

## Making the Switch to 988!

By Bridget Britton, Behavioral Health Field Specialist

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline has been in existence since 2005. The Lifeline has been an invaluable resource for people to use in a suicide crisis situation, and now a new initiative has made it even easier for people to connect with trained counselors in times of distress. Anyone in the United States can now call or text 988 to reach the Lifeline when they are in a state of emotional distress, having thoughts of suicide, having thoughts of harming others, or having substance use concerns.

In addition to the new, easy-to-remember number, the Lifeline has expanded the services it offers. Traditionally, the Lifeline primarily focused on supporting individuals experiencing a suicide crisis situation. It now also offers support for someone who would like to talk through the distress they are experiencing related to anxiety, depression, or substance use.



Just as when people called the Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (which will continue to remain in service), a person who calls or texts 988 will be linked to a trained professional such as a counselor, therapist, or social worker for support. These counselors are trained to reduce the stress of the challenge or crisis, provide emotional support, and link the caller to services in their local area for additional assistance. Research has shown that most calls to the Lifeline can be managed or resolved over the phone.

Help us break down the stigma of receiving support by promoting 988! There is no shame in seeking out support.

Here is a list of common signs a person may need to talk with a mental health professional:

- New or unusual fatigue
- Increased irritability
- Depression lasted more than 2 weeks
- Social isolation
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- Thoughts of suicide or self-harm
- Difficulty following through with tasks at work or school

Most of these signs are compounded on top of each other and last for several weeks.

The switch to the new 988 number has been a work in progress for several years, and it will take some time to spread the word within our communities. You can help spread the word today by sharing this information on your personal or professional social media pages, or by visiting <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/partner-toolkit> to find resources that can be shared at locations throughout your community.