

988 is Here!

What is 988 and How is it Different from Other Three-Digit Hotlines?

988 connects the public to mental health crisis counselors who are part of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network. It was made available across the country on July 16, 2022.

When should I call 988?

Call, text, or chat 988 when you'd like emotional support, are thinking about suicide, or are worried about a friend or loved one.

People call to talk about lots of things: substance use, depression, emotional distress, anxiety, stress caused by financial worries, relationships, sexual identity, abuse, mental and physical illness, and loneliness, to name a few.

What happens when I contact 988?

Crisis counselors will listen to you, provide support, and connect you to resources if necessary.

- Spanish-speaking counselors
- Translation and interpretation services
- Services for Veterans

How is it different from 911?

911 connects the public to emergency services. If you need an ambulance, police, fire, or another emergency response, this is still the number to dial.

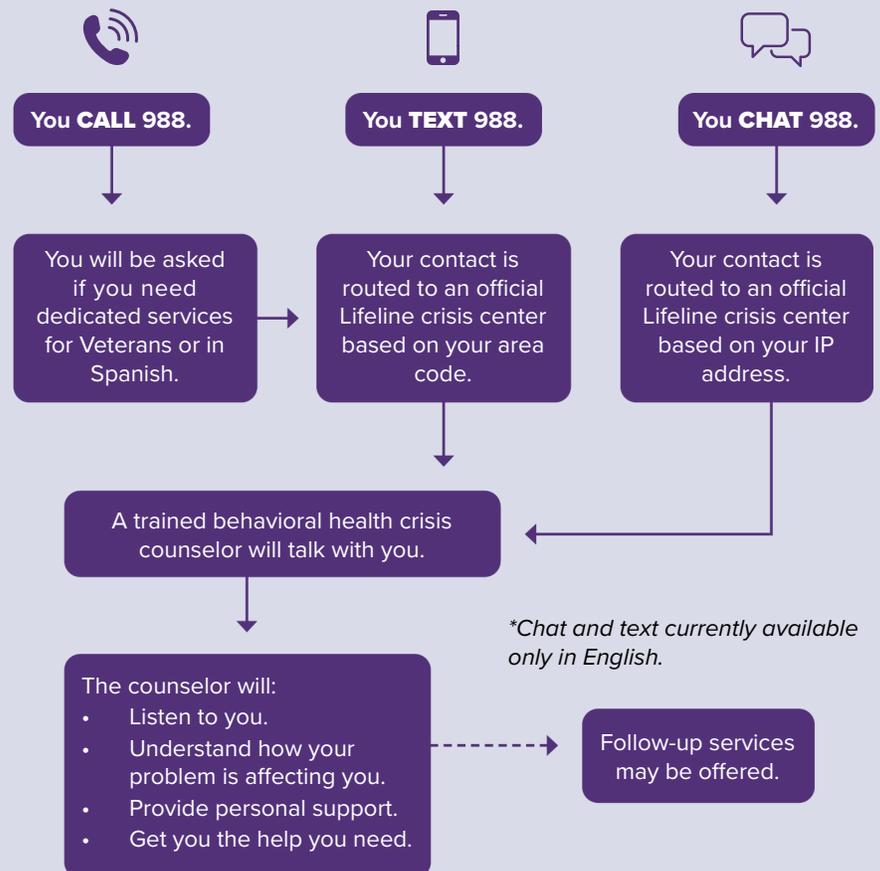
How is it different from 311?

311 is New York City's non-emergency phone number to find information about services, make complaints, or report problems like graffiti or road damage. It's also Orange County's crisis line number.

How is it different from 211?

211 is the non-emergency number for finding community resources, such as food banks and shelters.

What Happens When I Contact 988?



Action Corner

How do **YOU** play a role? Look in this corner every newsletter to learn how you can take action and be involved in the implementation of 988.

THIS MONTH'S TASK: Start the Conversation About 988

Start talking to the people in your community about 988! Here are some ways you can start the conversation:

- Share this newsletter with other people in your community.
- Encourage people to sign up for the 988 Updates and Education list serv.
- If you are a provider, start talking to the individuals you work with about 988.
- Change your office's mental health resources to include 988 as an emergency resource for mental health crises instead of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 10-digit number.

An Interview With a 988 Crisis Center Director

Cheryl Giarrusso is the Director of Crisis Services at Contact Community Services (Contact) in Syracuse, NY. She and her team worked hard to prepare for the switch to 988 this summer. Contact is one of 13 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) crisis centers in New York that made the switch to 988 on July 16, 2022.

“988 will help folks who are struggling, in crisis, or just need to connect. **It’s such an easy number to remember**, which means more people will use it,” Giarrusso says.

Contact is the primary NSPL crisis center for several New York counties. They received about **15,000 NSPL calls in 2020**. Giarrusso says the organization expects a **30% increase in calls** during the first year of 988.

To prepare for 988, Giarrusso worked to increase staff, improve training, and strengthen follow-up services.

Training and Community Connections

Contact’s counselors receive training focused on active listening. This is an essential skill for answering crisis calls. “When someone doesn’t feel prepared to respond to a crisis call, they may switch into ‘question mode.’ That isn’t always what a caller wants,” Giarrusso explains. “Problem-solving isn’t always the best response to someone in crisis. **People want to tell their story to someone who will just listen and won’t judge them.**”

Contact has also built strong connections to care in the communities that they serve. This helps crisis counselors connect callers to the services they might need for ongoing support.

Contact has been working with local governments and 911 agencies to prepare for 988’s launch, too. Counselors from Contact will be physically located in 911 dispatch centers to make the transition easier. They will **help 911 operators identify which callers may prefer talking with a trained mental health counselor**. Eventually, Giarrusso wants to divert all these calls once Contact has more staff.



Staff and Wellness

So, who are the people answering the phone at Contact? Counselors include licensed behavioral health professionals, master’s level staff, graduate students, and people with bachelor’s degrees. **Every counselor completes over 100 hours of training before responding to calls on their own.** Contact is also developing a peer program so certified peer specialists can answer calls as well.



Staff wellness at Contact matters, too. Giarrusso requires all her workers to develop their own safety plan that outlines their personal signs of stress. The plan helps supervisors and staff know when it’s time to take a break. Contact’s offices are also filled with signs that encourage workers to ‘Take 250.’ Giarrusso says, “If it’s time for a counselor to walk away from their desk, we urge them take 250 steps to clear their head.” The organization also offers a quiet room with a couch, chair, and low lighting where staff can go to relax.

Giarrusso says **the work can be stressful, but it’s fulfilling** for her and her team.

“People really feel good knowing they made a connection and were able help someone using active listening,” she reflects. “People feel good about doing that. They’re happy that they came in and picked up the phone.”

Contact Community Services has been a provider of the NSPL since 2010.

Need this Translated?

Español 中文 Русский বাংলা শ্রীলঙ্কা 한국어 العربي Kreyòl ayisyen Italiano Polski