support, and police are generally the only service that can be dispatched.

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 crowded emergency departments, 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.

The [988 Lifeline says](#), “Less than two percent of 988 Lifeline calls involve emergency services. When emergency services are involved, over half of these emergency dispatches occur with the caller’s consent.” Communities with robust crisis services estimate that they dispatch mobile crisis response teams to less than 10-20% of crisis line help seekers, 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?

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) 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 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 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 when 988 launched, or is it still its own line?

No. Just as 988 makes it easier for people in the U.S. to connect to help, Veterans and service members can call 988 and press “1” to be connected to the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL), which is run and staffed by the Veterans’ Administration. The VCL is also available by chat (VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat) and text (838255).

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

No, but dialing either 988 or 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) will connect people to the same services provided by the 988 Lifeline. 988 is the easier way to access those services.

What training do 988 staff receive?

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

The 988 Lifeline Core Clinical Training is a self-paced online training that covers essential skills for crisis counselors who answer calls, chats, or texts within the 988 Lifeline network. More training is also being developed to address the specific needs of populations at higher risk of suicide, and the 988 Lifeline regularly updates and improves training for its counselors.

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

Your location information is not collected and used by the 988 Lifeline. Calls are routed to a 988 crisis center based on the caller’s approximate physical location, without exact physical location data being made available to the 988 network. This is different from 911, which uses location-specific technology to determine a caller’s exact location.

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.

What is georouting? Is it different from geolocation?

Georouting is how calls to the 988 Lifeline are directed to local call centers. Georouting directs phone calls locally, without revealing a caller’s exact location to the call center or 988 network. When someone reaches out to 988, their call will be sent automatically to a contact center that is close to their approximate location, connecting them to local resources without sharing any personalized data or details.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines georouting as “technical solutions for directing calls based on a geographic location for the origin of the call **without** transmitting information about the caller’s precise location.” This is in contrast to “geolocation” which is used in routing 911 calls and provides more precise location information so that first responders can be dispatched quickly to respond to life threatening medical emergencies. Geolocation is not used or available for 988 contacts.

Currently, georouting is only available for calls to 988, although SAMHSA and the FCC are exploring georouting for texts to 988.

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 centers are connected to a national back-up network that can answer contacts when a

local center does not have the capacity to do so. 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 local center capacity, but also related crisis services, like mobile crisis teams, which provide an alternative to law enforcement response, 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 ensure there is a crisis system that supports 988 help seekers in your community depends on advocates like 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](#) to help meet increased contact 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.](#)

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.

I'm undocumented—is my communication confidential?

Your immigration status is not required information to receive help from 988. 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, and 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 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 you, assess your needs, provide support, help de-escalate the crisis, and connect you to mental health resources as needed and available. For most contacts to 988, no in-person response is needed or dispatched.

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 will 911 be connected to 988?

Crisis centers within the 988 Lifeline have policies in place that guide how a center might contact 911 if it is necessary to dispatch an in-person response to save someone's life. Please see the [988 Lifeline 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 support interactions 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?

For the vast majority of help seekers, contacting 988 is the primary intervention and no in-person response is needed. The goal of 988 is to provide the most appropriate, least restrictive response.

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 contacts 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 agency, or department of human services to learn more. You can also reach out proactively to your local crisis contact center, or the nearest center that is part of the 988 Lifeline network. In addition to asking about resources, you can inquire about their policies for engaging law enforcement or whether there is a non-law enforcement option in your community.

What does imminent risk mean?

"Imminent risk" is a term used by the 988 Lifeline and is defined in the [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Suicide Safety Policy](#). This policy defines the term 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 help seeker and a series of questions that are asked to determine the risk of the person. If the crisis counselor believes that the help seeker 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?

Contacts to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, and the information shared by help seekers, are confidential. However, if during an interaction, 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 counselor will engage the help seeker to voluntarily provide their location, so the information can be passed on to 911. But if specific location information is not given, the 988 contact center may provide what available information they have to 911 that is critical to saving the help seeker'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](#)