

# Why Is Suicide an Issue for Firefighters?

Each year, between 100 and 200 firefighters commit suicide. According to one study, the suicide rate for firefighters is nearly 50% higher than the suicide rate of the general public. This increased risk of suicide is largely caused by mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, that result from firefighters' experiences on the job. The trauma can be either single events where the risk and stress were especially high, or it can be repeated exposure to stressful or traumatic events.

Studies have found that firefighters develop post-traumatic stress disorder at a rate similar to military service members, with approximately 20 percent of firefighters meeting the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder at some point during their careers. The risk of PTSD for firefighters is nearly three times the risk for the general population.

## Knowing the Signs

A key step to preventing suicide is recognizing the signs that you or someone you know may be considering suicide.

- Talking about feeling trapped or wanting to die
- Expressing feels of hopelessness
- Feeling like there is no reason to live
- Worrying about being a burden to others
- Increasing drug and alcohol use
- Partaking in reckless behavior
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Withdrawing or isolating from others
- Displaying extreme mood swings

## RESOURCES

**Suicide and Crisis Lifeline  
988**

[www.988lifeline.org/](http://www.988lifeline.org/)

**Firefighter Behavioral  
Health Alliance**

[www.ffbha.org/](http://www.ffbha.org/)

*in the know*

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# FIREFIGHTERS AND SUICIDE



**Rescue Others,  
Rescue Yourself**

# How to Help Yourself

If you are considering suicide or are displaying the signs of considering suicide, there are resources available to help you. You can call or text the the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988, or you can chat at 988lifeline.org. Confidential support is available 24/7 for everyone.

There are also organizations like the Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance that are specifically designed to help firefighters access the resources and strategies they need to reduce the risk of suicide.

Remember that suicide is preventable. There are steps you can take to reduce your risk of suicide.

- Talk to someone. Talking about how you are feeling could alleviate some of your distress. You might want to talk to someone close to you. Another option is for you to call 988 and speak to volunteers who have been trained to listen and help.
- See a mental health professional. They can provide you with a range of coping strategies, interventions, and support.

- Stay connected. Having a community of supporters reduces your feelings of isolation, and they can be there to listen when you need them.
- Be physically active. Exercise can reduce stress, improve sleep, and lead to greater social connections. All of these factors reduce your risk of suicide.
- Avoid substance use. Drugs can create mental highs and lows that worsen suicidal thoughts.
- Refrain from excessive alcohol consumption. More than 1 in 3 people who die from suicide are under the influence of alcohol at the time of death.
- Limit your access to lethal means, such as firearms.



# How to Help Others

If a friend, loved one, or colleague has talked about suicide or is displaying signs of being at risk for suicide, there are things you can do to help. Always remember that when someone tells you that they are suicidal, take them seriously.

- If you feel comfortable doing so, ask someone if they are feeling suicidal. Research shows that talking openly to someone about suicide does not increase their risk of suicide.
- Try to use clear and direct language, for example, "I care a lot about you, do you feel suicidal?"
- Listen. People with lived experience of suicide highlight how helpful it is to have someone to talk to who listens. It is not about coming up with solutions, but about listening to the person and helping them explore options for seeking help and safety.
- Encourage them to get help. You can support the person by being there for them when they call a helpline or make an appointment with a health professional.

# What Is at Stake?

Suicide and suicide attempts cause serious emotional and physical impacts. People who attempt suicide and survive may experience serious injuries that can have long-term effects on their health. They may also experience depression and other mental health concerns.

Suicide and suicide attempts affect the health and well-being of ones friends, loved ones, co-workers, and community. When people die by suicide, their surviving family and friends may experience prolonged grief, shock, anger, guilt, symptoms of depression or anxiety, and even thoughts of suicide themselves.

