

K-State Research and Extension News for September, 2022

Help & Hope is Closer Than You Think

Submitted by Kathy Goul, Family & Consumer Science Agent

Our immediate response to someone in a medical crisis is to call 911. This nationwide emergency response system has helped save countless lives since its inception, linking callers to emergency responders on the other end of the line. The simple, 3-digit number connects us to a network that routes us to the help that is needed, saving us from having to search for the phone number of the nearest hospital, police department or fire department during our time of need.

So what if a 3-digit system could be put in place to offer help and hope to those experiencing suicidal thoughts, a substance use crisis or mental health-related distress? Could this type of system make it easier to reach out and be connected to trained individuals who can help us during our time of need? Absolutely! Today, help and hope is closer than you think.

Starting July 15, 2022 the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline began operating under the 988 dialing code. This simple, 3-digit number offers around-the-clock access to trained crisis counselors who can help the caller, or a loved one who may need crisis support. In addition to accepting calls, the 988 Lifeline is also set up to respond via text messages for those who prefer this form of communication. [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org) also gives people the option to chat with trained crisis counselors, if they prefer. Having several methods of communication pairing those in need with a trained professional is a tremendous step in beginning to address the mental health and wellness needs in our country.

Too many people are experiencing suicidal crisis or mental health-related distress without the support and care they need. Sadly, the pandemic only made a bad situation worse. Urgent realities are driving the need for crisis service transformation. In 2020 alone, the U.S. had one death by suicide every 11 minutes. For people aged 10-34 years, suicide is a leading cause of death. In the period of just one year, from April 2020 to 2021, more than 100,000 individuals died from drug overdoses. Behind each of these numbers, there are people, families and communities who have been impacted. Yet, in the face of these urgent realities, hope is here.

The 988 dialing code operates through what was formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. It is a network of over 200 locally operated and funded crisis centers around the country. The 988 Lifeline helps thousands of struggling people overcome suicidal crisis or mental-health related distress every day. This system can be accessed through every land line, cell phone carrier and voice-over internet device and is available free of charge. Services provided are free and confidential.

Numerous studies have shown that most callers are significantly more likely to feel less depressed, less suicidal, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful after speaking to a 988 Lifeline crisis counselor.

September is National Suicide Prevention Month. I challenge you to help spread the word about the 988 Lifeline. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA.gov) has materials available online to help us share information about the 988 Lifeline. If you are on social media, there are “shareables” that you can download to use. Posters and fact sheets are available for you to share with community organizations, in the workplace or at your place of worship.

Our call to action simple. Help spread the word about the 988 Lifeline. Three simple numbers can bring help and hope to someone who is feeling helpless and alone, with no one to turn to. Three simple numbers can be the difference between life and death.

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. For more information, visit samhsa.gov. To reach K-State Research & Extension Marais des Cygnes Extension District offices, please call Paola (913-294-4306) or Mound City (913-795-2829), write to kgoul@ksu.edu or check out our website: www.maraisdescyignes.k-state.edu.