

FWD ASSIST HQ / COMPANION / NO. 18

The Card

Nobody can think straight in the middle of it. So you decide it now, on an ordinary day, and you carry it.

The problem with the worst nights is not that there is nobody. It is that at two in the morning you cannot think of anybody, and looking for a number feels like more than you have in you.

So the work happens now, while it is easier. You fill in a card once. Then it exists, and the version of you who needs it does not have to build it from nothing.

THE NUMBER, BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

Veterans Crisis Line: dial 988 then press 1. Or text 838255. Or chat at veteranscrisisline.net. It is answered around the clock and you do not have to be enrolled in VA health care to use it.

WHAT IS IN HERE

1. Why you fill this in on a good day
2. What people around you actually need to know
3. The card, to cut out and keep
4. A page for whoever you give it to

This is not treatment and it is not a substitute for it. It is a piece of paper that makes one thing easier. If you are working with a counselor or a doctor, tell them you are doing this and let them help you fill it in.

Decide it on a good day

Every decision you make in advance is one you do not have to make later.

Think about how much of that night is spent on logistics. Where is the number. Is it too late to call him. Will she be asleep. What do I even say. None of that is the actual problem, and all of it stands between you and the part that helps.

Answer those questions once, in daylight, when they are just questions. Write the answers down. That is the entire idea.

THE ONE LINE TO REMEMBER

You are not writing this for tonight. You are writing it for a night you cannot picture right now.

Which is why it goes in your wallet, on the fridge, in the truck, in a photo on your phone. Somewhere your hands find it without your head having to work.

Three people, not one

One name is fragile. He does not pick up, or he is deployed, or you had an argument last month and now calling him is one more hard thing. Put three down. They do not all have to be close friends. One can be a brother you talk to twice a year. One can be a Vet Center. One can be a line that is answered by a stranger, which is sometimes the easiest call to make.

A word about the ones who are not people

A Vet Center is staffed largely by veterans and family members, and counseling there is confidential and separate from the rest of the system. Chaplains take calls that are not religious. The crisis line does not require you to be in crisis. Put at least one of these on the card so there is always something open.

Where to find the numbers, so you can fill the card in tonight. The Vet Center Call Center is 1-877-927-8387 and it is answered around the clock; they can also tell you where your nearest Vet Center is. To look one up yourself, use the facility locator at va.gov and choose Vet Centers. Your clinic's number is on your appointment letter or your VA card.

What actually helps, and what does not

Most people who love you have no idea what to do, so they guess. Telling them saves everybody.

What people do	What veterans say works better
Ask a hundred questions about what happened.	Sit there. Say almost nothing. Stay longer than is comfortable.
Try to fix it, or explain why it is not that bad.	Agree it is bad. Do not argue with it.
Say to call if you need anything.	Show up. Bring food. Drive. Do the thing without being asked.
Disappear because they are afraid of saying the wrong thing.	Text anyway. Say I do not know what to say and I am not going anywhere.
Guess how bad it is from the outside.	Ask. "Is this a rough night or is this worse than that?" You are allowed to ask directly, and asking does not plant an idea.

None of that is clinical advice. It is what people say afterward about what they wished somebody had done. Your version may be different, and the card has a line for it, because the person who wants to help you genuinely does not know unless you tell them.

One more decision worth making today

Putting time and distance between a bad hour and a decision is something clinicians and crisis counselors raise often, and it is worth asking them about. What it looks like is personal: for some people it is where a firearm is stored, for some it is who holds a medication, for some it is something else entirely.

This is worth deciding with somebody rather than alone. A Vet Center counselor, your clinician, or the crisis line will talk it through with you, and they will know what is lawful and practical where you live, which matters for firearms in particular. Then tell one of your three people what you decided.

ONE THING WORTH SAYING PLAINLY

If it is getting worse, or if it is not the ordinary bad night, that is a reason to get a professional involved, not a reason to handle it alone with a card. The card is for the gap between appointments. It does not replace one.

The card

Fill it in. Cut along the box below. Fold it to fit where you keep it: wallet, fridge, glove box, and take a photo of it so it is on your phone too.

MY THREE PEOPLE

Name	Number	Best time / how

ALWAYS OPEN

Veterans Crisis Line	988 then press 1, or text 838255
My Vet Center	
My clinic or counselor	
One more	

WHAT I WANT SOMEBODY TO DO

In your own words. Short. Somebody will read this out loud to themselves at a bad moment. Somebody else wrote: "Just come over. You do not have to say anything. Do not make me explain it."

WHAT DOES NOT HELP ME

Somebody else wrote: "Do not tell me about your cousin. Do not ask if I have tried going for a run."

ONE REASON I WROTE THIS DOWN

A person, a dog, a promise, a date on a calendar. Whatever is true. You are writing it for somebody who will have forgotten it.

If somebody gave you this card

Then they trust you, and they did something hard to hand it over.

You do not need training and you are not being asked to be a counselor. You are being asked to be reachable and to not flinch.

IF YOU ARE THE ONE HANDING IT OVER

Handing somebody this card is the hard part. You do not need a speech. Something like: "I wrote this down on a good day. I want you to have it. You do not have to do anything with it right now." Text it if saying it out loud is too much. Sending a photo of the card counts.

- ☐ Put their name in your phone in a way you will notice at a bad hour.
- ☐ Answer, or call back fast, even when it is inconvenient.
- ☐ Read what they wrote under what I want somebody to do, and do that.
- ☐ Do not make them explain or justify it.
- ☐ Show up in person when you can. Presence beats words.
- ☐ Say the hard thing out loud if you are worried. Asking directly does not plant an idea.
- ☐ Keep your own support. You are not meant to carry this alone.

IF YOU ARE WORRIED RIGHT NOW

Veterans Crisis Line: dial 988 then press 1. Or text 838255. Or chat at veteranscrisisline.net. It is answered around the clock and you do not have to be enrolled in VA health care to use it.

You can call it yourself, about somebody else, without them on the line. Family and friends use it too. If somebody is in immediate danger, that is 911.

A note about this document

This is a companion to a book, not a clinical instrument, and it does not replace a treatment plan. If you or the person who gave you this is working with a counselor or a Vet Center, tell them about the card and let them help shape it.

This is general education. It is not medical advice, and it is not a substitute for care from a qualified professional. FWD Assist HQ is not affiliated with the Department of Veterans Affairs or any government agency.

Current as of October 2026. Phone numbers and services change. Confirm them before you rely on this.