

Frequently Asked Questions about 988

1. What phone numbers can I call if I or someone I know is in a crisis or needs mental health services?

The [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) offers 24/7 call, text and chat access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing suicidal, mental health crisis, substance use crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress. People can also dial 988 if they are worried about someone else who may need crisis support.

The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) 24/7 Help Line at **800-854-7771** is available for mental health service referrals. The Help Line also provides emotional support with trained active listeners as well as a Veteran Line to connect with our veteran programs.

2. When should I call 988 versus the LACDMH Help Line (800-854-7771)?

Contact 988 through phone, text or chat if you or someone else needs mental health/substance use crisis support. Contact the LACDMH Help Line if you simply need a referral for mental health services or general information about mental health services. No matter which phone number you call, the trained staff answering the phone will ensure that you get the help that you need.

3. Are 988 and the Lifeline the same?

Yes. 988 is the easy-to-remember number that reaches what is commonly referred to as the Lifeline—a network of more than 200 state and local call centers funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through the Substance Abuse Administration and administered by Vibrant Emotional Health. Formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, the full name has changed to the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

4. Does the 1-800-273-8255 (Suicide Prevention Lifeline) number still work?

Yes. Using either number will get people to the same services. Ultimately, 988 is an easier-to-remember way to access a strengthened and expanded network of crisis call centers.

5. Is 988 only for suicide-related crises?

No. 988 services have been expanded from the traditional suicide-related crises of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to include all mental health and substance use related crises as well as the ability to connect the caller to in-person field response by mental health teams.

6. Does using 988 really help?

Yes, numerous studies have shown that most people who call Lifeline (now 988) are significantly more likely to feel less depressed, less suicidal, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful after speaking to a crisis counselor.

7. How quickly can I expect to be connected to a counselor when I call 988?

Within 30 seconds.

8. When I call 988, what other responses can I expect beyond phone, text, or chat counseling?

If needed, the 988 crisis counselor will connect the caller to a trained mental health field response team that will respond in person.

9. When I call 988, will first responders (like the police or Emergency Medical Services) be automatically dispatched?

No. For most calls, trained mental health counselors will be able to handle the call over the phone. However, if it is determined that there is an immediate risk of safety to the caller or to the public, the caller will be connected with first responders.

10. How is 988 different than 911?

988 connects callers with trained mental health counselors instead of law enforcement and emergency medical service personnel. 988 provides 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). Law enforcement and Emergency Medical Services response to a mental health emergency is often not necessary in a mental health emergency. 988 was established to improve and facilitate access to crisis, mental health and emotional services and resources to divert these calls to highly trained mental health counselors in assisting individuals in emotional distress or suicidal crisis.

11. If I contact 988 for help, will I be hospitalized?

All 988 crisis center staff work through active engagement to provide support and assistance for people at risk in the least restrictive setting possible. In fact, most contacts with the Lifeline (now 988) are resolved by phone, text, or chat, in a manner that does not require additional immediate intervention. If a field response is needed, the mental health team will evaluate the situation to keep you safe. Hospitalization may occur.

12. What happens when I call 988?

When calling 988, you will first hear a greeting message while your call is routed.

- If your area code is based in L.A. County, your call will be routed to Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services, the 988 provider in L.A. County.
- If your area code is based outside of L.A. County, the call will be routed to the closest center based upon the area code of the cell phone being used. A counselor may ask a caller for their location in an emergency or to provide local referrals.

Once the call is routed, a trained crisis counselor will answer the phone, listen to you, understand how your problem is affecting you, provide support, and share resources if needed. If you and the trained crisis counselor determine that an in-person field response is needed, the crisis counselor will connect you with a field response by a mental health team. In rare situations, your call may be routed to 911 if there are immediate safety concerns.

13. What happens when I chat via 988?

Chat (English only) is available through the Lifeline's website at 988lifeline.org/chat. People seeking chat services are provided a pre-chat survey before connecting with a counselor, who identifies the main area of concern. If there is a wait to chat with a crisis counselor, a wait-time message will appear. If demand is high, you will be able to access the Lifeline's "helpful resources" while waiting. Once you are connected, a crisis counselor listens to you, works to understand how your problem is affecting you, provides support, and shares resources that may be helpful.

14. What happens when I text 988?

When you text 988, a group of Lifeline crisis centers will respond to your text. This service will expand over the next few years to increase local and state level response. Once you are connected, a crisis counselor listens to

you, works to understand how your problem is affecting you, provides support, and shares resources that may be helpful. Currently, texting is available in English only.

15. What languages will 988 services be available in?

988 services over the phone will be available in English and Spanish. More than 250 additional languages will be available using a third-party interpreter to provide interpretation services. Text and chat services are currently available in English only.

16. Will 988 accommodate those who are hard of hearing or blind?

988 currently serves TTY users either through their preferred relay service or by dialing 711 then 1-800-273-8255. Lifeline also offers services through chat and text. Lifeline is in the process of expanding to video phone service to better serve deaf or hard of hearing individuals seeking help through the Lifeline/988.

17. Can I call 988 for a person who is experiencing homelessness and mental health or substance use issues?

If the person does not appear to be in distress, please continue to use [LA-HOP](#) to make an outreach request for individuals experiencing homelessness who need supportive services or the DMH Help Line for individuals with mental health or substance use issues. If the individual appears to be in distress and may need crisis services, 988 should be called.

18. How can Veterans reach the Veterans Crisis Line?

Veterans, Service Members, and their families can call 988 and press option 1. To learn more, please visit <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/about/what-is-988>. This process is the same as it has been in the past for Veterans; however, it's now simpler with the shortened 988 number.

19. Will my location automatically be known when I call 988?

No. Currently, 988 routes calls by your phone number area code to the

nearest crisis center. This is different from 911, which uses geolocation to identify your physical location.

20. Will my call to 988 be recorded?

The 988 greeting states that calls may be monitored or recorded for quality assurance purposes. Additionally, crisis centers in the Lifeline network may independently use call recordings for training purposes, dependent on the best practices of the center. It's also important to note that people contacting 988 are not required to provide any personal data to receive services. We recognize the importance and the expectation of privacy when a person contacts 988. The network system has several safeguards to address concerns about privacy.

21. How is 988 different than 211?

In most states, the 211 system provides health and social service assistance information and referrals. 988 crisis counselors will provide support for people in suicidal crisis or mental health-related distress in the very moments they need it most.

22. What type of training do 988 crisis counselors receive?

988 currently requires that all network centers adhere to specific standards regarding Suicide Risk Assessment and Imminent Risk interventions. The Lifeline Core Clinical Training, currently under development, will be a self-paced online training that will cover essential skills for crisis counselors who answer calls/chats/texts within the Lifeline network. Additional training is being developed to address the specific needs of populations at higher risk of suicide.

Are 988 crisis counselors trained on cultural competency?

There are ongoing efforts to improve cultural competency training for 988 crisis counselors. Several resources have been put into place to help address this, including updating pages on the Lifeline website and creating specific tools for crisis counselors, such as Spanish-language clinical guidance resources, Deaf and Hard of Hearing best practices for callers/chat visitors, an LGBTQ+ guidance document, an American Indian/Alaskan Native tip sheet and more.

23. Will 988 share information with immigration agencies (e.g., Immigration & Customs Enforcement, Border Patrol, etc.)?

No. 988 is a confidential service, and caller information will not be shared with immigration agencies. Additionally, callers are not required to disclose details about their immigration statuses to receive 988 services.

24. Will chat/text Lifeline services be able to data mine my information/user for their company profit?

No. The Lifeline administrator, Vibrant Emotional Health, is a not-for-profit organization with a primary mission to support emotional wellbeing for all people, and it does not sell Lifeline data.

25. What will be in place to protect data privacy of users of 988?

People contacting 988 are not required to provide any personal data to receive services. We recognize the importance and the expectation of privacy when a person contacts 988. The network system has several safeguards to address concerns about privacy. Any effort to obtain demographic information from those who use 988 will serve three primary purposes: 1) to save lives; 2) to connect people to ongoing supports; and 3) to evaluate system needs and performance, particularly ensuring that gaps and inequities are being addressed.

26. Is 988/Lifeline really a free service?

Yes. The Lifeline responds 24/7 to calls (multiple languages), chats, or texts (English only) from anyone who needs mental health-related, or suicide crisis support and connects them with trained crisis counselors. The support and service received from the crisis counselors are provided at no charge to those who use the service; however, standard data rates from telecommunication mobile carriers may apply to those who text to the Lifeline.