

988 Information for the Autism Community

What is 988?

- 988 is a three-digit hotline that offers 24/7 call, text, or online chat options with trained crisis counselors for emotional distress, and/or a suicidal, mental health, or substance abuse crisis.

Who will respond to you if you contact 988?

- A crisis center worker who has been trained to provide crisis supports, but who may or may not understand how to support an autistic person.

Will contacting 988 help you?

- The goal of crisis center workers is to help, but contacting 988 is not always helpful for autistic people. One thing to remember is that 988 is not an autism-specific resource, which means that some of the questions or information shared may seem irrelevant.
- Contacting 988 may be helpful one time and then not the next, or vice versa. It depends on the knowledge and experience of the crisis center worker who answers.

When do you contact 988?

- You can contact 988 when you feel you are in crisis.

How do you access 988?

- Call 988
- Text 988
- Online Chat 988 (988lifeline.org/chat)

What are some reasons to reach out for support?

Emotional distress - negative emotions that impact your life.

Substance use - legal or illegal substances that are having a negative impact on your life.

Suicidal ideation - thoughts or ideas about wanting to die.

Suicidal intent / plan - a purposeful decision to die by suicide, which may include a definite plan.

Mental health crisis - a situation where your actions, emotions, or thoughts put you or others at risk of harm.

Sensory overwhelm - an intense sensory onslaught that overwhelms your ability to regulate and cope.

Challenging relationship interactions – negative interactions causing distress. Autistic people may have difficulty understanding social cues, non-verbal language, and figurative speech of non-autistic people, and non-autistic people may not understand the literal, blunt honesty, and flat affect of autistic people, resulting in relationship challenges.

What happens if you say you are suicidal?

- Suicidal thoughts can be distressing to experience, but do not always suggest that someone is in significant danger. The 988 counselors will ask you questions to learn more about your suicidal thoughts and safety in order to best help you and connect you to appropriate services.
- If you have an intention/plan to act on your thoughts and there are concerns about your safety, a counselor may suggest ways (e.g., hospitalization) to keep you safe immediately.

What happens when you first contact 988?

- **If you call 988**, you will be prompted to select a specific number if you are a veteran or if you identify as a person from the LGBTQIA+ community; otherwise, you wait for a crisis counselor to join the call. There will be music while you wait.
- **If you text 988**, the initial questions need to be answered to be connected with a crisis counselor. There are no right or wrong answers - just do the best you can.
 - After answering the initial questions, you are asked to complete a survey while you wait for a crisis counselor. The survey is optional, you can be connected with a crisis counselor without completing it.
 - The purpose of the survey is to know more about you and your situation so they can support you better. In order to submit your survey responses, you have to answer questions about your zip code, name/alias, age, gender, and main concerns. Sharing your phone number is optional.
 - **Advice:**
 - Answer the initial questions impartially, using as little emotional energy as possible.
 - Fill out the survey if you have the energy and feel safe doing so.
- **If you chat online with 988**, you will be taken to a webpage where there is information about 988 and a pre-chat survey to fill out before being connected with a crisis counselor. If you'd like to see what the webpage looks like go to: 988lifeline.org/chat

There are answers to frequently asked questions available to help you understand what will happen during a chat discussion with a crisis counselor. (Scroll down at: 988lifeline.org/chat)

You may have to wait to be connected.

- Wait times are common. Remain on the phone or text/message thread and a crisis counselor will join.
- There can also be wait times during your conversation with the crisis counselor; they may not respond to you immediately.
- Wait times occur for a variety of reasons, none of which are personal. Wait times do not mean that your difficulties are not important or that counselors do not want to help you.

What do you want to tell the 988 counselors?

- It is your choice to disclose your autistic identity or not. Depending on the crisis counselor and what they know about autism, disclosing can either help or harm.
- You can share your preferences for communication with the 988 counselor (e.g., concise and direct language, pace/volume of verbal communication).
- Advocating for your communication preferences with a 988 counselor does not guarantee that they will understand and accommodate your requests.
- Ask the counselor to clarify any words or questions you don't understand (e.g., "What does 'feeling blue' mean?").
- See "*What are some reasons to reach out for support?*" section for specific concerns to tell the 988 counselor about.

What happens if you lose contact with 988?

- **If you lose power**, a crisis counselor may reach back out if contact is lost due to a technical issue and it is obvious the person wanted to continue the conversation. In general, crisis counselors want to be respectful to someone choosing to end a call. If the crisis counselor is concerned about a high risk of suicide, they may reach back out.
- **If you suddenly leave the call, text, or chat discussion**, it is unlikely that you will be contacted by the crisis counselor. 988 crisis counselors are trained to be cautious about contacting people who disconnect or hang up during the conversation because they recognize the right of the individual to stop communicating with the crisis counselor for a variety of reasons.
- **If texting with 988 and you type in “Stop”, you will receive two messages:**
 - First: “You replied with the word “stop” which blocks all texts sent from this number. Text back “unstop” or “start” to receive messages again.”
 - Then: “I will not disconnect our conversation. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to us, we are available 24/7 to support you. Have a nice day.”

How do you end the call, text, or chat?

- You can end the call/text/chat at any point.
- You can say/write:
 - *“Right now I am going to end the call/text, but if I feel I need this service later, I will call/text back.”*

What if the crisis counselor ends the call early?

- This experience may make you feel invalidated.
- You can remind yourself that the crisis counselor is doing a job and it’s not personal.
- You can contact 988 again if you want to seek more support.
- Chances are high you will get a different crisis counselor.

What if the call/text doesn’t go as planned? What if it makes you feel worse?

- Not every communication with 988 will be helpful for autistic people in crisis. Many autistic people have reported negative experiences with 988. If the contact makes you feel worse, you are not alone.
- If you do not feel better after your communication with 988, try to understand what you were hoping to get from contacting 988. For example, were you hoping to feel connection with another person, get resources, or be distracted?
- If you want to feel connection with another person, you could try contacting someone else. Call/text a supportive friend or family member.

How can you give 988 feedback about your experience?

- If you’d like to give feedback about your experience, go to: 988lifeline.org/contact-the-lifeline/

To get other **autism-friendly crisis support resources**, visit: <https://www.autismcrisissupport.com/resources>