

Common Crisis Center Questions Regarding 988

Now that the name has changed from ‘National Suicide Prevention Lifeline’, what is the new, official title of the line?

The official title of the service is “988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.” Acceptable ways to refer to the service when handling Lifeline conversations are:

- “988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline” (full name)
- “988 Lifeline” (preferred short name)
- “Lifeline”
- “988”

What is important to share when people ask what 988 is?

Beginning July 16, 2022, 988 will be the new three-digit dialing code connecting people to the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, where compassionate, accessible care and support is available for anyone experiencing mental health-related distress—whether that is thoughts of suicide, mental health or substance use crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress. People can also dial 988 if they are worried about a loved one who may need crisis support.

988 is not a new service, but instead builds and expands upon the existing service of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, funded by SAMHSA, and administered by Vibrant Emotional Health, which has been in operation since 2005.

Moving to 988 does not mean the 1-800-273-8255 number goes away. After July 16, 2022, using either number will get people to the same services. In the end, 988 is an easier-to-remember way to access a strengthened and expanded network of crisis call centers.

How is 988 different from the Lifeline?

988 is not a new service, but instead builds and expands upon the existing service of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, which has been in operation since 2005. The new, shorter, 988 phone number will make it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services. (The current Lifeline 10-digit number will continue to function.) Like the national Suicide prevention Lifeline, 988 Lifeline responds 24/7 to calls, chats or texts from anyone who needs support for suicidal, mental health, and/or substance use crisis, and connects those in need with trained crisis counselors.

How is 988 different from 911?

988 was established to improve access to crisis services in a way that meets our country’s growing suicide and mental health-related crisis care needs. 988 will provide easier access to the Lifeline network and related crisis resources, which are distinct from the public safety purposes of 911 (where the focus is on dispatching Emergency Medical Services, fire and police as needed)

The 988 and 911 systems will need to be closely coordinated to seamlessly allow referral of callers for appropriate care or response that addresses the unique circumstances present with

each crisis encounter. SAMHSA is actively engaged with 911 counterparts at the federal, state, and local levels to plan for smooth coordination between the two services.

How do we answer when we pick up the line? Do we say “988, [Name] speaking”?

Acceptable greeting options/variations include variations and combinations on the following:

- “This is the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, how may I help you?”
- “988 Lifeline, may I help you?”
- “You’ve reached 988, may I help you?”
- “Lifeline, may I help you?”

Greetings may also include the crisis counselor giving their name. For example:

- “This is the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, Katie speaking, how may I help you?”
- “You’ve reached 988 Lifeline, this is Katie, how may I help you?”

When making follow-up and outreach calls, identify yourself as calling from:

- “988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline”
- “988 Lifeline”
- “988”
- “Lifeline”

Should call responders continue to ask questions about suicide when answering calls from 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline?

Yes, the expectation will not change - all callers/chatters/texters must be asked about suicide. Our updated Suicide Safety Policy will be released before the end of the month which will come with moderate changes to the wording of prompt questions but the importance of asking all about thoughts of suicide will remain the same.

Will 1-800-273-TALK stop taking calls when the switch to 988 occurs?

Callers can continue to access the Suicide Prevention Lifeline by dialing 1-800-273-8255. 988 is a three-digit number providing access to the hotline in addition to its original 10-digit number.

Will we be able to tell if the caller dialed 988 or NSPL?

Responders will not be able to see if a call is coming through 988, as calls will route through the 1-800-273-8255 number, and will come into centers in exactly the same way they have previously. Responders will be able to see when an SMS is coming from 988.

Will crisis centers receive the total number of calls and answer rate?

The state and center level reporting that currently goes out and shows this information will continue. As noted on those reports, center level reporting will vary somewhat from what centers see in their own reporting due to the different points of view of the national routing data, and the piece of that picture each center sees. Vibrant is working with States and centers to minimize differences within acceptable ranges and to troubleshoot areas of concern.

When making follow up/outreach calls what number should we dial out on? Should we block the number when we make outreach/follow up calls?

Generally, it’s best to dial out from an internal number to your center. If you can establish an outbound number that can also be identified when receiving an inbound call as related to the Lifeline it would be even better practice. If you cannot, staff should be trained about how to respond to inbound calls related to Lifeline follow-up and explain the center’s relationship to the Lifeline.

What should we do if a member of the media calls, texts, or chats the line and identifies themselves as such

If a member of the media reaches a responder seeking information about 988, the following steps are recommended:

- The responder should first let the member of the media know that for questions related to 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, they should reach out to the Vibrant Communications team through communications@vibrant.org
 - The call responder should take down appropriate information relating to the call (time, day, caller details) if they wish to let Vibrant know about this occurrence, and then email the communications email above
- If the reporter says they are just calling to understand how the line works, a responder may direct them to this page of the Lifeline website: <https://988lifeline.org/talk-to-someone-now>
- If the reporter is persistent in asking questions, we suggest asking a supervisor for support.

Will people “test call” the line, and will I be able to know?

We know from past experience when the media has covered the Lifeline that test calls, texts, and chats may occur. You will not be able to tell if someone is performing a test call from the media or stakeholders, or for their own information, and should treat each call with the same care and expertise you bring to all your work. If you do identify a test call, please follow the same protocol as above for reporters with questions.

A reminder that test conversations/media conversations are different from third party requests for assistance - make sure to follow Lifeline guidance on handling conversations from people calling concerned about a family member or friend.

What if I have other questions related to the number transition?

This is an ongoing dialogue between us, so we'd love to hear from you if there are questions related to the transition that we have not yet answered for you. Please email us at Lifelineinfo@vibrant.org and we will be able to update this list next week.