



What to Say to a Struggling Veteran.

You might say:

To validate emotional pain:

- “You’ve been struggling a lot lately.”
- “You’ve had a hard go of it.”
- “It takes a lot to go through what you’ve been through.”
- “You’ve endured a lot.”
- “I would guess you’re pretty weary with all that has happened.”
- “Tell me about the difficulties you’ve been having.”
- “Of all these difficulties, what is the hardest for you to deal with?”

**Are you a Veteran Champion?
Be a part of the win!**

To allow a safe place for tears:

- “It’s okay to cry.”
- “Your tears are safe here.”
- “Don’t choke down your tears. When you feel the lump in your throat, let them out through your tears.”

Things NOT to say. Platitudes minimize feelings.

- “Count your blessings.”
- “You’ve got to look on the bright side.”
- “God never gives you more than you can handle.”
- “Something good will come out of this.”
- “You were just following orders.”

Veterans’ struggles may include thoughts of suicide.

Demonstrations of these behaviors requires immediate attention:

- Searching for ways to kill him or herself
- Talking about death, dying or suicide; you may hear:
 - “I can’t go on like this.”
 - “No one can help me.”
 - “My family would be better off if I wasn’t here.”
- Self-destructive behavior such as increasing drug/alcohol abuse, unsafe use of weapons, etc
- Exhibits extreme emotional outbursts (loud crying, yelling)

DO NOT leave this struggling Veteran alone!

If you do not see the behaviors above, *you might say:*

Are you thinking about killing yourself?

Start a conversation to help him/her open up.

- “When did you first start feeling like this?”
- “Did something happen that made you begin to feel this way?”

Simple and encouraging feedback goes a long way to show support and encourage help-seeking.

- “You’re not alone, even if you feel like you are. I’m here for you, and I want to help you in any way I can.”
- “It may not seem possible right now, but the way you’re feeling will change.”
- “I might not be able to understand exactly what you’re going through or how you feel, but I care about you and want to help.”

Things NOT to say:

- “How could you do that to yourself?”
- “What is wrong with you?”

Veteran Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255, Press 1, Text 838255 or VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat

Call if the Veteran has any of these warning signs:

- Hopelessness, feeling like there is no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, mood swings
- Feeling like there is no reason to live
- Rage or anger
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking
- Increasing alcohol or drug abuse
- Withdrawing from family and friends

Sources:

- <https://www.wsj.com/articles/can-suicide-be-prevented-11547908212>
- <https://opuspeace.org/>
- https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/
- <https://mha.ohio.gov/Prevention/Suicide-Prevention/Ohios-Suicide-Prevention-Plan>
- https://mha.ohio.gov/Portals/0/assets/Treatment/SuicidePrevention/MHAS_Suicide_Prevention_Veterans_FNL.pdf
- <https://vanguardveteran.com/soul-injury/>

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