

## What is 988?

**988** connects the public to mental health crisis counselors who are part of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network. It will be available across the country on July 16, 2022.

### When Should I call 988?

You can call, text, or chat 988 when you'd like emotional support, are thinking about suicide, or are worried about a friend or loved one.

People call to talk about lots of things: substance use, depression, emotional distress, anxiety, and stress caused by financial worries, relationships, sexual identity, abuse, mental and physical illness, and loneliness, to name a few.

### What Happens When I Reach Out to 988?

Crisis counselors will listen to you, provide support, and connect you to resources if necessary.

- ➔ Spanish-speaking counselors available
- ➔ Additional translation services available
- ➔ Services for veterans and the LGBTQ+ community

## How is 988 Different?

### How is it Different from 911?

**911** connects the public to emergency services. If you need an ambulance, police, fire, or another emergency response, this is still the number to dial.

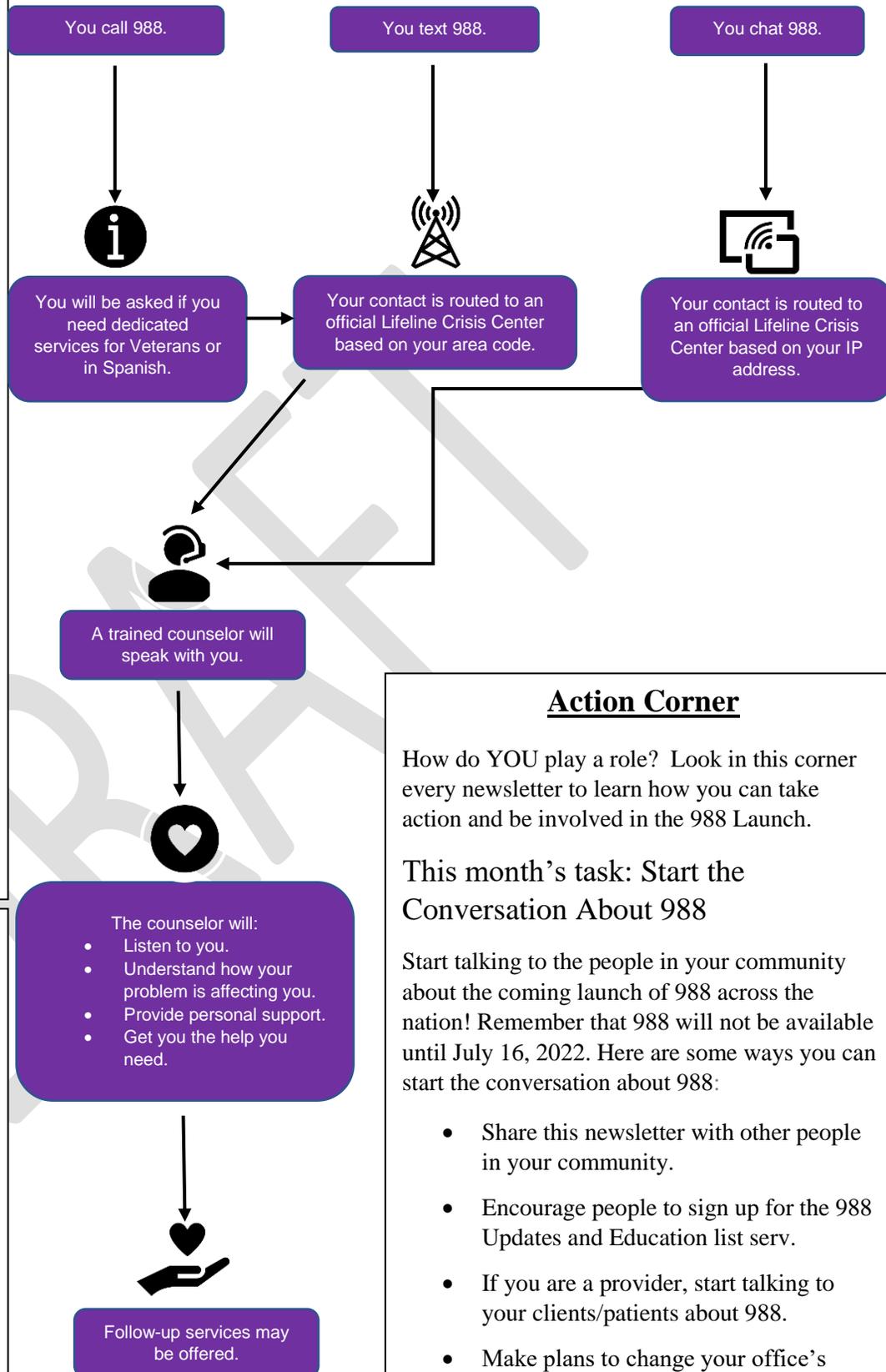
### How is it Different from 311?

**311** is New York City's non-emergency phone number to find information about services, make complaints, or report problems like graffiti or road damage.

### How is it Different from 211?

**211** is the non-emergency number for finding community resources, such as food banks and shelters.

## What Happens When I Contact 988?



## Action Corner

How do YOU play a role? Look in this corner every newsletter to learn how you can take action and be involved in the 988 Launch.

### This month's task: Start the Conversation About 988

Start talking to the people in your community about the coming launch of 988 across the nation! Remember that 988 will not be available until July 16, 2022. Here are some ways you can start the conversation about 988:

- Share this newsletter with other people in your community.
- Encourage people to sign up for the 988 Updates and Education list serv.
- If you are a provider, start talking to your clients/patients about 988.
- Make plans to change your office's methods of communication to include 988 as an emergency resource for mental health crises starting after July 2022.

# An Interview With a 988 Contact Center Director

Cheryl Giarrusso is the Director of Crisis Services at Contact Community Services (Contact). She and her team are getting ready to make the switch to 988 this July. Contact will be one of 13 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) centers in New York making the switch to 988.

“988 will help folks who are struggling, in crisis, or just need to connect. **It’s such an easy number to remember**, which means more people will use it,” Giarrusso said.

Contact is the primary NSPL contact center for 10 counties in New York. It received about **15,000 calls in 2020**. Giarrusso says the organization **expects a 30% increase in calls** during 988’s first years.

To prepare for 988, Giarrusso is increasing staff, improving training, and strengthening follow-up services.

Talk with us.



Be the lifeline.



## Training and Community Connections

Contact’s Counselors receive training focused on active listening. This is an essential skill for answering crisis calls. “When someone doesn’t feel prepared to respond to a crisis call, they may switch into ‘question mode.’ That isn’t always what a caller wants,” Giarrusso explained. “Problem-solving isn’t always the best response to someone in crisis. **People want to tell their story to someone who will just listen and won’t judge them.**”

Contact is also building strong connections to care in the community. This helps her staff connect callers to the services they might need for ongoing support.

The center is working with local governments and 911 centers to prepare for 988's launch, too. Counselors from Contact will work in 911 call centers to make the transition easier. They will **help 911 operators find the callers who may prefer talking with a trained mental health counselor**. Eventually, Giarrusso wants to divert all these calls once Contact has more staff.

## Staff and Wellness

So, who are the people answering the phone at Contact? Most of the staff are licensed counselors that have a master’s degree. Some counselors are graduate students or have bachelor’s degrees. **Every counselor goes through over 100 hours of training before they can take calls on their own.** Contact is also developing a peer program so certified peer specialists can answer calls as well.

Staff wellness at Contact matters, too. Giarrusso requires all contact center workers to develop their own safety plan to outline their personal signs of stress. The plan helps supervisors and staff know when it’s time to take a break. Contact’s offices are also filled with signs that encourage workers to ‘Take 250.’ Giarrusso said, “If it’s time for a counselor to walk away from their desk, we urge them take 250 steps to clear their head.” The organization also offers a quiet room with a couch, chair, and low lighting where staff can go to relax.

Giarrusso says **the work can be stressful, but it’s fulfilling** for her and her team. “People really feel good knowing they made a connection and were able help someone using active listening,” she said. “People feel good about doing that. They’re happy that they came in and picked up the phone.”

Contact Community Services has been a provider of the NSPL since 2010