

TAKE ACTION

FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Support Your Way:

STORIES OF REACHING OUT

What support can look like —
before, during, and after a crisis



There's no one way to ask for help. This booklet shares the stories of Californians — with different lived experiences, challenges, and identities — walking through what it looked like to reach out before, during, and after a mental health or suicidal crisis.

You might see yourself in these moments: feeling overwhelmed, checking in on a loved one, or not knowing where to start. That's okay. Support looks different for everyone; what matters is reaching out in ways that feel safe for you. These stories are meant to show you how different resources and supports can help before, during, or after challenging moments or crises.

Selma, 38

Selma is a mother of two teens and also helps care for her mother. She and her husband, Daniel, have always tried to keep family life steady— but lately, the stress has been building. Their teenage daughter has become more withdrawn, and their middle schooler recently asked questions about self-harm after a classmate shared something scary online.

Before the Crisis

As a first-generation Lebanese American, Selma didn't grow up talking about mental health. But she knew something had to shift. At a school event, she learned about youth suicide prevention, and learned the importance of regular conversations with teens, and how talking about suicide prevention doesn't mean it will put the idea in their head. That night, Selma decided to discuss it with Daniel. Together, they learned more about warning signs, how to listen to hard emotions without judgment, and made a plan for mental health check-ins with their teens. They started regular "family talks" after dinner — just 10 minutes where anyone could bring up anything. The conversations felt awkward at first, but slowly, the kids opened up.

During the Crisis

One night, their daughter confided that a friend had mentioned wanting to disappear. Selma took a deep breath and thanked her for sharing, then shared Teen Line, a peer resource she learned about. Selma also called 988 that night — not in a panic, but to ask how to support her daughter and respond in a calm, informed way. The counselor helped her keep communication open while keeping everyone safe. Selma was able to reach out to the parents of the friend, and helped them make a plan.

After the Crisis

The experience opened up a new level of closeness in their family. They now make it a point to check in as a family when things get hard, and not put off conversations, even if it takes persistence. Selma also found a local support group for first-generation parents through Inclusive Therapists, where she could discuss the emotional weight of caregiving.



"I used to think I had to have all the answers. Now I know the most important thing is just being there."

Amari, 22

Amari is a nonbinary Black creative balancing multiple part-time jobs while pursuing their passion for dance and design. Lately, the stress has been suffocating — rent, rejection, loneliness. They find themselves zoning out during the day and doom-scrolling at night.

Before the Crisis

Amari knew something was off but kept brushing it aside. Their friend group had been talking about therapy more, and one friend shared his experience texting 988 and receiving in-the-moment support. Learning that someone close to them had been dealing with the same type of pressures was comforting. Amari saved the number and website 988california.org to their notes app, just in case they or someone they knew needed support.

During the Crisis

One weekend, after a falling-out with a close friend and a string of job rejections, Amari started to feel worse than they had before. They had dealt with depression and anxiety throughout young adulthood, but this felt different and more overwhelming. They texted 988, unsure what to expect. The counselor responded right away. The counselor validated how overwhelmed Amari felt and offered to stay on the line while they made a safety plan together. Amari ended the call feeling calmer, but also ready to find ongoing support.

After the Crisis

That text to 988 helped Amari take the next step: calling a therapist on a community-based directory for 2SLGBTQIA+ people of color. Amari also explored [The Trevor Project](https://www.thetrevorproject.org) website and text line, which they found helpful for finding language around what they were feeling. They still have hard days, but now they don't hide them. And when they see friends struggling, they share what helped them.

"Reaching out didn't solve everything, but it did make me feel better, and gave me the encouragement to be honest with myself as well as my friends and family."





Mateo, 45

Mateo had been working long hours to support his family after being laid off from his previous job. He hadn't told his partner how bad things had gotten — he felt ashamed, and like he had to stay strong. But the pressure was eating him alive.

Before the Crisis

He stopped sleeping. He started avoiding calls from friends. He felt like he was failing, even though he was doing everything he could.

During the Crisis

One evening after work, Mateo sat quietly in the backyard, staring at the sky, feeling like he couldn't hold it together another day. He thought about calling 988 but hesitated. He'd heard stories about law enforcement getting involved and didn't want things to escalate.

He decided to check the 988 website first and learned that law enforcement is only involved in rare situations when there's a serious risk to someone's life. That gave him enough peace of mind to call.

The counselor who answered let him talk without judgment, asked how he was feeling, and helped him plan a way forward with the goal of keeping him safe. They also referred him to several local supports offered in his County which provided things like temporary assistance and a peer support group with other men in Spanish.

After the Crisis

Mateo shared what happened with his partner and found support he didn't expect, but greatly appreciated. Together, they worked out a plan to take care of bills, find job training options, and build a new routine. Mateo also began attending a peer support group for men experiencing work-related stress.

"I thought reaching out would make me look weak. But that call helped me feel human again."



Lena, 25

Lena is a first-generation college graduate and a graduate student studying biology and data science. Balancing her academic workload with a part-time job and family expectations has left her feeling isolated and overwhelmed. A recent breakup made everything harder — like she was starting from scratch.

Before the Crisis

Lena kept herself busy to avoid thinking about how exhausted she felt. But when she started skipping classes and ignoring texts from her closest friends, she knew something wasn't right. A classmate had once mentioned the [988 Lifeline](#). Lena saved the number in her phone, just in case.

During the Crisis

One night, the pressure caught up with her. She texted 988, unsure of what to expect.

The counselor responded quickly and gently helped her name what she was feeling. They offered breathing exercises and checked in about her safety. It didn't feel like a script, but more like someone was actually listening.

After the Crisis

The next day, Lena looked into low-cost therapy options through her school, as well as culturally affirming therapists and peer groups. She found [Therapy for Black Girls](#) and bookmarked it as a resource to return to. The steps felt small, but they were hers.

"I didn't have to figure it all out that night. I just had to take the first step — and I'm glad I did."

Elijah, 32

Elijah is a middle school teacher and the oldest son in a close-knit Filipino family. Between grading papers, mentoring students, and helping his younger siblings navigate their own lives, he's always been seen as the strong, steady one. But lately, he's felt like anything but.

Before the Crisis

The pressure of being dependable — for his students, his family, and his community — had been building for months. Elijah started having trouble sleeping. He lost interest in the things that used to bring him joy, like playing pickup basketball on weekends. He kept telling himself he just needed to push through. But the weight didn't go away.

Late one night, while scrolling on his phone, he came across a post that read, "You don't have to be in crisis to call 988. Sometimes you just need someone to talk to." He took a screenshot, unsure if he'd ever use it.

During the Crisis

After a particularly stressful parent-teacher conference, Elijah drove home feeling overwhelmed and shaky. He sat in his car for 30 minutes, unable to move. That screenshot came to mind. He dialed 988.

When the counselor picked up, Elijah was quiet at first. Then the words started spilling out. About the expectations. The exhaustion. The guilt he felt for needing help at all. The counselor listened, helped him breathe, and reminded him that caring for others doesn't mean abandoning yourself. Once Elijah felt safe to be on his own, the counselor helped him outline steps to find someone he could talk with regularly.

After the Crisis

That call was a turning point. Elijah began seeing a therapist who specialized in supporting educators. He also explored emotional well-being resources online after visiting the National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association (NAAPIMHA) and got connected to an online support group. These days, Elijah can show up for his students and family — while also showing up for himself.



**"I used to think I had to carry it all alone.
But support makes me stronger — not weaker."**

Reach Out for More Support

If you or someone you love is struggling, help is here — any time, in your own way. You can call, text, or chat with trained counselors using any of the below resources.

You can reach out for yourself or someone else, and you don't have to be in crisis to get support.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988 for free, 24/7 support | 988california.org

The Trevor Project

Support for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth: 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678-678 | thetrevorproject.org

Teen Line

Youth-to-youth support: 1-800-852-8336 or text TEEN to 839863 | teenline.org

Therapy for Black Girls

An online space dedicated to encouraging the mental wellness of Black women and girls with podcasts, therapists, and more | therapyforblackgirls.com

National AAPI Mental Health Association

Trainings, resources, and events to promote mental health and well being for Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities | naapimha.org

South Asian Mental Health Initiative & Network

An online network of support groups, providers, resources, and articles for South Asian communities | samhin.org

Inclusive Therapists

An online directory to help you find a therapist, counselor, or coach near you who shares or understands your background and unique identity | inclusivetherapists.com

And don't forget, your County's Behavioral Health Department's website can help you find various community resources and support service local to you.

