



NAVIGATING CHALLENGING CALLS  
AND  
HOW TO RESPOND TO THEM

## Managing Stress Related to Elections and Other Major Community Events

- -First and foremost, it is important to pause and identify the emotions the caller is experiencing. We have to tend to the emotions (MRPISS) before engaging in problem solving.
- Examples could be: Sounds like-- “You feel like things are out of your control”, “You are feeling overwhelmed by the constant information”, “You feel exhausted”, “You are isolating yourself due to feeling unsupported”, “You feel like you do not know what is true or who to trust”.

## Managing Stress Related to Elections and Other Major Community Events

- Brainstorm coping strategies, such as, what can they do to care for their well being, in the present moment. Explore support systems as to who might understand how they feel.
- Focus the caller on keeping a routine, which helps us stay grounded in the here and now, and remind us of what is in our control that does not have to change.
- Provide guidance on ways the caller can get involved if they are experiencing helplessness.

## Managing Stress Related to Elections and Other Major Community Events

- How to support individuals you do not agree with and who seek to engage you in political discourse: provide validation and redirection.
- Some examples are: “This is your time and space. I will not answer questions about myself. If you like, we can talk more about the stress you might be feeling”, or “I appreciate your curiosity about my opinions on the election. It is better if we keep the conversation on what is going on with you right now”.
- Focus on feelings and not facts.

## Understanding and Working with Angry Expressions

- Anger is often a secondary emotion and what underlies that can be sadness, resentment, confusion, or guilt. A caller might state that they are feeling anger or you might be able to tell by their expressions on the phone.
- Anger can be productive as it can lead someone to address something problematic in their life. It can also alert someone to imminent harm or abuse.
- Unless a caller is expressing anger or verbal abuse towards the crisis counselor themselves, it is important not to take the expression of anger personally.
- It is important to practice self-regulation techniques to maintain equilibrium when speaking with angry callers so as not to heighten the caller any further.

## Understanding and Working with Angry Expressions

- Do a self-check—how do you feel physically? Can you do boxed breathing? Count backwards? Ground yourself in another way?
- Can you provide a positive affirmation to yourself during the call?
- After the call, self-talk can be helpful. Ask yourself—what emotions are you experiencing? What may have elicited those feelings? What was learned from the interaction? What did you do well and what could you do differently the next time?
- The crisis counselor needs to differentiate between an angry expression and an abusive interaction. More on this later.....

# Angry Expressions Versus Abuse

<p>General use of cursing or swearing in their speech. “I hate the _____ situation I am in”</p>	<p>Cursing or swearing directed at the crisis counselor or the use of derogatory language. “I_____hate you. You are a _____ and a _____”.</p>
<p>Yelling/screaming about their experience.</p>	<p>Yelling/screaming at the crisis counselor about the counselor’s “incompetence”</p>
<p>Expressing frustration with the crisis counselor’s skills or a misunderstanding that has occurred during the conversation</p>	<p>Blaming the crisis counselor for their situation or attacking the crisis counselor’s character.</p>

# Abusive Contacts Phrase Bank

## Pranks

Assessing for possible prank: “I am glad you reached out and it sounds like this has been very stressful for you. I wanted to get some clarification because something you shared did not quite make sense to me (point out the inconsistency). Can you share more about what prompted you to reach out today?”

Obvious Prank: I am here to support you but (whatever the prank is) is making me concerned this may be a prank. Pranks can make it hard for someone in need of support to get through to our hotline. I am going to be ending the conversation now, but please reach out in the future if you are in need of crisis support.



# Abusive Contacts Phrase Bank

## Sexually Motivated

This is a safe space to discuss a wide range of mental health topics. We can discuss things that have affected you and the emotions you feel. However if the conversation becomes inappropriate or graphic, I will have to end it.

After the first warning: This service is intended to support those in crisis and those who are thinking about suicide. This conversation is inappropriate and I will have to end it. Please reach out again if you are in a crisis.

# Abusive Contacts Phrase Bank

## Verbal Abuse

I am hearing that you are upset. It is understandable that you would feel that way given everything that is going on. However, I cannot tolerate being spoken to in an attacking or abusive way.

It makes sense that you are feeling angry. However, I just want you to know that we can process this anger, but I will have to end the conversation if you continue to direct that anger towards me.

## Threatening

This is a safe space to talk about your mental and emotional health. However we will not tolerate any threats and will have to end the conversation if it continues.

If the warning is ignored, counselor has permission to end the conversation.

# Abusive Contacts Phrase Bank

## Derogatory Language

I am glad you reached out and I can hear how angry you feel. I ask that you do not use terms like that while we talk so that we can focus on supporting you today.

( re-direct or end as necessary).

## Harassing the Counselor

This is your space to talk and what is upsetting you. We need to keep the conversation focused on you and not me. If we are not able to do that, I might have to end the conversation.

## Harassing the Crisis Service

After assessing for suicide—You have reached out several times today and you mentioned you are not thinking about suicide. I am going to end the conversation now, but reach back out again if you need crisis support.

# General Guidelines

- Remain compassionate but maintain boundaries: utilize active listening skills but assess, determine an appropriate intervention, which might include ending the call.
- Directly ask if there is a current emergency
- Clearly outline options and explain what they entail
- End the conversation when necessary
- Use resources for self-care after challenging conversations
- Speak to a supervisor to debrief or to inform about the abusive caller

# Understanding Compassion Fatigue

- Compassion fatigue is comprised of burnout and secondary traumatic stress
- Burnout- feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, like nothing you do can make the situation better.
- Secondary Traumatic Stress-feeling like the trauma of the people they are helping is happening to them or the people they love.
- Vicarious Trauma- When the feelings of S.T.S go on for a long while. This can impact how the person views the world and the worldview skews more negative.

# Signs of Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

- Burnout
- nothing we do can help
- Exhaustion and overwhelm
- Feeling you are not doing your job well
- Cynical
- Lacking feelings or feeling indifferent

## Secondary Traumatic Stress

Fearfulness that was never there before

Excessive worry about terrible things happening to you or your loved ones

On guard all the time

# Signs of Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

- Secondary Traumatic Stress
- Racing heart, shortness of breath
- Sense of being haunted by what you have been hearing on the hotlines
- Feeling that others' trauma is yours
- Compassion Satisfaction
- The sense of fulfillment you feel for the work you do. Recognizing the same strengths you see and support in others with whom you work. Knowing you make a difference.
- The goal is for Compassion Satisfaction to outweigh Compassion Fatigue.

## Practicing Self-Care

- Self-care for this kind of work is preventative in nature. It is important to cultivate self-awareness, so you can know what types of calls or callers heighten your emotional reaction.
- While it is important to maintain neutrality while the call is happening, it is just as important to tend to oneself before going on shift and once the shift has ended.
- Spend time reflecting on your expectations about crisis conversations, and discuss these with a trusted supervisor.
- Taking on too much responsibility for an individual does not help them or you.
- Practice self-compassion- give yourself the same kindness you would a loved one in your position.
- Know your hot-button topics and consider how you would effectively counsel in these situations.



# Practicing Self-Care

- Take time off when needed
- Engage in continued trainings to feel better equipped and energized
- Identify activities that you use for coping that make you feel better
- Be aware of the following: good sleep hygiene, mental relaxation, physical movement, social supports and developing close relationships
- What are some things you all do for relaxation or self care?

## Before, During and After Shift

- **Before shift-** Notice your current mood, stress level, and how you feel physically. How might this affect your crisis conversations? Can you practice a meditation for a few minutes beforehand.
- Make your work area comfortable and surrounded with things that bring joy
- Reduce clutter around you when working
- Plan end of day or end of week rewards to keep you motivated during your shift
- **During shift-** take breaks when needed, stand up, stretch, walk away from your work area for a short time
- Debrief with supervisors or peers after challenging crisis conversations
- Practice deep breathing exercises, doodle or color, use a stress ball
- Practice mindfulness exercises

## Before, During and After Shift

- **After your shift-** Debrief with a supervisor or peer
- Identify something positive you did on shift.
- Develop a ritual for transition from “on-shift” to “off-shift” in order to separate work and home life. This could include a short meditation, engaging in a relaxing hobby, changing clothes, or putting work stuff away.

## Examples of Self-Care Exercises

- Box Breathing-visualize a box and follow the sides in your mind for each step- Inhale through your nose for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, slowly exhale for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Self-compassion break- utilizing a mantra
- Stretching
- Guided imagery- using online tools or by yourself, imagine a peaceful environment and imagine what you would hear, smell, see, touch, taste
- Gratitude lists

# Managing Counselor Reactions Leads to Better Outcomes for Everyone

