

Suicide Prevention Week: Five Toolbox Talks

How to Use These Talks

This pack contains five toolbox talks, one for each day of Construction Suicide Prevention Week, 14 to 18 September 2026. Each talk runs about five minutes. They are free to copy, print and use on any project, and no software is required to run them.

No training or qualification is needed to present them. The person delivering the talk is not being asked to counsel anyone. The purpose is to raise the subject out loud, in front of the crew, so that it stops being unmentionable on site.

- **Deliver them in person:** These talks work when a superintendent or foreman presents them face to face. A message on a phone does not carry the same weight.
- **Read the content as written:** The wording on sensitive points has been chosen deliberately. Improvising around it tends to soften the parts that matter most.
- **Leave time at the end:** Do not close the huddle the moment the talk finishes. The useful conversations usually start after the speaker stops.
- **Prepare the site-specific fields first:** Two talks require your own Employee Assistance Program details. Look them up before presenting rather than guessing at them.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Call or text 988, any time of day or night.

Crisis Text Line. Text HELLO to 741741.

Written by Nyfty.ai and free to copy, print and use on any project. The topic set follows the themes in the Construction Suicide Prevention Partnership's toolbox talk library, which carries 19 topics in English and Spanish at [construction-suicideprevention.com](https://www.construction-suicideprevention.com). Figures are from NIOSH and the CDC, Suicides Among Construction Workers in the United States, 2021, and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 2021.

Day 1. Suicide Prevention: Why It Belongs in a Toolbox Talk

The Number Behind This Talk

In 2021, 5,213 construction workers in the United States died by suicide. That is more than five times the number of construction workers who died from injuries on the job in the same year.

The construction suicide rate was 46.06 per 100,000 workers, against 19.47 across all industries. Construction accounts for 7.4 percent of the workforce and 17.9 percent of all worker suicide deaths. These figures are published by NIOSH and the CDC.

Every project has a system for the second number. Pre-use inspections, barricades, pre-task plans, incident reviews, corrective actions. The first number, on most sites, gets a poster. This week is about closing that gap by five minutes a day.

Why This Industry Carries More of It

The conditions the research points to are ordinary on a jobsite rather than unusual:

- **Intermittent Work:** Jobs start and stop, and income stops with them. Uncertainty about the next start date is a constant for large parts of the workforce.
- **Time Away From Home:** Following the work means long stretches away from family, routine and the people who would otherwise notice a change.
- **Chronic Pain:** Physical work produces injury, and injury brings long-term pain management, which carries its own well-documented risks.
- **A Culture of Not Saying:** The expected answer to how are you doing has been fine, regardless of what is actually true. That expectation is learned on site and it is reinforced daily.

The risk is not spread evenly across the trades. Among male construction workers in 2021, ironworkers were at 117.89 per 100,000 and welders at 87.03, against a construction average of 46.06. Workers aged 55 to 64 were also above the industry average, which cuts against the assumption that this affects younger workers only.

Discussion

Do not press for answers on the first day. Put the subject on the table and let it sit. If the crew says nothing, that is itself worth naming before moving on.

Key Points

This Is a Safety Issue

More construction workers die by suicide than from injuries on the job. It belongs in the same conversation as fall protection and equipment inspection.

The Conditions Are Ordinary

Intermittent work, time away from home and chronic pain are normal features of this industry, and so is the risk that travels with them.

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Day 2. The Words We Use

Language Decides Whether People Speak Up

The phrase committed suicide is inherited from criminal language. Offences are committed. Clinical bodies, public health agencies and crisis services now use died by suicide, and the reason matters on a jobsite.

A worker who believes that what he is feeling makes him a criminal or a coward will say nothing. A worker who understands it as something that happens to people, and that has a response, has a reason to speak. The change in wording costs nothing and it changes who talks.

Redefining Tough

The trade's working definition of tough has been to carry it privately and get on with the job. Applied to physical work that definition has served the industry well. Applied to this, it has cost it people. A more useful definition for a crew:

- **Tough Is Saying It First:** A worker who tells his crew he is not doing well takes a harder action than lifting a heavy load, and takes a real social risk doing it.
- **Tough Is Asking:** Raising the subject with a workmate is uncomfortable and carries the risk of getting it wrong. It is also the action most likely to change an outcome.
- **Tough Is Staying:** Sitting with someone through a difficult conversation, without trying to solve it, is harder than offering advice and considerably more useful.

Discussion

Ask the crew whether anyone has ever told someone at work that they were struggling, and what the response was. If nobody answers, say so plainly and move on. Silence on that question is the point of the talk.

Key Points

Say Died By Suicide

Committed is borrowed from criminal language. The wording shapes whether a worker believes he can raise it at all.

Redefine Tough On Site

Tough is the worker who says it first, asks the question, and stays for the answer.

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Day 3. How to Ask

The Barrier Is Not Caring

Most workers say they would step in if they believed a workmate was in trouble. Most do not. The reason given is consistently the same: not knowing what to say, and fear of making the situation worse.

No qualification is required for what follows. The sequence below is four steps long and any member of a crew can use it.

The Four Lines

- **Name What You Noticed:** State the observation, not the conclusion. You have not been yourself the last couple of weeks, rather than what is wrong with you.
- **Ask Directly:** Are you thinking about suicide. Asking a person directly does not put the idea in their head. That belief is a myth and it is the most common reason the question never gets asked. The usual response to being asked is relief.
- **Listen Without Fixing:** Do not fill the silence, offer solutions, or move the conversation to your own experience. Let the answer be as serious as the person says it is.
- **Give Something Concrete:** The 988 number, the Employee Assistance Program number, a lift to an appointment, or time off the tools. A specific next step is worth more than an offer to talk any time.

If the Answer Is Yes

Do not leave the person on their own, and do not treat the conversation as finished because it was difficult.

- **Stay With Them:** Remain with the person while arrangements are made. Being alone immediately after disclosing is the situation to avoid.
- **Make the Call Together:** Call or text 988 with them rather than handing over a number and walking away.
- **Escalate the Same Day:** Notify your supervisor or safety lead so that support continues past the end of the shift. This is a handover, not a breach of confidence.

Discussion

Ask the crew to consider who on this site they would go to if they noticed someone going quiet. They do not need to answer out loud, but they should leave with a name in mind.

Key Points

Ask the Question Directly

Asking does not plant the idea. Avoiding the question is what keeps people silent.

Listen, Then Give a Next Step

Do not solve it. Hand over something specific: a number, a lift, time off the tools.

Never Leave Someone Alone

If the answer is yes, stay with them, call 988 together and escalate the same day.

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Day 4. Where to Send Someone

Know the Numbers Before You Need Them

The previous talk covered how to raise the subject. This one covers where to direct a person afterwards, so that the conversation does not stall at the point it matters most.

Before presenting this talk, write both crisis numbers and your own Employee Assistance Program number on the site board, and leave them there permanently.

Crisis Support

- **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline:** Call or text 988 from anywhere in the United States, any time of day or night. It is free. A trained counsellor answers and talks the situation through. It can also be used by someone who is worried about another person and does not know what to do.
- **Crisis Text Line:** Text HELLO to 741741 to have the same conversation entirely by text, for anyone who will not make a phone call.

Your Employee Assistance Program

Most workers on most sites cannot name their Employee Assistance Program number. That is a failure of communication by the employer, not a failure by the workforce, and this talk is the opportunity to correct it.

Site-specific: read out your organisation's EAP provider and phone number, how many sessions are covered at no cost, and what your written policy states about privacy. Read the policy as written rather than paraphrasing it.

Site-specific: if your organisation is prepared to stand behind it, state plainly that seeking help does not affect a worker's position here.

Discussion

Have the crew save 988 into their phones before the huddle breaks up. Wait while they do it. A number saved before it is needed is the entire point of this talk.

Key Points

988 Is the Number

Call or text 988 any time, for yourself or for someone you are worried about. Text HELLO to 741741 as the text-only alternative.

Put the EAP Number on the Board

Read out the provider, the number and the written privacy policy. Then leave it displayed permanently.

Save It Before You Need It

Have the crew put 988 in their phones during the huddle, not afterwards.

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Day 5. Money and Mental Health

Financial Pressure Is a Site Safety Issue

When workers are asked what is weighing on them, money is raised ahead of almost anything else. Not the hours and not the work itself. Rent, a vehicle payment, a bill that has landed, child support, or a gap between jobs that has run longer than planned.

Financial pressure disrupts sleep. A worker who is not sleeping is a worker with degraded judgement, slower reactions and reduced hazard awareness on site the following day. On that basis alone this belongs on the same list as every other topic covered at a toolbox talk.

Workers in this trade will discuss almost anything before saying that they are short this month. The shame attached to it is disproportionate, and in most cases the cause is not anything the worker did.

What to Do

- **Use the EAP Early:** Employee Assistance Programs generally cover financial counselling alongside mental health support, on the same number. It is designed to be used before a situation becomes a crisis.
- **Raise It With the Office:** Payroll errors, hours disputes and delayed payments are fixable problems that workers routinely absorb in silence. Raise them rather than carrying them.
- **Watch for the Quiet One:** A worker who has gone quiet on the drive in is not necessarily quiet about the work. Changes in mood, withdrawal from the crew and uncharacteristic irritability are worth noticing.

Discussion

Close the week here. Confirm to the crew that these talks will continue at least monthly rather than stopping at the end of September, and that the numbers stay on the board.

Key Points

Money Worry Affects Site Safety

Financial pressure costs people sleep, and tired workers make worse decisions around live hazards.

The EAP Covers Financial Counselling

Same number as mental health support. It is intended to be used early, not as a last resort.

Keep Going After September

One talk a month beats five in one week. Leave the crisis numbers displayed permanently.

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