

### S.A.V.E., Q.P.R., R U OK?

Many of us look forward to the winter holiday season – traveling, spending time with loved ones, decorating and gift-giving, hosting or attending celebrations and parties, making and sharing our favorite holiday foods and beverages, and making time to remember and celebrate the reasons for these holidays.

But, for many, the holiday season can also be stressful, lonely or sad. We may be affected by the short days and lack of sunlight, which causes Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) in about 1 in every 10 of us. We may be away from family or a family member may be away from us. We may have lost a loved one. We may over-commit ourselves. We may be trying to reintegrate into civilian life after being deployed. We may be anxious about the increased social demands or financial pressures. Sometimes the additional stress can be more than a person thinks they can bear.

Suicide is a national concern and a concern here in Nebraska. Recent data gathered in the South Heartland health district tells us that there is a need for us to reach out. Too many 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders (35% or 1 in every 3 students) have felt so sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some of their usual activities; 20% have seriously considered attempting suicide; 16% have made a plan about how they would attempt suicide; and 11% have actually attempted suicide.

In Nebraska, the spouses and significant others of veterans are more likely than the general population to report depression and frequent mental distress. In addition, our veterans are significantly more likely to report binge drinking.

This holiday season, reach out and help a friend, colleague or family member who may be struggling. Learn to recognize the signs that someone is feeling overwhelmed, like there's no way things can get better, and learn how you can help.

What can you do? How about, S.A.V.E, Q.P.R. or asking R U OK? It looks like alphabet soup, but any of these three approaches are good places to start!

#### (1) S.A.V.E

S.A.V.E. is the Veteran's Administration's (VA) suicide prevention education that can help people who work with, live with, or care for Service members Veterans, and military and Veteran families. Janelle Brock, is a suicide prevention outreach and educational specialist with the local VA-Nebraska Western Iowa Healthcare System. She shared with me that S.A.V.E. – which stands for "Signs," "Ask," "Validate," and "Encourage" and Expedite" – offers simple steps that anyone can take when talking with Veterans or anyone who is at risk for suicide.

Janelle recommends that we all learn to recognize these warning signs:

- Hopelessness – feeling like there's no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
- Feeling like there is no reason to live

- Rage or anger
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking
- Increasing alcohol or drug misuse
- Withdrawing from family and friends

If you or a Veteran in your life is feeling depressed, anxious, hopeless, or as if life has no purpose, a next step is to visit the [VeteransCrisisLine.net](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net) to learn about support that is available to you.

Warning signs that require immediate attention include:

- Thinking about hurting yourself or killing yourself
- Looking for ways to kill yourself
- Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- Self-destructive behavior such as drug misuse, carelessly handling weapons, etc.

If you are a Veteran or you know a Veteran who is showing any of these signs, call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/Chat), or text to 838255 today.

## (2) R U OK?

Similarly, the Movember Foundation, a men's health organization, promotes asking "Are you okay?"

"Men sometimes aren't comfortable reaching out, or think it might be a burden for their friends if they talk openly about life's challenges. If a guy you know seems to be going through a tough time, they might not talk about it even if they want to. The first step in looking out for them is reaching out," states the mental health and suicide prevention page of the Movember Foundation's website (<https://us.movember.com/mens-health/we-need-to-ask>).

Reach out by asking "Are you okay?" Then listen, encourage action, and check in.

The MF recommends that before you start a difficult conversation, you should prepare yourself. The website includes tips for each step of the conversation and examples of questions and responses you might use.

## (3) Q.P.R.

Another similar tool to use is Q.P.R. - Question, Persuade, Refer – which are three steps anyone can learn to help prevent suicide. QPR is a practical and proven suicide prevention training. The QPR Institute says "just as people trained in CPR and the Heimlich Maneuver help save thousands of lives each year, people trained in QPR learn how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to question, persuade, and refer someone to help."

The Nebraska Suicide Prevention Hotline is 1-800-273-TALK. Contact the South Heartland District Health Department if your organization or workplace would like to schedule a Q.P.R. training. Contact Janelle Brock if you would like to know more about the S.A.V.E. suicide prevention training or check out the S.A.V.E. online suicide prevention training video at <https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/>. And visit the

Movember Foundation's website: <https://us.movember.com/mens-health/we-need-to-ask>, if you want to learn tips for having difficult conversations.

Do you know someone who may be struggling or hurting? Start the conversation. Reach out, ask the question, encourage and expedite.

*Acknowledgement: The Movember Foundation is a charity that focuses on some of the biggest health issues faced by men worldwide: prostate cancer, testicular cancer, and mental health and suicide prevention. South Heartland District Health Department receives funding originating from the Movember Foundation to work on community supports for mental wellness of our South Heartland veterans, military service men and women, and their families.*

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