

988 Lifeline Enters Its Fourth Year as Demand Grows

September is Suicide Prevention Month, and this year's observance comes as the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (Lifeline) marks its fourth anniversary, with usage climbing steadily. The three-digit number gives anyone a free, easy way to reach crisis counselors by phone, text, or chat, connecting callers to a network of over 200 local and state-funded crisis call centers.

New figures show just how much that need has grown. Since its 2022 launch, the 988 Lifeline has logged 23.3 million total contacts, including 15.8 million calls, 4.2 million texts, and 3.4 million chats. Monthly volume has topped 600,000 contacts consistently over the past year, sometimes nearing or exceeding 700,000, more than double the roughly 277,000 monthly contacts recorded just before the three-digit dialing code launched. Compared with a year ago, demand is up 15%, and nearly 50% higher than two years ago.

Local response has also improved. As of May 2026, 26 states answered at least 90% of their 988 calls in-state, up from only eight states before launch, meaning more callers reach counselors familiar with nearby resources rather than being routed to national backup centers.

There are encouraging signs in the outcomes data, too. Suicide deaths declined modestly in 2024 and stayed relatively stable in provisional 2025 figures, with one study finding suicide deaths among people ages 15 to 34 running about 11% lower than expected had 988 never launched. However, sustained funding and staffing shortages at call centers remain concerns as demand continues to rise.

988 Lifeline offers voice, text, and chat options in English and Spanish. Call or text 988 or visit 988lifeline.org if you or someone you know is experiencing mental health struggles, emotional distress, or alcohol or drug use concerns. Help is one call, text, or chat away.

Mental Health Benefits of Reading

Curling up with a good book is more than a cozy hobby; it's a genuine workout for your mind and emotions. In fact, researchers continue to uncover the advantages of being a habitual reader. Studies have found that reading offers several benefits, such as the following:

- **Strengthens your brain**—Over time, regular reading may actually reshape brain structure, strengthening the neural pathways tied to memory, focus, and comprehension.
- **Builds emotional resilience**—Books can stir the full range of feelings, from happiness and surprise to sadness, fear, and anger. Experiencing that emotional range can help build resilience and improve one's ability to cope with difficult situations.
- **Sharpens empathy**—Reading literary fiction has been shown to improve your ability to sense what others are thinking and feeling, even when it differs from your own. This skill can carry over into real relationships.
- **Relieves stress**—Losing yourself in a good book can help reduce stress by lowering cortisol, blood pressure, and heart rate. Many people build this into a bedtime ritual to help the body wind down and sleep better.
- **Improves focus and attention span**—Reading can help train the brain to sustain attention on a single thread for an extended stretch. That practice in prolonged focus can carry over into work, conversations, and other areas of life that demand concentration.
- **Eases feelings of loneliness**—Getting lost in a story can offer a sense of companionship without the pressure of social interaction. For people navigating isolation, books can provide comfort, connection, and a reminder that others have felt what they're feeling.

Making reading a daily habit can yield many cognitive and emotional benefits. For further guidance, contact a mental health professional.

DO YOU HAVE HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

High blood pressure can cause heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, blindness, and even lead to death.

Luckily, high blood pressure is easy to identify through screening, and relatively easy to treat. Experts recommend that adults over the age of 18 get screened periodically for high blood pressure. If you haven't been screened lately, talk to your doctor about it.

If you have high blood pressure:

- Make sure you follow up with your doctor to develop a treatment plan. Not addressing high blood pressure can lead to the serious health issues listed above.
- If your doctor prescribes medication, take it according to your doctor's instructions.
- Work on lifestyle changes, such as eating healthier, being physically active, reducing stress, and stopping tobacco use. Developing these healthy habits can help you lower your high blood pressure.

Even if you don't have high blood pressure now, it's important to continue getting screened periodically and strive to **lower your risk factors**. That means eating nutritiously, getting regular physical activity, lowering your stress level, and quitting smoking.

