

## PTSD Bytes – Audio Transcription

Episode #:	10
Guest:	Lisa Brenner, PhD
Title:	#10: Crisis Resources and Support

Pearl:

Welcome and thank you for tuning in to PTSD Bytes, the podcast where we invite experts to talk about PTSD and mental health and how technology like mental health apps can help. We'll cover a new topic every other week in bite-sized episodes. I'm your host, Pearl McGee-Vincent, and I'm a clinical psychologist at the Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD.

We have a very important topic today, resources for crisis support. We'll be learning about things that you can do for your everyday mental health, as well as tools that you or those you care for can use before, during and after a mental health crisis. Before we get started, given the topic, I want to make sure our listeners know that in the event of a life-threatening emergency to call 9 1 1, or go to your nearest emergency room. You can also call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255, Veterans press 1 for the Veterans Crisis Line.

And now it is my pleasure to introduce today's guest. Dr. Lisa Brenner is a board-certified rehabilitation psychologist. She's also a professor at the University of Colorado and the director of the Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center, or MIRECC, at the VA. Welcome Dr. Brenner.

Lisa:

Thank you so much for this invitation and opportunity to speak about Veteran suicide prevention.

Pearl:

Can you break down for us the types of things that mental health professionals are talking about when they refer to somebody being in crisis?

Lisa:

The thing that's so hard about crisis is it can be so different for different people. The way that I generally conceptualize it is when people's coping strategies are outstripped by their stressors, right? This is different for each of us. For some people, it could be financial stress, for some people it could be familial stress. But really what can happen is the stress starts to mount and the stressors and the stress overwhelm individuals' coping strategies. And that's when we usually think about being in crisis.

Pearl:

So what kinds of things are you talking about when you mention coping strategies?

Lisa:

Coping strategies can be a whole range of things. Some of them are really very similar for all of us. Can never underestimate the importance of a good night's sleep, taking care of yourself in terms of diet and exercise and just kind of level setting. I think there are additional things that we do for ourselves. So for example, different people really like to listen to certain kinds of music or whatever it is that feels like it can help you settle, can get your feet underneath you. For some people connecting with other people can help with coping. I think knowing what helps you get your feet underneath you is really, really important. And to have those thoughts about ahead of time.

Pearl:

So how does somebody know whether they're in crisis or headed towards a crisis, or how can someone identify if someone they care about may be headed towards a crisis?

Lisa:

It's always great if you can take stock before a crisis occurs. So what does it feel like to feel okay. And then what are the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that start to occur when things are starting to be more difficult. And so for some people that can look like: I'm having trouble sleeping, I'm having trouble concentrating, I'm having a harder time dealing with those in my family or my kids. The other thing that can be really helpful for people is to notice their triggers. So if you know something is generally triggering to plan ahead. How do we plan for things that are going to take an emotional toll on us? And then in doing that, how do we put coping strategies or things to bolster our coping strategies in place?

I think these same kinds of conversations can be had between family members also. You can have a sense for people that you care about, what does it look like when their coping strategies are getting overwhelmed. Maybe agitation is one that we look for. Maybe somebody who drinks socially, suddenly you notice somebody you care about or yourself is drinking every night. And I think that's the key is what does it look like when things are at baseline versus when is there a change?

Pearl:

And I'm also wondering what's the difference between somebody who might have that experience of not being able to cope because of an overabundance of stress and somebody who's actually at risk of suicide? Or is there a difference or how can we tell?

Lisa:

Well, again, I think it's different for different people. I generally think that for folks, when they start to move into a place of feeling hopeless, they feel like they can't do any bolstering. sometimes folks really start to think about ending their own lives. and people more frequently than many people think, have the thought, 'I wish I was just dead or I wish I just wouldn't wake up' when they're feeling very stuck or hopeless about their situation. So certainly if people are moving from, 'I'm feeling overwhelmed' to, 'I feel trapped. I feel hopeless, I don't think there's a way out of this situation' – that would certainly be the time to start getting help, to get some more support and try to put some pieces in to help bolster until people start feeling better.

Pearl:

One of the key takeaways I'm hearing from you is that crises don't necessarily come out of nowhere. That there can be warning signs or things you notice about your behavior or your thoughts that can cue you into the fact that you're maybe not doing so well. And that when you notice that, you can ramp up these coping strategies to help avoid going into crisis.

Lisa:

Yeah, yeah, I think sometimes it can be like that. Sometimes it can be a process where it's like a snowball rolling down a hill and things start to accumulate, and you have less and less of the coping behaviors and more and more stressors, and things get overwhelming. There are other things that are just like really,

really large stressors for people, let's say getting a really hard medical diagnosis that can instantaneously move folks from feeling pretty okay into crisis mode.

Pearl:

At what point should somebody consider calling the Crisis Line? Do you have to be thinking about suicide or could you call the Crisis Line at other times for other reasons?

Lisa:

Yeah, it's a really great point to bring up because we really want to encourage folks to call sooner. And some people don't like to talk to people a lot, so I always like to remind that you can call, you can talk to somebody, or you can chat or you can text. And for Veterans, certainly we encourage folks to call and press 1. And there you can speak to somebody who works for the VA and has specialized training in things that can be stressful to Veterans.

The other thing though is if somebody's having a suicidal crisis, the folks at the Crisis Line are really well trained to help people assess what's happening for them right now. They will be able to stay steady and help you take some steps to either put a safety plan in place or find more immediate care that you need right now. People will try to get a sense of what's happening for you. Are you safe right now? How can we help you right now? All the questions I'll be asking is to kind of help you and then figure out what you can do together to create safety and help bolster your coping.

Pearl:

And so just to help clarify, you can call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. And then for the Veterans Crisis Line, you call that same number 1-800-273-8255, and then press 1. And that'll route you over to the Veterans Crisis Line. And that's available to Veterans, Veterans' family members, loved ones, as well.

Lisa:

And military members. The other thing I should say is that if somebody is a family member or friend and isn't sure what the next best step to take is, certainly people on the Crisis Line can help with that too. I also just want to let folks know too, that there are resources, both in terms of chat and texting in Spanish. When you look at the [Veteranscrisisline.net](http://Veteranscrisisline.net), there's a link you can see right on the main Crisis Line page that has everything translated into Spanish and talks about what the resources are.

Pearl:

Thank you. And can you share with us what a safety plan is and who can benefit from one?

Lisa:

One thing that's true for all of us is we don't do our greatest planning when we are tired or in crisis, or just generally not doing well or feeling well. And so the idea of a safety plan is, let's do the thinking ahead of time. Before we kind of talked about internal coping strategies, so that would be part of the safety plan, where you have things listed that you know you can do for yourself that actually help you feel like you can get your feet underneath you. We really like to work with people ahead of time, to make sure that things like excess medications are outside the house, that guns are appropriately locked up. Because we really want folks to be able to have the opportunity to get through crises, get to the other side and be able to live out their futures.

Pearl:

One thing that really stands out to me is how much the technology has evolved. Are there any other technology resources that you would recommend related to crisis support?

Lisa:

One thing that's evolved over time is safety planning used to kind of happen in the old-fashioned way on paper and pencil. But now we have the safety planning embedded in the PTSD app and you can have it right there and accessible to you in terms of kind of contacting people you might want to contact, contacting the Crisis Line, also updating it. And it makes it really a live document.

Pearl:

Thank you so much for joining us today, Dr. Brenner, and sharing your wealth of expertise related to suicide prevention and crisis support.

Lisa:

Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me. It's such a pleasure to talk to you all. And I know we've been talking a little bit about Veterans, but I also want individuals to know that the things like the PTSD app are available online, they're there for everybody.

Pearl:

Some of my key takeaways today are the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255, press 1 if you're a Veteran to get to the Veteran's Crisis Line. You can also text the Veteran's Crisis Line at 838255. You can visit the Veterans Crisis Line online at [Veteranscrisisline.net](http://Veteranscrisisline.net). And there you can find the chat feature to chat with the Veterans Crisis Line, as well as resources in Spanish.

One of the important things I learned from Dr Brenner today was that there's no one size fits all model for crisis prevention, and that it can be really beneficial to take an inventory when you're not in crisis so that when things start to go sideways, you have a strategy in place to get help.

And I wanted to highlight if you go on YouTube and search for "VA safety plan," you can see a brief tutorial on how to create your Safety Plan in PTSD Coach.

Pearl:

This has been an episode of PTSD Bytes, the podcast that delivers bite-sized expertise on issues related to PTSD, mental health and technology. Catch new episodes every other week by following or subscribing to PTSD Bytes on your preferred podcast app. Thank you for joining us.