



Jesse Brown VA Medical Center *News and Announcements*

Suicide, a word we hear mainly in whispers. It is rarely spoken about in mainstream media, unless it's connected to celebrity. Almost 1 million people make a suicide attempt every year. One suicide is one to many so we the VA constantly promotes resources to keep them top of mind when you or a loved one needs them.

Talking about suicide does not make a person become suicidal, but talking about it to someone who may be secretly suicidal, can save their life. **Operation S.A.V.E** or simply S.A.V.E. is a training offered to veterans, staff and the community. It covers the

Signs of suicidal thinking, such as expressed hopelessness, anxiety, agitation or irritability, rage or anger, engaging in risky activities, increase in alcohol or substance use, social isolation and withdrawal from family and friends, giving away prized possessions and spending sprees or calling or texting friends or posting on social media to say good-bye and talking about or looking up ways to die.

Asking the most important question of all, "Are you thinking of suicide?", "Do you have a plan to end your life?" or "Are you thinking about killing yourself?", in a direct and compassionate manner.

Validating the veterans experience by talking openly about suicide, being willing to listen, not passing judgement and recognizing that the situation is serious.

Encouraging and **E**xpediting getting help. Don't keep the veteran's suicidal behavior a secret, do not leave him or her alone, try to get the person to seek immediate help from his or her doctor or the nearest emergency room, call 911 and reassure the veteran that help is available.

S.A.V.E is intended to educate our veterans to what to look for in their fellow veterans and battle buddies, to help us reduce and eventually eliminate veteran suicide. Veterans are the first line of defense in the effort to eliminate veteran suicide. S.A.V.E. training teaches veterans to recognize when another veteran may be at risk. It teaches them ways of approaching this uncomfortable topic with confidence and compassion, how to handle their own fears and feelings about suicide and how to express to others that most of the underlying issues that lead to the development of suicidal thoughts and feelings are treatable or solvable.

In addition, S.A.V.E. training includes education about risk factors associated with the development of suicidal thinking, in the civilian population and those unique to veterans and service members, such as recent losses, health or legal problems, few social supports, frequent or lengthy deployments, exposure to extreme stress, physical or sexual assault and service

related injuries. The concept of "means safety" is introduced and techniques for limiting risk and access to lethal means are discussed. **Never** negotiate with someone who has a gun, get to safety and call 911. If the veteran has taken pills, cut themselves or done harm to themselves in some way, call 911. Remember, the Veterans Crisis Hotline 1-800-273-8255, press 1, is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to help!