



CRISIS LINE FACILITATION

FACILITATOR MANUAL

FACILITATOR GUIDE

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ABOUT THIS MANUAL

This manual was developed for use as part of Project CONNECT, a University of Michigan research project partnered with the Michigan Army National Guard.

The materials provided are available within the public domain and do not reflect the views of the Center for Disease Control or the United States government.

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Group-Based Crisis Line Facilitation

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ABOUT THIS MANUAL

This manual is designed to equip National Guard leadership (e.g., chaplains, commanders, officers, non-commissioned officers) to conduct Crisis Line Facilitation (CLF) sessions with National Guard members, providing guidance for both individual and peer support interventions. The importance of soldiers sharing these resources with fellow soldiers, family members, and friends is emphasized. It has three main parts: 1) an Introduction providing essential background for CLF facilitators, 2) a detailed look at the six CLF modules, and 3) an Appendix with more information and basic skills to improve understanding and use.

Key features include:

- **A flexible framework:** Example questions and language help facilitators adapt to each guard unit or individual needs, moving beyond a rigid script to address specific challenges. Italicized examples suggest effective conversation wording.
- **Accessible facilitator tips:** Each module guides facilitators to deepen therapeutic insights, solve common issues, and boost engagement. **Appendix 1** offer foundational skills to assist discussion.
- **A Soldier workbook:** The companion workbook improves session communication and engagement through confidential self-reflection and group participation.
- **Versatile use:** While primarily designed for groups, the manual includes tips for one-on-one adaptation.
- **Multiple options for behavioral rehearsal:** Based on available resources and group size, the manual provides adaptable practice crisis line call components, such as an MVCL demonstration or role-play.



Use of the accompanying Workbook

Soldiers/session attendees should each receive a workbook to accompany this manual. The workbook will contain all the facilitated questions in this manual. Because of the group nature of this intervention, it is advised that most questions first be explored individually in the workbook, followed by an invitation to the group members to share out loud or in a dyad.

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The importance of confidentiality

Confidentiality and the sensitive nature of the discussed information should be addressed at the beginning of the session, with the following in mind:

- Please restate that the session is confidential. Mention that you will keep the information confidential as a facilitator and you also ask that individual attendees keep the group conversation confidential.
- Because attendees may share their own experiences and those of unit members/friends, everyone should refrain from saying names, locations, or any other direct identifiable information.
- Emphasize the use of the workbook to engage with the discussion and reflect on personal experiences.
- The content of this session may cause distress for some people, also some units have experienced death or suicide of members, and this may be helpful to know when you are speaking to a group. **It is advised that as a facilitator, you are aware of your unit's safety procedures for suicide risk and that you know the appropriate resources for where to direct attendees if needed for immediate help.**

Visual Guides

When you see the following icons, you will know to:



Address questions to the entire group.



Direct group to self-reflect in workbook



Recommended Supplies

- Facilitator manual
- Workbooks and pens for each soldier
- Notebook for facilitator note keeping
- Technology if doing the recording option
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An Introduction to Crisis Line Facilitation

Importance of Suicide Prevention in the National Guard

Suicide remains a critical concern for the National Guard. In 2023, the Department of Defense reported 523 service member suicides and 146 family member suicides (93 spouses, 53 dependents). The National Guard's suicide rate was 27.6 per 100,000, significantly higher than the U.S. general population and over twice the rate of similar-aged individuals. This persistent issue within the Guard showed no significant long-term increase or decrease between 2011 and 2022.

Veterans Crisis Line (VCL): A Response

Established in 2007 as the National Veterans Suicide Prevention Hotline, the service evolved into the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) by 2011 and integrated into the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in 2022. Since the 988 launch, VCL calls have increased by 22.7%, highlighting its growing importance.



The VCL offers 24/7 confidential support via call (988, press "1"), text (838255), and online chat for active service members, National Guard and Reserve members, Veterans, and their families. With over 200 local call centers, it connects individuals to mental health and emergency resources. Crucially, it provides a stigma-free space for open discussion and immediate help.

Description of 988 Lifeline Services

Under the umbrella of the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, there are several services that individuals can access; the VCL is one of these services:

Service	Population	Access
988 Lifeline	General population	988
Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) <i>Referred to as the Military Veterans Crisis Line (MVCL) in this manual</i>	Veterans, active service members, and their loved ones	988, then press 1
988 with a Spanish-speaking counselor	Spanish-speakers	988, then press 2

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LGBTQI+ support via 988	LGBTQI+ Youth and Young Adults aged 25 and younger	988, then press 3 or chat/text PRIDE
988 Videophone	Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing People	Clicking on link on webpage https://988lifeline.org/get-help/

Barriers to Crisis Line Use

Suicide prevention remains the VA's top priority. However, many at-risk Veterans and Military personnel do not utilize the Crisis Line during crises. Despite improvements to the 988 Lifeline, barriers persist:

- *Fear of repercussions*: Stigma around mental health in military culture can lead to concerns about discharge or disciplinary action.
- *Mistrust of confidentiality*: Some fear personal information sharing or involuntary hospitalization.
- *Lack of awareness*: Many Guard members may not know about the VCL, its availability to them and their loved ones 24/7/365, or when to seek help.
- *Misconception of cost*: Many are not aware that the VCL is free, and concerns about cost and financial burden can be a deterrent, especially for Guard members who are balancing civilian and military life.



Providing upstream communication to National Guard members about the VCL, while highlighting its benefits, is key to encouraging the utilization of this important resource even prior to the time of crisis (see **Appendix 2** for more information on how to address common barriers to Crisis Line utilization).

About Crisis Line Facilitation

Note: For this manual, we will refer to the Veterans Crisis Line as the Military Veterans Crisis Line (MVCL)

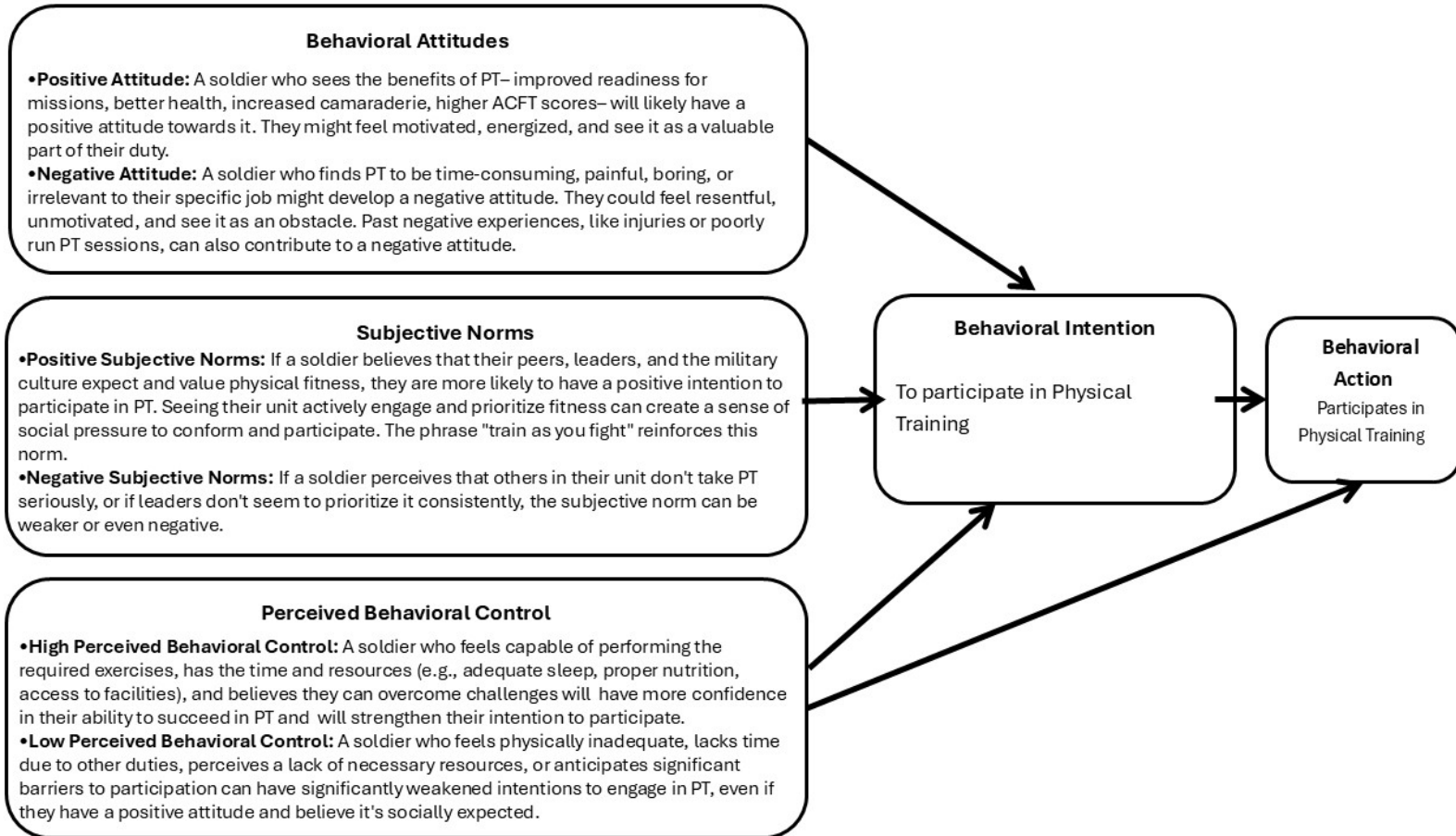
Crisis Line Facilitation (CLF) is designed to help encourage utilization of the MVCL before and/or during times of crisis. **The CLF session incorporates exercises that allow attendees to physically rehearse calling the Crisis Line. This "train as you fight" approach, familiar to Military Guard members, aims to build confidence, create automaticity in their response, and lessen the mental burden should they or someone close to them face a future crisis requiring swift action.**

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CLF is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior¹ and addresses the three core elements of behavior change in this model:

1. *Behavioral Attitudes* (which are based on beliefs about different behaviors)
2. *Subjective Norms* (which are based on sense of social pressure/expectations)
3. *Perceived Behavioral Control* (based on the sense of self-efficacy to engage in the behavior)

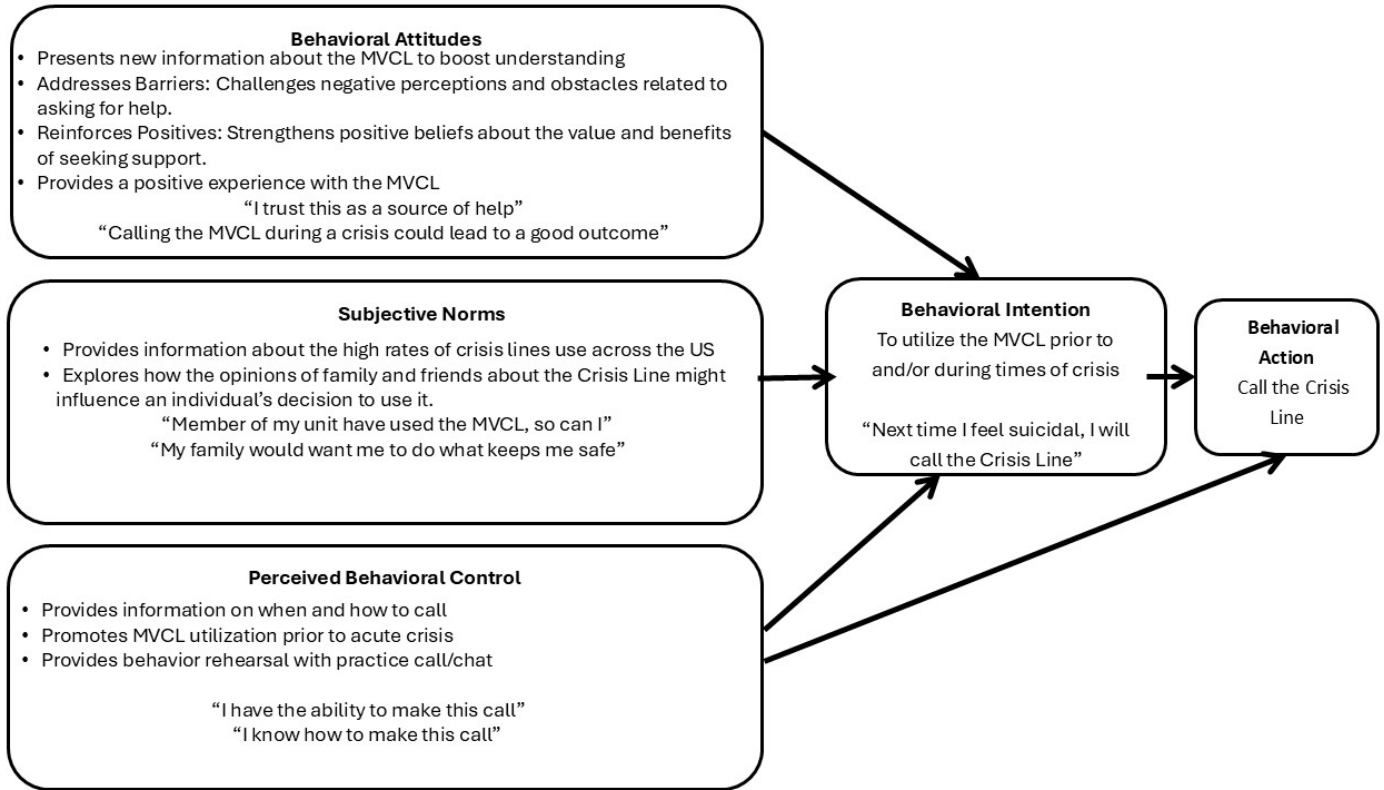
Consider this scenario to see how the Theory of Planned Behavior plays out when a soldier decides whether to fully participate in physical training:



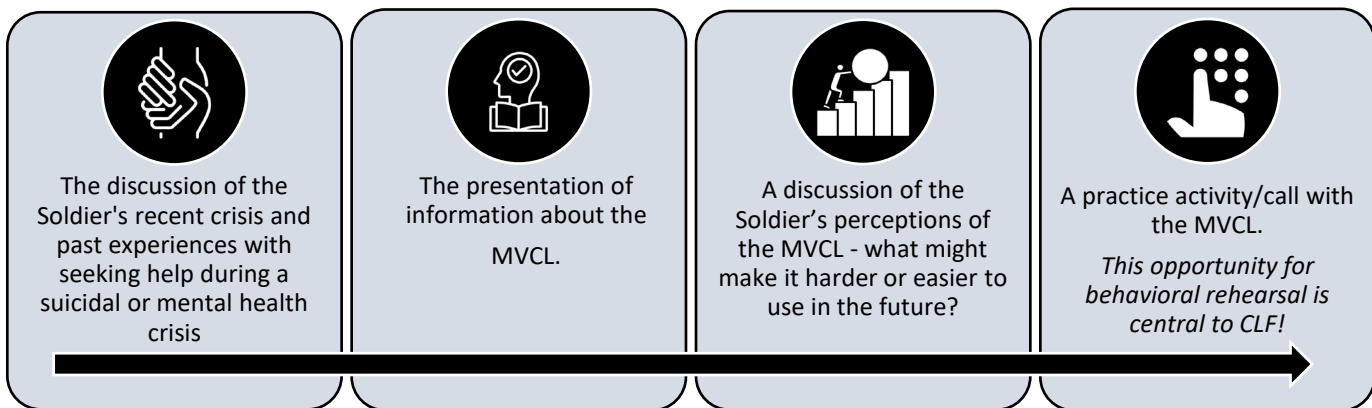
While facilitator expertise in the theoretical model is not required, understanding its core elements can provide valuable insight into the goals of each CLF module. Here is how the CLF intervention addresses key aspects of behavior change through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior:

¹ Ajzen I. The Theory of Planned Behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. 1991;50:179-211.

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CLF is to be delivered in a single session, lasting approximately 30 minutes. During this session, the intervention has four **core** components:



This manual guides the delivery of CLF.

While each session should cover all intervention components, facilitators are responsible for tailoring the materials to the experiences and perceptions of each group or individual to build rapport and maintain engagement.

Group-Based Crisis Line Facilitation

Section 1: Session Overview

Facilitator Checklist

- Familiarize yourself with unit safety procedures for mental health crises and suicide risk and know where to direct attendees for immediate help.
- Explain purpose of the CLF session and why it is important for this group (or individual)
- Remind group of confidentiality guidelines, respect, and group conduct
- Explain the workbook: purpose of and how to use
- Explore how suicide prevention resources can be helpful for soldiers
- Explain and discuss the plan/agenda for the session

Section Background

This section is the facilitator's opportunity to establish the context for the session content and group dynamics. Given the sensitive nature of the topics (mental health, suicide), it is crucial to immediately establish a trustworthy and empathetic tone while clearly communicating the importance of the session's material.

Helpful Resources

- The importance of confidentiality (p. currently in beginning of manual – About this manual)
- **Appendix 1** – Useful Facilitator Techniques Agenda Setting Section

Before you Begin

Review your unit's safety protocols for mental health crises and suicide risk. Ensure you know exactly where to direct attendees if someone expresses an immediate need for help. Being ready to respond thoughtfully and effectively is key.

Section 1: Step-by-Step Guide

Explain the purpose of the CLF session

- Introduce yourself and explain your role if the unit or individual might be unfamiliar.
- Express appreciation for the group's participation.
- The purpose of the session is to provide service members with information about the Military Veterans Crisis Line (MVCL) related to how and when to contact the MVCL and practicing this skill.
 - You can emphasize here that the MVCL
 - provides free, 24/7 support for military service members and Veterans who may be feeling hopeless, isolated, or suicidal.
 - is also available for those who want to help a friend or loved one in distress.
- The information that is shared in this session may be valuable for you personally, or it could be a resource that you could provide to someone else. In other words, this information could be something to have in your back pocket in case you or someone you know ever needs it.

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Remind the group of confidentiality guidelines, respect, and group conduct

In group settings, emphasize confidentiality to build trust and encourage sharing, while also clearly explaining its limits.

- Discuss confidentiality limitations.
- Explain why maintaining confidentiality, especially in a group setting, is important and how to maintain confidentiality.
- Encourage service members to avoid sharing specific names, ranks, or other identifiable details when discussing personal experiences
- You can emphasize the ability to reflect individually within the workbook or frame conversations in a way that focuses on hypothetical situations (e.g. Imagine a soldier you know is going through a tough time and mentions feeling overwhelmed. What are some things they might find helpful in reaching out for support?)

Facilitator Considerations: Confidentiality

Examples of confidentiality limitations within this group would be particularly within the military context, where privacy concerns can have career implications. While confidentiality is respected, there are specific circumstances where information may need to be reported.

If you are a mandated reporter, disclose your status at the beginning of the session and clarify what that entails, including your legal and military obligations to report any concerns of harm to self or others, abuse, or misconduct. This disclosure ensures that service members understand the boundaries of confidentiality from the outset.

Explain the purpose of the accompanying Workbook

- This resource is available for service members to use as a reference guide during discussions.
- It provides space for personal reflection through writing and offers an alternative for those who prefer not to share out loud.
- It includes additional information about the Military Veterans Crisis Line (MVCL) and guidance on supporting someone in crisis.

Explore how suicide prevention resources can be helpful for soldiers

Direct attendee attention to Page 1 of the Workbook – “Talking about mental health is important”

Use questions that prompt specific responses about whether service members know about national programs, local services, or informal support systems. This opens the conversation for sharing experiences and learning about diverse available resources, including well-known and lesser-known options.



- *How relevant does a conversation about suicide among soldiers feel to you all?*
- *By a show of hands, who feels that discussions related to suicide and emotional distress are relevant to soldiers?*
- *Why do you think having mental health or crises resources could be helpful for YOU or OTHER service members?*
- *What resources are you currently aware of for mental health or crisis support?*
- *Raise your hand if you know about or have heard of the MVCL. Raise your hand if you or someone you know has ever used a crisis line resource like the MVCL.*

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Provide information about the importance of mental health resources and suicide prevention within the National Guard. Ask group for their thoughts on any or all of the following.

- Military personnel are at heightened risk for suicide compared with the broader U.S. population
- It can be hard to identify exactly what you're feeling, who can and is willing to help, etc.
- It can be hard to identify when and how to help your fellow service members or family/friends
- The Military/Veteran Crisis Line is another tool/resource that can be utilized during these times.
- Some people don't know about the MVCL or when to use it.

Share the Agenda

Direct attendee attention to Page 2 of the Workbook – “Agenda”

1. Learn some of your shared values as service members to guide our discussion.
2. Explore your impressions of the Military/Veterans Crisis Line.
3. (Optional) Share personal experiences related to mental health crises or discussing crisis scenarios.
4. Learn more about how the Crisis Line operates and discuss ways to make it more accessible.
5. Conduct a practice call with the Crisis Line to understand how it functions.

See **Appendix 1** for more instruction on the importance of agenda setting.

Section 2: National Guard and Group Values

Facilitator Checklist

- Explain the purpose of discussing military and personal values
- Identify and discuss individual or military values
- Examine how core values relate to help-seeking
- Briefly summarize the section

Section Background

Understanding a person's core values can offer insight into how they might seek help during a mental health crisis. When seeking help aligns with what someone deeply cares about – like their health, family, or their commitment to country – the likelihood of reaching out increases. For National Guard members, connecting the Military Veterans Crisis Line (MVCL) to shared values like duty, loyalty, and resilience can overcome hesitation caused by stigma or a belief in self-reliance. Framing the MVCL as a tool that supports mission readiness and taking care of fellow service members shows that seeking help is an act of responsibility and strength, not weakness.

For example: Let's say someone deeply values **courage and strength**. If they are struggling with a mental health crisis, they might initially see seeking help as a sign of weakness, which goes against their value of strength. This could make them hesitant to reach out. However, if an intervention or a trusted person reframes seeking help as an act of **courage** – the bravery to face their struggles and take action to improve – it suddenly aligns with their core value. Because it now connects with what's truly important to them (being courageous and strong), the motivation to seek help increases. It no longer feels like a negative thing to avoid, but a meaningful step towards living in line with their values. This internal alignment makes the decision to seek help more likely to be sustained because it's driven by something deeply personal and important to them.

This section of the CLF session will explore the core values of the group and begin to make connections to ways in which seeking help during a crisis aligns with these deeply held beliefs.

Helpful Resources

- **Appendix 1** – Useful Facilitator Techniques Summaries Section
- **Appendix 3** - Exploring Values
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P96_QvTjvLc "DECISIONS" video

Section 2: Step-by-Step Guide

Explain the purpose of discussing military and personal values

- Briefly summarize the facilitator background information above.
- Explain that the following discussion will focus on military and personal values.
- State that you will guide the group in identifying their values and facilitate a discussion on how these values relate to motivations for seeking help for oneself and others in a crisis

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Identify and discuss individual or military values

Direct attendee attention to Page 3 of the Workbook – “What 3 values are important to you?”



Ask the group to identify their *top three values*, first on paper. Invite individuals to share their values with the group and discuss why sticking to their values is important and how it shapes their life/military experience. Have service members identify ways they display these values within their current roles within the guard, their jobs, with family and friends. **Take notes on the group’s responses, so that you can reflect on these specific values that are important to the group throughout the remainder of the session.**

Examine how core values relate to help-seeking

- *What are the ways within your guard duties that you display these values?*
- *How do you hold the unit accountable to these values? Is there a lot of pressure to uphold these values? What happens when they are not upheld?*
- *What is the purpose of having a set of core values?*
- *How might these values motivate you to seek help when you need it? To seek help for a friend or loved one?*
- *Have you ever felt that seeking help conflicted with any of the National Guard’s core values? If so, which ones and why?*
- *Why do you think some service members hesitate to reach out for support, even when they are struggling?*
- *How can we reframe help seeking as an act of strength and duty rather than a sign of weakness?*
- *Are there unspoken cultural norms within the Guard that might discourage people from reaching out for help? How can we challenge those norms?*



Briefly summarize this section

Briefly summarize this discussion, touching on the specific values that were mentioned by the group.

See **Appendix 1** for details on building an effective summary.

Facilitator Considerations: What to do when no one is talking?

Encouraging groups to engage in discussions requires creating a comfortable and inclusive environment. One effective method is using Rounds for smaller groups (10 and under). In this approach, each person in the group is asked to respond briefly, ensuring everyone has a chance to contribute.

- Can we go around the room and hear a core value that motivated you to enlist in the National Guard?

For larger groups, Dyads and Triads can be useful. This technique involves breaking the group into smaller pairs or trios for discussion. Afterward, a few groups report back to the larger session, helping quieter participants feel more at ease before sharing with everyone.

Using these methods can help foster engagement, ensuring all voices are heard and contributing to a richer group discussion.

Section 3: Past Crises and Perceptions of Help Seeking

Facilitator Checklist

- Explain purpose of discussing help-seeking during a crisis
- Define the meaning of a crisis and explore with the group
- Discuss past crises and prior help-seeking experiences
- Discuss perceptions, social norms and values related to help seeking
- Discuss perceptions of the MVCL
- Briefly summarize the section

Section Background

Understanding service members past experiences with potential crises, both personal and for others, is crucial for identifying their unique challenges and the factors influencing their help-seeking behavior (or lack thereof). This insight allows the facilitator to pinpoint barriers and motivators for future line use, as well as key intervention points in a crisis narrative. For instance, by recognizing a pattern of escalating loneliness leading to acute crisis, the facilitator can highlight the benefit of seeking support at the initial onset of loneliness rather than waiting until the moment of severe crisis when asking for help becomes overwhelming or even feels impossible.

A crisis should be defined broadly to emphasize that service members can call the MVCL for any reason related to emotional distress. Common stressors faced by National Guard soldiers include prolonged separations from family, financial instability, reintegration struggles, and the psychological toll of high-stakes decision-making. This section provides you with an opportunity to gather valuable insights into the barriers and common stressors faced by the unit, enabling you to tailor the session to meet specific needs. Factors such as location can play a significant role, as rural units may encounter different challenges compared to those stationed near major cities. Discussing these stressors after reviewing core military values allows you to highlight potential inconsistencies between beliefs and actions. For example, it is often easier for soldiers to encourage their peers to seek help than to seek help themselves, revealing an important area for discussion and reflection.

It is possible some soldiers have contacted the Crisis Line before and shared with the group that they contacted the Crisis Line during a previous crisis. This section includes how to proceed 1) when any soldier has previously contacted the Crisis Line, and 2) when no soldiers have contacted the Crisis.

Misinformation, uncertainty, or fear can discourage individuals from reaching out for crisis support. This section allows the soldiers to express any concerns and reflect on past experiences with crisis services, paving the way for clarifications and reassurance.

Perceptions of help-seeking are not just shaped by personal beliefs but also by cultural and social influences. Understanding how others—such as family, peers, and mental health professionals—view the Crisis Line can offer insight into external barriers or sources of encouragement. By linking these discussions back to core values, you can help the soldiers recognize that seeking help aligns with military principles of strength, accountability, and taking care of one another.

Using the ruler scaling technique helps explore and strengthen a person's motivation and confidence by using numerical scales to assess their current standing and potential for change. When applying this technique to the **Confidence Question**, asking why the soldiers choose that number and not a lower one could highlight existing

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strengths and knowledge. By asking what could help move them just one step higher on the scale, the facilitator is encouraging growth and fostering reflection on solutions and strategies for improvement. Similarly, for the **Likelihood Question**, asking why the individual chose their rating instead of a lower number can reveal positive intentions or past experiences that support help-seeking behavior. Following up with a question about what would make them feel more likely to call in the future can guide a conversation about barriers and ways to increase readiness to seek support. These questions could be answered by the soldier on paper or out loud as a group. This technique promotes self-efficacy and empowers individuals to take small, meaningful steps toward utilizing the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) when needed.

Helpful Resources

- **Appendix 1** – Useful Facilitator Techniques Summary Section
- **Appendix 2** – Barriers to Crisis Line Utilization
- **Appendix 4** – Why Encourage National Guard Members to Share Their Experiences Using the MVCL
- **Appendix 5** – Recognizing and Responding to a Crisis
- **Appendix 6** – Understanding a Previous Crisis
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UgvGU_HsyIq "REASONS" video

Section 3: Step-by-Step Guide

Explain the purpose of discussing help-seeking during a crisis



- *The purpose of our discussion today is to explore the MVCL as a resource for yourselves or a fellow soldier/friend.*
- *Before we can really talk about how useful this resource would be to you all, we need to have a better understanding of how you have responded to a personal crisis or a crisis of a friend/fellow soldier.*
- *Once we better understand how you have responded to suicidal or mental health crises in the past, we may know more about how specifically the Crisis Line could be of service to you.*

Define the meaning of a crisis and explore with the group

[Direct attendee attention to Page 4 and 5 of the Workbook – “What is a crisis?” and “Signs of a crisis”](#)

- The word crisis can mean different things to different people.
- Being a soldier requires balancing a lot of personal and professional responsibilities.



- *With a show of hands, how many of you have helped a fellow soldier through some kind of personal or mental health related crisis?*
- *What kind of crises might a soldier experience? What are some of the stressors in a soldier’s life?*
- *What do you soldiers do when a personal issue starts to feel overwhelming?*
- *How/where do soldiers usually talk about mental health concerns/crisis/personal struggles?*
- *What mental health or crises resources available to military service members you all are aware of?*

See **Appendix 5** for information on recognizing and responding to a crisis.

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Discuss past crises and prior help-seeking experiences

[Direct attendee attention to Page 6 and 7 of the Workbook – “Tough Times”](#)



After self-reflection in the workbook, invite attendees to share with the group, if nobody volunteers, ask to share in a dyad. The following questions can help guide your discussion:

- *Think about a time in your life when you or a friend experienced stress or a crisis.*
- *Briefly, what was going on for you or a friend at this time?*
- *What were some of the feelings and thoughts you were having at this time?*
- *During this time of crisis, were you or a friend able to ask for help from a friend, family member, professional, etc?*
- *If you were able to ask for help, how did that go? How did you feel about asking for help at that time?*
- *If you were not able to ask for help, what were some of the reasons why?*
- *What, if anything, did you learn from this stressful life event?*

See **Appendix 6** on how to better understand a soldier’s past crisis.

Ruler exercise to gauge current confidence and likelihood of calling the MVCL

[Direct attendee attention to Page 8 of the Workbook – Ruler scales](#)



Discuss current levels of confidence and likelihood to call the MVCL by exploring the Veteran’s answers. Use this opportunity to explore alternative coping strategies they have relied on, introduce the Crisis Line as a potential resource, and identify perceived barriers or facilitators to its use.

- **Confidence Question:** *On a scale where 1 to 10, with 1 being not at all confident and 10 being very confident, how confident are you that you would know how to contact the MVCL when you wanted or needed to?*
- **Likelihood Question:** *On a scale from 1 to 10, 1 being not at all likely and 10 being very likely, how likely is it that you would call the MVCL in the future when you or a fellow service member were feeling sad, hopeless, or in a suicidal crisis?*
- *Why did you choose that number and not a lower one?*
- *What would help you move just one step higher on the scale?*
- *What would help you feel more likely to call in the future?*



Discuss perceptions, social norms, and values related to utilization of the MVCL

Invite the group to discuss their knowledge and perceptions of the MVCL. Be prepared to gently correct misinformation and reinforce positive perceptions and motivations to utilize the crisis line.

- *What do you all know about the Crisis Line?*
- *How do you all feel about it as a resource for when you are feeling hopeless, isolated, in crisis?*
- *How do you all feel about it as a resource for when you are concerned about the wellbeing/safety of a buddy or family member?*
- *What concerns, if any do you all have about calling or reaching out to the Crisis Line?*
- *What have you all heard from others, if anything, about their experience with calling the Military Veterans Crisis Line?*
- *[Decide on relevance – linking back to values if possible] How do you think your family/therapist/friends would feel about you contacting the Crisis Line? especially if soldiers mention getting “in trouble” or kicked out if superiors find out.*



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See **Appendix 2** for a list of common barriers for contacting the MVCL.

Offer a summary of this section

Briefly summarize this discussion, touching on military values, discrepancies, change talk, future approaches, and Crisis Line perceptions. See **Appendix 1** for details on building an effective summary

- Point out discrepancies (e.g.) *“on the one hand you were worried about asking for help, on the other hand you really wanted somebody to know what you were going through.”*
- Identify any change talk, (e.g.) *“I want to be better about reaching out for help or including others in my care”*
- Reflect on any indication of wanting to approach the future differently (e.g.) *“It sounds like if you were to have a crisis in the future, you would be open to the idea of calling for help”*

Facilitator Considerations: If there is hesitancy around sharing past crisis experience

You could use the workbook more actively. **Page 5** serves as a referral resource, offering examples of crisis warning signs. When reading through the signs, soldiers can use this information to better inform their responses when talking with someone in crisis.

Page 7 of the workbook is specifically dedicated to someone they know in a suicidal crisis. The word "suicide" often incites fear and many people may not consider how they would respond if someone disclosed suicidal thoughts. **Page 7** provides intentional prompts designed to confront discomfort with suicidality.

Appendix 6 provides more questions for deeper reflection and discussion about a crisis.

Facilitator Considerations: Negative Experience with MVCL

If a soldier shares a negative MVCL experience, you can use active listening by maintain open body language, use verbal affirmations, and reflect the soldier’s key points. Validate their feelings without judgment (e.g., “You felt frustrated.”). Empathic reframing allows exploration of alternative interpretations or highlight their strengths (e.g., “You reached out because you knew you needed support—that’s an important step.”). Using motivational interviewing techniques, such as open-ended questions and reflective statements, can uncover needs and shape future discussion from frustration to problem-solving.

Section 4: Information about the Military Veterans Crisis Line

Facilitator Checklist:

- Explain the purpose of sharing information about the MVCL
- Ask the group or revisit what is known about the MVCL
- Share and discuss the information about the MVCL
- Encourage the group to put 988 Press 1 in their phone contacts
- Check for understanding and address questions
- Briefly summarize the section

Section Background

The goal of this psychoeducation section is to provide clear and relevant information about the Military Veterans Crisis Line, aiming to reduce any uncertainties and improve soldiers' attitudes toward using the service. By highlighting key aspects—such as the accessibility, confidentiality, and support provided by the MVCL—the section seeks to normalize help-seeking behavior and increase awareness of the resources available. It encourages soldiers to view the MVCL not just as a resource for immediate crises, but as a proactive tool that can be used during difficult times or when they notice changes in others. Through open discussion and fact-sharing, participants can address any misconceptions or concerns they might have about the service and learn how to use it effectively when needed.

Helpful Resources

- **Appendix 6 - MVCL Education**
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AOH0JwQeyo&t=2s> "YOU ARE NOT ALONE" video

Section 4: Step-by-Step Guide

Explain the purpose of sharing information about the MVCL

- While the Crisis Line might be a familiar concept, it's important to explore some specifics together. This will allow you to make the best decision about whether it's a resource you'd want to use.

Share and discuss the information about the MVCL

Direct attendee attention to Pages 10 – 12 of the Workbook – “Have you heard?”

- Using **Appendix 6** as a reference to share information about the MVCL based on misconceptions or deficits. For example, if you have heard that from some, a barrier to use is that it costs too much money, be sure to share that the service is always free. If the group is largely unfamiliar with the MVCL, you may take more time to cover most of the information about the Crisis Line to ensure a full understanding.
- If you will be conducting a practice call with the MVCL - Be sure to take note of questions that come up in this discussion that could be useful to direct toward the Crisis Line responder during the practice call.
- Should questions or concerns arise that require further research or a delayed response, make a record of the item and inform the group that you will investigate and provide a follow-up. It's crucial to ensure this follow-through.

Encourage the group to put 988 Press 1 in their phone contacts

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Direct attendee attention to Page 13 of the Workbook – “How to save the Veterans Crisis Line number in your phone”

- Suggest to attendees that proactively saving the "988" Crisis Line number in their phone under a recognizable name can make it even simpler to reach out and reduce any hesitation in a moment of need.
- Encourage and provide a moment for attendees to save the quick access "988" number in their phones under a memorable contact name. If attendees do not have their phones available, encourage them to write a note to themselves to do this later.

Check for understanding and address questions

After sharing the information about the MVCL, facilitate a check-in to gauge attendees' reactions and address any lingering questions or concerns. This debrief ensures that everyone leaves the session feeling informed, supported, and empowered to use the MVCL if they ever need it.



- *How might this information be helpful to you all in the future?*
- *Does any of this information surprise you or change the way you view the Crisis Line?*
- *What additional information would help you feel more confident in using the Crisis Line or deciding if it's the right option for you?*

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Section 5: Practicing the MVCL Call

Facilitator Checklist:

- Explain the purpose of the practice activities
- Facilitate the practice activity
- Debrief the practice activity
- Conduct another the ruler exercise

Section Background

Practicing calling the MVCL directly familiarizes soldiers with the process, easing uncertainty and anxiety about what to do in real crisis situations. Research supports that **behavioral rehearsal—practicing a behavior in a controlled setting**—increases the likelihood of follow-through in real situations. By experiencing details about the call, such as how a crisis line responder reacts, how long you might be on hold, and what happens after you dial the number, and by hearing a crisis worker's language and approach, soldiers gain a clearer understanding of how to communicate their concerns, the kinds of questions asked, and how to effectively navigate the conversation. This firsthand experience can increase confidence in the ability to call for help when needed, reinforcing the belief in the ability to successfully engage in this behavior in the future.

As the facilitator, you may choose one of the following options based on which is best suited for your group or whether you are engaging one-one-one with a soldier. Engaging in one of the following options helps normalize help-seeking behavior and allows soldiers to identify and address concerns before finding themselves in a crisis:

- **Scripted Roleplay to MVCL:** Provides a realistic example of a MVCL conversation, providing the opportunity for soldiers to experience how a crisis line responder might interact with a caller [**best for large group or small groups (3-4 people)**]
- **Live Practice Call:** Reduces uncertainty by allowing soldiers to experience the process in a low-pressure setting. [**best for one-on-one or small groups (2-3 people)**]

If the unit expresses concerns or challenges when talking to a fellow soldier in distress, **Appendix 8** has a roleplay that could be conducted in smaller groups for further learning. This activity is located on **page 18 in the workbook**.

REMINDER: Encouraging the soldier(s) to add the MVCL 988 Press 1 number to their phone contacts is a small but significant step in making the resource more accessible.

Ruler exercises are valuable in assessing the soldier's current confidence levels and the likelihood of utilizing MVCL in the future, which fosters a sense of control over their decisions and actions. By comparing these current scores to those from Section 3, you can highlight progress, which strengthens the soldier's belief in their ability to use MVCL when needed.

Helpful Resources

- **Appendix 1** – Useful Facilitator Techniques
- **Appendix 7** – MVCL Education
- **Appendix 8** – Roleplaying a Crisis Intervention
- **Appendix 9** – Scripted Roleplay to MVCL
- **Appendix 10** – Debriefing a Roleplay

Section 5: Step-by-Step Guide

Explain the purpose of the practice activity

- By participating in practice - roleplay or live - soldiers are provided with behavioral rehearsal experience that could strengthen their confidence in using MVCL in the future.
- This "train as you fight" approach, familiar to Military Guard members, aims to build confidence, create automaticity in their response, and lessen the mental burden should they or someone close to them face a future crisis requiring swift action.

Facilitate the Practice Activity

Practice Option 1: Scripted Roleplay to MVCL

Direct attendee attention to Page 14-15 of the Workbook – “Scripted MVCL Roleplay”

See **Appendix 9** for the Scripted Roleplay to MVCL activity

Example Scenario

Alex is at home, feeling overwhelmed after a particularly challenging training exercise. Sam is a responder at the Military Veterans Crisis Line call center.

1. Set the Scene and Assign Groups and Roles

- Ask the larger group to break into smaller groups of 3
- You, the facilitator, briefly reviews the scenario and sets expectations.
- Assign one soldier to play **Sam, the MVCL responder**, on the line.
- Assign one soldier to play **Alex, the soldier in distress**.
- Additional group members act as **the observer(s)**. **The observer(s) will be asked to provide their reactions to the following:**
 - What did you feel as you listened to the conversation? Did it make you think that calling the MVCL could be a good thing for a soldier who's struggling?
 - How likely is Alex to call the Crisis Line again during his next crisis?

2. Conduct the Roleplay

- Alex, the soldier in distress, dials the MVCL and waits for an answer.
- Sam, the MVCL responder, answers and starts the scripted role play.
- Read through the roleplay in assigned character.

3. Debrief in smaller group

- The **soldier who played Alex, the distressed soldier**, shares how the conversation felt.
- The **soldier who played Sam, the MVCL responder**, reflects on what was challenging and what felt effective.
- Observer(s)** thoughts on:

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- i. What did you feel as you listened to the conversation? Did it make you think that calling the MVCL could be a good thing for a soldier who's struggling?
- ii. How likely is Alex to call the Crisis Line again during his next crisis?

4. Debrief to full group

- a. What did the group notice about the exchange between the MVCL responder and the caller?

5. Facilitator Insights & Key Takeaways

- a. Reinforce the importance of checking in early and often with fellow soldiers.
- b. Emphasize that it's okay not to have all the answers—being present and showing concern is what matters most.
- c. Discuss barriers that might prevent someone from opening up and ways to overcome them.
- d. Review relevant resources and how to encourage their use.

Share Alternative Variations

- Encourage soldiers to complete practice calls to the MVCL on their own by directing them to the workbook
- Swap roles so multiple soldiers get a chance to practice.
- Use Appendix 8 to roleplay a conversation with a friend in distress.
- Use a group discussion format to brainstorm ways to approach similar real-life situations.

Debrief the roleplay with full group



- *For those who played the MVCL responder, what strategies did you use to check in and offer support?*
- *For those who played the struggling soldier, what aspects of the conversation felt helpful or unhelpful?*
- *Observers, what were your reactions?*
- *What was the most challenging part of the conversation?*
- *Why is it important to reach out, even if you're not sure what to say?*

See **Appendix 10** about debriefing a roleplay

Encourage the soldier(s) to add the MVCL 988 Press 1 number to their phone contacts.

[Practice Option 2: Live Practice Call](#)

****This is recommended when in a one-on-one conversation with a soldier or smaller groups (3-4 soldiers). ****

Conduct the practice call

- 1. Emphasize the value of rehearsal:** Highlight why practicing the MVCL call is important.
 - a. Practice familiarizes soldiers with the call process in a non-crisis situation.
 - b. Rehearsal allows soldiers to hear the types of questions a responder will ask.
 - c. This provides an opportunity for soldiers to ask clarifying questions of the responder.
- 2. Prepare questions for the MVCL:** Guide the group in developing questions.
 - a. With the individual (or as a small group), brainstorm questions you'd like the MVCL responder to answer.
 - b. Preparing questions ensures a focused and productive conversation, promoting confidence and clarity about the call process.

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c. This step actively involves soldiers in the practice call, encouraging proactive help-seeking behavior when needed.

d. **Direct attendee attention to Page 16 of the Workbook if struggling to come up with their own questions – “Questions you could ask the MVCL”**

3. Explain what to expect

- a) The individual (or one person in the group) will initiate the call. Ideally, the soldier receiving CLF will be the individual to speak with the MVCL responder. However, if the individual is nervous and/or would prefer that you do the speaking that is also okay, as long as the soldier remains engaged.
- b) Keeping our group questions in mind, the caller will dial 988 and press 1.
- c) Wait for the someone to answer the phone. This might take a few minutes to get someone connected so be patient.
- d) Sharing names is optional but could help the responder provide more tailored assistance.
- e) Once connected, inform the responder that this is a practice call and that you have some questions.
- f) Clearly state that you are not in crisis or experiencing suicidal thoughts. This helps manage the responder's approach, though they may still follow standard safety check protocols. Questions asked by the responder might be:
 1. Are you having thoughts of harming yourself?
 2. Are you having thoughts of suicide?
 3. Are you having thoughts of harming others?
- g) Ask a few or all the prepared questions, and then once you are feeling comfortable, feel free to end the call.

Debriefing the MVCL Practice Call



- *How did the call go for you?*
- *What, if anything, did you like about the call?*
- *What are your thoughts on how calling MVCL could be helpful for you in the future? (Reinforce strengths and goals)*
- *What did the MVCL responder do or say that made you feel more comfortable?*
- *How comfortable would you feel recommending MVCL to others?*

During the call, some expected and unexpected outcomes might occur such as long wait times before connecting to a responder, unhappy with the practice call experience, or the responder is hesitant or unsure of the caller's status of wellness. Tips for how to handle challenges are in **Appendix 2**.

Facilitator Considerations: Negative observations

During the debrief, if soldiers note issues like unclear responses, lack of warmth in tone, or insufficient details about services, guide the conversation toward how these could impact someone in crisis and how communication could improve. You, the facilitator, want to focus on solutions, not criticism. For example, if the tone felt too formal, discuss how tone plays a role in crisis intervention and how a more reassuring approach is needed for referring peers. Note this is one call and the next exchange with MVCL could be different. Frame negative observations as learning opportunities to better prepare guiding others to crisis supports.

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Conduct another ruler exercise

[Direct attendee attention to Page 9 of the Workbook – Ruler scales](#)

Discuss current levels of confidence and likelihood to call the MVCL and compare this score to Section 3 response. Use this opportunity to identify perceived barriers or facilitators.



- **Confidence Question:** *On a scale where 1 to 10, with 1 being not at all confident and 10 being very confident, how confident are you that you would know how to contact the MVCL when you wanted or needed to?*
- **Likelihood Question:** *On a scale from 1 to 10, 1 being not at all likely and 10 being very likely, how likely is it that you would call the MVCL in the future when you or a fellow service member were feeling sad, hopeless, or in a suicidal crisis?*
- *How does this number compare to your previous number?*
- *What would help you move just one step higher on the scale?*
- *What would help you feel more likely to call in the future?*

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Section 6: Final Summary

Facilitator Checklist:

- Summarize session
- Check in with the group about their experience and comprehension of the material

Section Background

This section allows the soldiers to express their comprehension of the information shared and restate key concepts. A concluding summary, using Motivational Interviewing and grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior, reinforces the importance of calling the MVCL when overwhelmed, lonely, or suicidal. It reflects the service member's own words, highlights their reasons for seeking support with the MVCL, strengthen their commitment and confidence in taking action. This final reflection instills a sense of autonomy and confidence in reaching out for help. It ensures clarity, motivation, and a plan for accessing help.

Checking in with the group after the summary ensures accuracy, encourages collaboration, clarifies misunderstandings, strengthens accountability, and improves future communication by valuing everyone's input and confirming takeaways. It provides an opportunity to address any misunderstandings or confusion before moving forward. Ending on a **strengths-based note** acknowledges soldier's resilience and dedication, reinforcing that seeking help is a sign of strength fostering **unit cohesion**.

Helpful Resources

- **Appendix 1** - Useful Facilitator Techniques

Section 6: Step-by-Step Guide

Purpose of this section

h) Provide a recap of the discussion by integrating the group's core values, reinforcing autonomy, emphasizing seeking help during crisis, and empowering change in a motivational way.

Summarize the session and check for understanding

Content will depend on the group or individual. Key points to prioritize in your summary:

- **Group's Stated Goals & Values** – Briefly summarize what the soldiers want to achieve and what matters most to them.
- **Change Talk Highlights** – Reflect and reinforce any statements about desire, ability, reasons, or need for change regarding calling the MVCL or help-seeking behavior
- **Strengths & Progress** – Acknowledge any positive steps, insights, or strengths demonstrated during the session.
- **Barriers & Concerns** – Note any ambivalence, struggles, or obstacles mentioned by the group.
- **Strategies & Coping Skills** – Summarize any strategies, tools, or ideas discussed for moving forward.
- **Commitment & Next Steps** – Capture any specific commitments made by the group and potential action steps before the next session.

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After providing summary:



- *Did I capture everything?*
- *Is there anything any of you would like to change or add?*

CLF Appendices

Appendix 1: Useful Facilitator Techniques

Appendix 2: Barriers to Crisis Line Utilization

Appendix 3: Exploring Values

Appendix 4: Why Encourage National Guard Members to Share Their Experiences Using the MVCL

Appendix 5: Recognizing and Responding to a Crisis

Appendix 6: Understanding Previous Crisis Experiences

Appendix 7: MVCL Education

Appendix 8: Roleplaying a Crisis Intervention

Appendix 9: Scripted Roleplay to MVCL

Appendix 10: Debriefing a Roleplay

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Appendix 1 - Useful Facilitator Techniques

This intervention utilizes some Motivational Interviewing techniques to better engage with the attendees. to help guide the discussion. Here are a few skills utilized throughout the manual:

Agenda Setting

Agenda setting provides several key benefits that can enhance the therapeutic process, support engagement, and improve the overall effectiveness of the sessions. Here are some specific advantages of agenda setting for group delivery:

1. **Establishing Clear Focus and Intent:** Setting an agenda at the start of the session helps you and soldier(s) establish a clear focus for the discussion. It provides a structure that ensures the session stays on topic, which is especially important in a group where multiple individuals may have different topics to discuss or views.
2. **Enhancing Time Management:** Group sessions typically have limited time, so setting an agenda can help you manage the session effectively. It ensures that all key topics or concerns are addressed within the allotted time, preventing the discussion from becoming too broad or losing focus.
3. **Reducing Anxiety and Providing Structure:** For individuals who struggle with uncertainty or anxiety, knowing the agenda ahead of time can provide a sense of security. It gives them a roadmap of what to expect, which can make it easier to engage in the session and feel more comfortable sharing.
4. **Fostering Open Communication and Trust:** When the group has a clear agenda, it creates an environment where individuals are more likely to express themselves openly. It sets expectations for transparency and communication, making it easier to share thoughts and feelings without fear of interruption or judgment.
5. **Providing Clarity for the Therapist:** For you, setting an agenda can act as a guide for managing the group's dynamics and needs. It helps ensure critical topics are addressed, navigate complex group interactions, and offer support to those who might need more focused attention.

Overall, agenda setting in a group contributes to creating an organized, supportive, and productive environment. It helps both you and the service members stay focused and promotes meaningful engagement.

Summarize participant insights and perspectives. Summarizing can be a powerful therapeutic tool, helping individuals process and make sense of their emotions and experiences. By condensing thoughts, feelings, or events into a clear and concise summary, people can gain insight into patterns, recognize underlying themes, and develop a greater sense of control over their narratives. Therapists often use summarization to reflect key points, ensuring that clients feel heard and understood while also encouraging clarity in their own self-expression.

A good therapeutic summary is concise, empathetic, and reflective, capturing the key points of a discussion while validating emotions and experiences. It should highlight important themes, patterns, and insights that emerged during the conversation without distorting or oversimplifying the client's words. A well-crafted summary also reinforces the client's progress, promotes self-awareness, and provides clarity, helping them organize their thoughts and emotions. Additionally, it should be collaborative, inviting the client or group members to confirm,

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clarify, or expand on what has been summarized. When used effectively, a therapeutic summary fosters connection, enhances understanding, and sets the stage for continued exploration and healing.

Facilitator Considerations: Midsession summary vs Concluding summary

A session concluding summary differs from mid-session summaries in its purpose and depth. While mid-session summaries are used periodically to check understanding, reinforce key points, and maintain engagement, the concluding summary serves as a final reflection that ties everything together. It synthesizes the main themes discussed, highlights any shifts in perspective, and solidifies the soldier's motivation and plan for action. Unlike mid-session summaries, which help guide the conversation, the concluding summary ensures that the session ends with clarity, direction, and a sense of empowerment to follow through on the next steps.

Rolling with resistance

When discussing mental health resources with National Guard members, it's important to roll with resistance by responding with empathy and understanding rather than pushing back. Some may fear repercussions on their military status, worrying that seeking help could affect their career. Start by acknowledging concerns to validate their feelings while keeping the conversation open: "I understand that reaching out for support can feel complicated, especially when you're thinking about your role in the Guard." If resistance arises regarding the relevance of crisis support, respond with understanding: "I get that this might not feel personally relevant to you right now, and that's okay." Then, ask for permission to proceed, reinforcing autonomy: "Would it be alright if we go over some key points? Feel free to ask questions at any time."

Ruler exercise

The ruler scaling technique in Motivational Interviewing (MI) helps explore and strengthen a person's motivation and confidence by using numerical scales to assess their current standing and potential for change. When applying this technique to the **Confidence Question**, after the individual provides a rating, the interviewer can ask, "Why did you choose that number and not a lower one?" to highlight existing strengths and knowledge. To encourage growth, the interviewer might follow up with, "What would help you move just one step higher on the scale?" This fosters reflection on solutions and strategies for improvement. Similarly, for the **Likelihood Question**, asking why the individual chose their rating instead of a lower number can reveal positive intentions or past experiences that support help-seeking behavior. Following up with, "What would make you feel more likely to call in the future?" can guide a conversation about barriers and ways to increase readiness to seek support. This technique promotes self-efficacy and empowers individuals to take small, meaningful steps toward utilizing the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) when needed.

Ruler questions can be adapted for group settings in various ways, depending on the group size. Facilitators have flexibility in how they ask these questions, but some effective approaches include:

- Asking everyone to write down their number, then inviting 2–3 people to share their responses.
- Having participants hold up the number of fingers that corresponds to their answer.

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- Asking participants to raise their hands as the facilitator calls out each number (e.g., "Who chose 1? Who chose 2?" and so on).

After the practice activity, it's important to revisit the ruler questions to assess any changes in the Veteran's perception of their ability to contact VCL and their likelihood of reaching out in the future. When comparing the scores before and after the practice activity, you're looking for shifts in confidence and willingness, which can highlight progress and areas of growth. For example, if a Veteran's confidence score has increased from a 4 to a 7, this reflects a growing belief in their ability to reach out to VCL when needed. Likewise, if the likelihood score improves, it suggests that the practice activity has helped the Veteran feel more comfortable and confident about using the resource. By comparing the before and after numbers, you can effectively track their progress, reinforce their achievements, and further empower them to continue using VCL when necessary. This exercise also offers the opportunity to highlight their strengths, discuss any barriers or concerns, and identify ways to improve their future engagement with VCL.

When engaging in the ruler discussion in Section 5, it's important to approach the situation with empathy and curiosity, especially if the number on the ruler remains the same or decreases compared to Section 3. Begin by acknowledging the individual's feelings and validating their experience. Ask open-ended questions to explore what might have influenced their score, such as barriers they encountered, factors that may have been overlooked, or shifts in their perspective. It is not unheard of for new barriers to be identified after the practice activity. Encourage reflection on any small steps or insights, even if the overall number didn't change, and focus on the strengths they used during the process. The key is to foster a safe, nonjudgmental space where soldiers feel empowered to explore their feelings without pressure to have made dramatic progress.

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Appendix 2 - Barriers to Crisis Line Utilization

The practice call to the MVCL is one of the most important components of CLF. While most of the time, the practice calls result in an overall positive experience, from time-to-time there are challenges that you may need to work through to help facilitate the call. The following is a list of potential challenges that could arise during the practice call.

Barrier 1: Long Wait Time to Speak to a VCL Responder

The MVCL strives to minimize wait times, but occasionally, callers may experience delays before reaching a responder.

Action you could take:

- **Normalize the wait time** and reassure the soldier that someone will be available soon.
- **Help the soldier develop coping strategies** to stay engaged while waiting:
 - Writing down thoughts or doodling
 - Taking a few deep breaths
 - Getting a glass of water
 - Practicing mindfulness techniques

Sample Language:

"Sometimes, the wait may be a little longer than expected, but calls are answered in order, and usually, someone responds quickly. If you ever experience a long wait during a crisis, what could you do in that moment to help yourself stay on the line?"

- **Build rapport** by discussing neutral, friendly topics, such as:
 - Their experiences in the guard
 - The structure of their day while on duty
 - Interactions with different staff

Barrier 2: National Guard Member is Unhappy with the Practice Call Experience

Not all practice calls go as expected, and a soldier may feel dissatisfied. This presents an opportunity to explore concerns and provide support.

Action you could take:

- **Actively listen and validate** their experience.
- **Explore what they didn't like** and offer additional information.
- **Remind them** that MVCL responders vary, and they are unlikely to get the same responder in the future.
- **Discuss the importance of trying again** if they ever need support during a crisis.
- **Explore alternative support options** if they are hesitant to call the MVCL in the future.

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Barrier 3 : MVCL Responder is Suspicious, Hesitant, or Irritated

Some MVCL responders may not be accustomed to practice calls, may be wary of being scammed, or may simply be new to the role.

Action you could take:

- **Acknowledge their hesitancy** and explore possible reasons for their reaction.
- **Humanize the experience** by reminding the soldier that responders are people too, and their responses may vary.
- **Encourage the soldier to request a different responder** if they do not feel comfortable with the one they are speaking to.

Tips to Prevent This Reaction:

- Start the conversation by mentioning that the call is part of a training or presentation to learn more about the MVCL.
- Stick to **logistics and procedural** questions rather than personal ones (e.g., avoid asking, "*How do you like your job?*"). This helps prevent suspicion and keeps the call focused on information-seeking.

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Appendix 3 - Exploring Values

Which Values Matter Most in Crisis Intervention?

While all core values are significant, some may be more directly relevant to crisis situations and help-seeking behavior. This discussion allows service members to reflect on which values personally resonate with them and explore how different values guide decisions in moments of crisis.

- *Which of the National Guard values do you personally connect with the most? Why?*
- *If you had to choose one core value that best supports seeking help, which one would it be and why?*
- *Do you think certain values become more important than others during a crisis? If so, which ones?*

Applying Values to Real-Life Scenarios

Understanding values in theory is one thing but applying them in everyday life is what truly defines them. This section encourages service members to think about how these values manifest in real-world situations, especially when someone is in crisis. Discussing examples reinforces that these values are not abstract but active principles that guide behavior.

- *Can you think of a time when you or someone you know demonstrated personal courage by seeking help?*
- *How do leaders in the Guard embody these values when supporting struggling service members?*
- *What does respect for fellow Guard members look like when someone is struggling with mental health challenges?*
- *What does integrity look like when someone recognizes they need support but feels reluctant to reach out?*

Additional Values That Support Help-Seeking

The seven core values provide a strong foundation, but other values—such as empathy, humility, or accountability—also play a crucial role in fostering a culture of support. This discussion encourages service members to think beyond the formal list and recognize other guiding principles that contribute to resilience and well-being.

- *Are there any values not listed that you believe are critical to fostering a culture of resilience and support?*
- *How do values like empathy, humility, or accountability play a role in encouraging help-seeking behavior?*
- *How can we integrate additional values into our everyday leadership and peer support?*

Creating a Culture of Support

It's not enough to understand values on an individual level—real change happens when they are woven into the culture of the unit. This discussion focuses on actionable steps to make seeking help more accepted, how leaders can set the tone, and how members can support one another in times of crisis.

- *What can we do as a unit to normalize conversations around mental health and seeking help?*
- *How can leaders set the tone for making resources like the Military/Veterans Crisis Line more accessible and accepted?*

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- *What are some ways we can hold each other accountable for living out these values, especially when it comes to taking care of ourselves and others?*



Each of the Guard's core values directly supports and encourages help-seeking behavior:

- **Loyalty** – Loyalty extends beyond duty to the nation; it includes loyalty to fellow service members and oneself. Seeking help through the VCL ensures that service members can continue to fulfill their commitments to their units, families, and communities.
- **Duty** – Taking responsibility for one's well-being is an essential part of duty. Recognizing when support is needed and acting on it is a way to uphold readiness and resilience, ensuring that one can continue to serve effectively.
- **Respect** – Respect is foundational in military culture, including self-respect. Acknowledging personal struggles and seeking help is an act of respect for oneself and for those who depend on you, demonstrating that every service member's well-being is valued.
- **Selfless Service** – While the Guard emphasizes serving others, self-care is equally vital. Seeking support when struggling allows service members to continue their mission and be present for those who rely on them, reinforcing the importance of collective strength.
- **Honor** – Honor involves making the right choices, even when they are difficult. Reaching out for help in times of crisis is a courageous and honorable act, reinforcing the commitment to living with integrity and resilience.
- **Integrity** – Integrity means being truthful with oneself and others. Recognizing the need for support and taking proactive steps to seek assistance aligns with the Guard's commitment to honesty and ethical action.
- **Personal Courage** – Asking for help requires bravery. Whether confronting personal struggles or supporting a fellow service member, it takes courage to reach out. Utilizing resources like the VCL is an act of strength, not weakness, and ensures no one fights their battles alone.

By embracing these core values, National Guard members can break the stigma surrounding help-seeking and reinforce a culture of resilience, ensuring that no service member feels isolated in times of crisis. The Military Veterans Crisis Line stands as a critical resource, ready to support those who serve.

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Appendix 4 - Why Encourage National Guard Members to Share Their Experiences

Using the Military/Veterans Crisis Line



Encouraging National Guard members to share their experiences using the MVCL can help reduce stigma, raise awareness, and reinforce the importance of seeking support, especially in a group setting. When Guard members openly discuss how the MVCL has provided them with help, it normalizes the use of crisis services and can encourage others to reach out when they are struggling. This helps other Guard members to realize they are not alone, and others may be going through similar situations. Personal testimonials can be powerful tools in fostering a culture of mental health support.

However, asking National Guard members to share their experiences with crisis services is not without risks. While many have positive encounters with the MVCL, others may have had less satisfactory experiences, such as feeling unheard, encountering long wait times, or being unsure of how their information would be used. Publicly sharing negative experiences could lead to distrust in crisis services rather than encouraging their use. It is essential to acknowledge these concerns while also working to improve crisis response systems and ensure service members receive the care they need.

Additionally, discussing personal crises can put National Guard members in a vulnerable position. Depending on the details shared, a service member might unintentionally reveal information that could impact their career. Mental health disclosures, particularly those related to crisis situations, could lead to questions about fitness for duty, security clearances, or retention. Some members may fear disciplinary actions or dismissal, even if their struggles were temporary and successfully managed. For these reasons, any initiative encouraging Guard members to speak about their experiences using the VCL must also prioritize privacy, informed consent, and protections against potential negative repercussions.

Ultimately, fostering open conversations about mental health within the National Guard is crucial, but it must be approached thoughtfully. Encouraging testimonials should be done in a way that empowers members to speak on their own terms, ensuring they understand both the potential benefits and risks of sharing their experiences.

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Leadership should work to create an environment where seeking help is viewed as a sign of strength, not a liability, and advocate for policies that protect service members from adverse consequences related to their mental health struggles.

Things to keep in mind:

1. Acknowledge the Importance of the Conversation

Mental health stigma remains a significant barrier to seeking help, especially in military settings. By openly discussing the Military/Veterans Crisis Line (MVCL) and its impact, Guard members can help normalize reaching out for support, making it more likely that others will seek help when needed. Additionally, personal stories carry emotional weight and can be more persuasive in encouraging others to use mental health resources than statistics or general statements.

2. Address Potential Risks Upfront

While sharing experiences can be beneficial, there are real concerns about how mental health disclosures may impact careers, reputations, or relationships. Some Guard members may worry about fitness-for-duty evaluations or how their chain of command might perceive them. By acknowledging these risks from the start, the conversation remains honest and balanced, allowing individuals to make informed choices about sharing their experiences.

3. Provide a Safe and Confidential Space for Discussion

Discussions about mental health and crisis services can be deeply personal and may involve traumatic experiences. Creating a safe and confidential environment encourages open and honest dialogue while minimizing the fear of judgment or repercussions. If members feel that their words may be used against them or misunderstood, they are less likely to share or seek help in the future.

4. Encourage Informed Decision-Making

Once a personal story is shared publicly, it can be difficult to control how it is interpreted, spread, or used. Some individuals may feel comfortable sharing details in a closed setting but not in a public forum. By emphasizing the importance of informed decision-making, Guard members can weigh the potential benefits and risks before speaking about their experiences.

5. Emphasize Personal Agency

No one should feel pressured into sharing personal, mental health experiences. Some may find storytelling empowering, while others may feel exposed or vulnerable. By reinforcing that sharing is a personal choice, Guard members can maintain control over their own narratives, ensuring they speak on their terms and in a way that aligns with their comfort level.

6. Frame the Conversation in Terms of Strength and Support

Military culture often associates strength with resilience and self-reliance, which can make seeking help seem like a weakness. Reframing the conversation to highlight that seeking support is a proactive, responsible decision can

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help shift this perspective. Additionally, focusing on support systems reassures individuals that they are not alone and that resources exist to assist them

7. Involve Leadership

Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the culture around mental health within the National Guard. When leaders openly support discussions about crisis services and mental health, it signals to service members that these conversations are valued and encouraged rather than risky.

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Appendix 5 - Recognizing and Responding to a Crisis

The National Guard’s core values emphasize service, support, and responsibility—not only in times of duty but also in times of personal need. This manual was created not only to assist those who may need crisis services, such as the Military/Veterans Crisis Line (MVCL), but also to equip soldiers with the knowledge and confidence to intervene when they see a fellow soldier, friend, or family member struggling. Recognizing the warning signs of a crisis and understanding how to respond can be life changing.

The following questions encourage reflection and discussion:

1. Imagining a Crisis Situation

- a. “Think of a scenario where someone close to you—a fellow soldier, friend, or family member—is in crisis. What might that situation look like?”
- b. “How do you think they might behave differently than usual?”
- c. “What emotions might they be experiencing, even if they don’t say it outright?”

2. Identifying Warning Signs

- a. “What are some signs that someone may be struggling, even if they don’t openly ask for help?”
- b. “Have you ever noticed subtle or indirect ways people express distress?”
- c. “How can you differentiate between temporary stress and a deeper crisis?”

3. Understanding the Crisis Experience

- a. “What factors might contribute to someone reaching a crisis point?”
- b. “What personal struggles, stressors, or experiences could lead someone to feel overwhelmed?”
- c. “How might past experiences, stigma, or personal beliefs impact their willingness to seek help?”

4. Responding to Someone in Crisis

- a. “If someone confided in you that they were having suicidal thoughts, how do you think you would react?”
- b. “What emotions might you experience in that moment—fear, uncertainty, concern? How could you manage those emotions to best support them?”
- c. “What are some helpful things you could say or do to let them know you care and want to support them?”

5. Overcoming Barriers to Seeking or Offering Help

- a. “What might stop someone from reaching out for help when they need it?”
- b. “Are there common fears or misconceptions that discourage soldiers from seeking support?”
- c. “What barriers might make you hesitate to intervene if you noticed someone struggling?”
- d. “How can we address those barriers and encourage a culture where seeking help is seen as a strength?”

6. Guiding Actions with Core Values

- a. “How do the National Guard’s core values—such as loyalty, duty, and selfless service—apply to stepping in during a crisis?”
- b. “In what ways does supporting a struggling friend or colleague align with the values we uphold in the military?”
- c. “How can these values help you push past hesitation and take action when it’s needed most?”

By reflecting on these questions, soldiers can better prepare themselves to recognize warning signs, navigate difficult conversations, and intervene effectively in crisis situations—ensuring that no one struggles alone.

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Appendix 6 - Understanding Previous Crisis Experiences

Encouraging discussion about past crises—whether personal or observed in others—can help soldiers reflect on their experiences, identify patterns in coping, and recognize the role of support systems. The goal is to foster self-awareness, resilience, and an openness to seeking help when needed. The following prompts can guide the discussion while maintaining a safe and nonjudgmental space:

1. Inviting Reflection on Crisis Experiences

- a. *“Has there been a time when you or someone close to you faced a crisis? Would you be open to sharing what that experience was like?”*
- b. *“Without sharing identifiable details, can you describe the situation and what was happening at the time?”*

2. Exploring Thoughts and Feelings During the Crisis

- a. *“What thoughts were running through your mind during that time?”*
- b. *“How did you feel emotionally and physically as the situation unfolded?”*
- c. *“Looking back, how did those emotions impact the decisions you made?”*

3. Assessing Available Support Systems

- a. *“At that time, did you or the person struggling have anyone you could turn to for support?”*
- b. *“Who in your life felt like a safe person to talk to?”*
- c. *“Were there barriers—internal or external—that made it hard to reach out?”*

4. Examining Actions Taken and Barriers to Seeking Help

- a. *“Did you (or the person) reach out for help? Why or why not?”*
- b. *“If not, what were some of the reasons that made it difficult to ask for support?”*
- c. *“What might have made it easier to seek help?”*

5. Reflecting on the Outcome and Lessons Learned

- a. *“For those who sought help, what happened next? Was the response helpful?”*
- b. *“Looking back, what did you take away from this experience?”*
- c. *“If a friend were going through something similar now, what advice would you give them?”*

By guiding soldiers through these reflections with open-ended, nonjudgmental questions, you can help them recognize strengths, acknowledge growth, and reinforce the importance of support-seeking behaviors. Addressing discrepancies between values and help-seeking behaviors requires a respectful, nonjudgmental approach. Asking open-ended questions and highlighting inconsistencies can foster insight. This approach allows the soldier to explore their own perspective and consider how their values can support—not hinder—the decision to seek help.

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Appendix 7 - MVCL Education

General Information

- Always free, no matter how many times you call
- Available 24/7 and you may call as many times as you want/need
- Confidential

When to call the Crisis Line

Sometimes people struggle with knowing when they should call the Crisis Line. The Military/Veterans Crisis Line receives over 20,000 calls every month.

- You **do not** need to be in a crisis to call.
- Call if you are feeling “off” or heading into a tough time.
- Reach out if you notice a friend, family member, or fellow service member acting differently or seeming down.
- Many have found that calling early can help prevent a crisis.
- You can call as many times as you need, even multiple times in a day.

The Crisis Line will

- Support and listen to you.
- Connect you with a local counselor familiar with resources in your area (many counselors are Veterans themselves).
- Empower you to make informed health decisions.

The Crisis Line Will NOT:

- Judge you.
- Share your information.
- Ask you to share anything you are uncomfortable with.

You Are Not Alone

- The Military/Veterans Crisis Line receives **over 20,000 calls every month.**
- **You do not have to be suicidal to call**—if you need someone to talk to or want help supporting someone else, reach out.

Ways to connect to the Crisis Line and What to Expect

Call – dial 988 and then press 1

- You’ll hear an automated message and music while being connected to a counselor.
- The counselor will listen, provide support, and offer helpful resources.

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Chat – Veteranscrisisline.net

- A chat counselor will discuss your safety, feelings, and social situation.
- They will connect you with resources and services to ensure you are safe.
- If all chat counselors are busy, you can still **call** or **text** the Crisis Line.
- **All chats are encrypted** to maintain confidentiality.

Text – any message to 838255

- Start your text session with any message.
- You'll receive **two automated messages** while being connected to a crisis counselor.
- Connection usually takes **less than 5 minutes**.
- The counselor will invite you to share how you're feeling and connect you with resources. The Crisis Text Line uses a **secure online platform**.

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Appendix 8 - Roleplaying a Crisis Intervention

Roleplaying a crisis intervention with a fellow National Guard member strengthens confidence in supporting peers. Practicing identifying distress, starting supportive conversations, and guiding towards resources reduces hesitation and increases MVCL contact. This hands-on experience boosts soldiers' preparedness to act in real-life scenarios, strengthening self-efficacy and positive intentions. Soldiers will learn how to express concern and ask direct but compassionate questions. This can be done one-on-one or in smaller groups depending on how many soldiers are present.

Resistance to roleplaying is natural, especially when dealing with sensitive topics like suicide prevention. Some National Guard members may feel uncomfortable, believe they already know how to handle these conversations, or worry about saying the wrong thing. You can acknowledge these concerns while reinforcing the value of practice. Acknowledging and reframing resistance to roleplaying by emphasizing skill-building, normalizing conversations, and the potential to save lives can increase engagement. Practicing in a safe environment prepares individuals for real-life situations with greater confidence and effectiveness.

Debriefing reinforces learning, addressing emotions, and ensuring that soldiers walk away with practical takeaways. Providing a structured debrief allows National Guard members to process their experiences in a supportive environment. This reflection period helps soldiers identify what felt effective, what was challenging, and what they might do differently in a real-life situation. Debriefing, similar to after-action reviews, serves to build confidence and refine skills for future interventions. The goal is to increase readiness and ensure that when the time comes to check in on a struggling colleague, each soldier feels equipped to respond with care, confidence, and clarity. Tips on how to structure the roleplay debrief, see **Appendix 10**.

Materials Needed

- Workbook
- List of support resources (e.g., Military/Veterans Crisis Line, unit chaplain, mental health services)

Example Scenario

Your friend hasn't been answering their phone for a few days, and you want to check in on them. You stop by their home and notice they look upset, with dark circles under their eyes. They mention they just lost their job and feel hopeless.

Section 6: Step-by-Step Guide

1. Assign Roles

- a. One soldier plays the **concerned National Guard member** checking in.
- b. One soldier plays the **friend in distress** experiencing job loss and hopelessness.

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- c. Additional group members act as **observers** and provide feedback.
2. **Set the Scene**
 - a. You, the facilitator, briefly reviews the scenario and sets expectations.
 - b. Soldiers take a moment to consider how they would naturally approach a struggling friend.
3. **Conduct the Roleplay**
 - a. The **concerned National Guard member** knocks on the door and begins a conversation.
 - b. They should demonstrate active listening, express concern, and ask open-ended questions (e.g., “I’ve noticed you haven’t been answering your phone—how have you been holding up?”).
 - c. The **friend in distress** responds realistically, sharing their feelings of hopelessness and job loss.
 - d. The goal is for the concerned member to offer support, encourage help-seeking, and reinforce that their friend is not alone.
4. **Debrief & Discussion**
 - a. The **soldier who played the friend in distress** shares how the conversation felt.
 - b. The **concerned National Guard member** reflects on what was challenging and what felt effective.
 - c. **Observers** provide constructive feedback, focusing on:
 - i. Tone of voice and body language
 - ii. Effectiveness of questions and responses
 - iii. Whether support and resources were offered appropriately
5. **Facilitator Insights & Key Takeaways**
 - a. Reinforce the importance of checking in early and often with fellow soldiers.
 - b. Emphasize that it's okay not to have all the answers—being present and showing concern is what matters most.
 - c. Discuss barriers that might prevent someone from opening up and ways to overcome them.
 - d. Review relevant resources and how to encourage their use.

Alternative Variations

- Swap roles so multiple soldiers get a chance to practice.
- Adjust the scenario (e.g., the struggling friend denies anything is wrong, becomes defensive, or mentions thoughts of self-harm) to explore different challenges.
- Use a group discussion format to brainstorm ways to approach similar real-life situations.

Debriefing the roleplay



- *For those who played the concerned friend, what strategies did you use to check in and offer support?*
- *For those who played the struggling friend, what aspects of the conversation felt helpful or unhelpful?*
- *What was the most challenging part of the conversation?*
- *If this had been a real situation, what next steps would you take?*
- *Why is it important to reach out, even if you're not sure what to say?*

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Appendix 9 - Scripted Roleplay to MVCL

Characters:

CALLER: Alex (20s, National Guard, sounds anxious and frustrated)

RESPONDER: Sam (30s, calm, empathetic, and direct voice)

OBSERVER(S): (silently observing the interaction)

Setting:

Alex is at home, feeling overwhelmed after a particularly challenging training exercise.

Sam is at the Military Veterans Crisis Line call center.

The observer(s) listens in on the call.

(Phone rings. Sam answers.)

SAM: Military Veterans Crisis Line, this is Sam. How can I help you?

ALEX: (Voice shaky) Hi, Sam. My name is Alex. I... I don't even know if I should be calling. I'm in the National Guard though so I think it's ok.

SAM: Alex, thank you for reaching out. The Military Veterans Crisis Line is here to support all members of the military, including the National Guard. What's going on?

ALEX: It's just... this last drill weekend was awful. We had this exercise, and it was supposed to be realistic training, but it just felt... chaotic. There was so much yelling, and it brought up stuff I didn't even realize was still bothering me.

SAM: It sounds like the exercise was more intense than you expected, Alex, and that it triggered some difficult feelings. Can you tell me more about what those feelings are?

ALEX: It's hard to explain. I just felt really on edge the whole time. Like I had to be hyper-vigilant. And then afterwards, I couldn't sleep. Every little noise made me jump. It's like I never left.

SAM: That sounds really exhausting and unsettling. It's not uncommon for intense training to bring up past experiences or feelings. Have you felt this way after training exercises before?

ALEX: Not this bad. Usually, I can kind of shake it off after a day or two. But this time, it's been almost a week, and I still feel this knot in my stomach. I'm snapping at my family, and I just want to be left alone.

SAM: It sounds like this experience has had a significant impact on you, Alex, affecting your sleep and your relationships. It's important to acknowledge that. Have you talked to anyone in your unit about how you're feeling?

ALEX: I tried to mention it to one of the sergeants, but he just kind of brushed it off, said it was just stress.

SAM: It can be frustrating when you don't feel heard or understood, especially by those you serve with. But you've taken a brave step by calling us. We're here to listen without judgment. You mentioned this exercise brought up things you didn't realize were still bothering you. Can you say more about that?

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ALEX: (Hesitates) Well... there was a deployment a few years ago. It wasn't a combat deployment, but there were some... incidents. Some things I saw... they weren't easy. I thought I had dealt with it, but now I'm not so sure.

SAM: It sounds like this recent training may have reactivated some of those difficult memories and emotions from your deployment. It doesn't mean you haven't dealt with it; sometimes, things can resurface unexpectedly. How are you coping with these feelings right now? Are you using any specific strategies?

ALEX: Not really. Mostly just trying to distract myself, but it's not working very well. I've been having some pretty dark thoughts, to be honest.

SAM: Alex, thank you for being honest with me about that. It sounds like you're going through a really tough time. When you say dark thoughts, can you tell me more about what you mean? Are you having thoughts of harming yourself?

ALEX: (Long pause) Sometimes... yeah. The thought crosses my mind that it would just be easier if I wasn't around. But I haven't... I haven't made any plans.

SAM: I hear that you're in a lot of pain right now, and those thoughts can be scary. It's important that you know you're not alone, and we want to help you through this. Since you're having these thoughts, even though you don't have a plan, I want to make sure you have the support you need to stay safe. Would you be open to talking about some immediate steps we can take to ensure your safety?

ALEX: (Quietly) I guess so.

SAM: Okay, we could connect you with immediate support in your area, and we can also explore longer-term resources that can help you process these feelings and memories. How does that sound?

ALEX: It sounds... okay.

SAM: Alright, Alex. Let's start by...

(The conversation continues with Sam focusing on Alex's immediate safety and exploring resources.)

Questions for the Observer(s)/group:

- What did you feel as you listened to the conversation? Did it make you think that calling the MVCL could be a good thing for a soldier who's struggling?
- How likely is Alex to call the Crisis Line again during his next crisis?

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Appendix 10 - Debriefing a Roleplay

By guiding the debrief in this way, you can help the soldiers process their experiences, learn from each other, and leave feeling more prepared to support a fellow National Guard member in distress.

1. Emotional Check-In

- Begin by acknowledging that discussing distress and suicide prevention can bring up emotions.
 - *How did that experience feel for you?*
 - *Was anything surprising or uncomfortable about the conversation?*

2. Reflecting on the Experience

- Encourage participants to analyze their approach and responses.
 - *For those who played the concerned friend, what strategies did you use to check in and offer support?*
 - *For those who played the struggling friend, what aspects of the conversation felt helpful or unhelpful?*

3. Identifying Challenges

- Discuss difficulties encountered during the roleplay.
 - *What was the most challenging part of the conversation?*
 - *Did you feel any hesitation or resistance, and if so, what caused it?*
 - *Were there moments where you felt unsure about what to say or do?*

4. Effective Communication Techniques

- Highlight communication skills that were effective in the conversation.
 - *What phrases or approaches seemed to encourage open discussion?*
 - *Was active listening used effectively? How could it be improved?*
 - *Did you notice any verbal or non-verbal cues that influenced the conversation?*

5. Applying Lessons to Real-Life Situations

- Connect the roleplay to real-world readiness.
 - *How might this roleplay change the way you check in on a struggling fellow soldier?*
 - *If this had been a real situation, what next steps would you take?*
 - *What resources could you recommend or connect someone to if they expressed feelings of hopelessness?*

6. Reinforcing the Importance of Checking In

- Emphasize that small interventions can have a big impact.
 - *Why is it important to reach out, even if you're not sure what to say?*
 - *How does practicing these conversations make it easier to have them in real life?*

7. Closing & Final Takeaways

- Summarize key insights from the discussion.
- Reinforce that checking in on a struggling colleague is about showing care and being present, not about having all the answers.
- Encourage ongoing conversations and remind soldiers of available support resources.