

SAFETY NOTES

Dial 9-8-8 for mental health crisis

New 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline emergency call center helps people in distress

As of July 16, 2022, all calls and text messages to 9-8-8 route to a 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline call center. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline provides 24/7 confidential support to people in suicidal crisis or mental health-related distress.

The current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is still available by calling 1-800-273-8255, but experts say the new three-digit code will be easier to remember during mental health emergencies.

WHAT IS THE 988 HOTLINE?

The new three-digit code is a direct line for people experiencing mental health distress to seek help from trained counselors. The hotline is staffed 24/7, allowing people to seek help at any time.

The new dialing code 988 routes callers to the same service, but it will be easier to remember than the original phone number, said Margie Wright, executive director of the Suicide and Crisis Center of North Texas.

WHY IS A NEW NUMBER NEEDED?

People might find it difficult to remember a 1-800 number when they're experiencing mental health distress, Wright said.

The new 988 code is easy to associate with 911 and 211, the social service hotline.

WHO CAN CALL THE NEW HOTLINE?

Anyone in the U.S. who needs mental health support or who is with someone in mental health distress can call or text the number to seek help. They do not need to be in danger of suicide to reach out to the lifeline. The same is true of the preexisting 1-800 number.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I USE THE HOTLINE?

When people call, text or contact the hotline service via chat, they will be connected to trained counselors who are part of the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network, according to the Lifeline website. The network is made up of about 200 local crisis centers, and callers will usually be connected to the center closest to where they're calling from, Garcia said.

ZERO IS POSSIBLE

City of Houston Safety Program

ZERO IS POSSIBLE

City of Houston Safety Program

When people connect with the 24-hour service, the counselors will listen, provide support and connect callers to additional mental health resources if necessary.

HOW WILL THE NEW NUMBER INCREASE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES?

Many people often call 911 when they need mental health support because they can't remember the 1-800 Lifeline number.

But police officers aren't always trained to deal with mental health crises and can't be expected to provide the proper support during those situations.

It was noted that many communities, especially among people of color, won't call 911 when experiencing mental health distress because they might not have good relationships with police. And if they didn't have the 1-800 number memorized, they would have no one to turn to for help.