

# Counseling Suicidal Callers

## *A Step by Step Quick Reference Guide*

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- ✓ **Establish a supportive and caring relationship with the caller.**
  - Always remain non-judgmental and open minded.
  - Speak with a warm, genuine voice tone.
  - Address the caller by their first name to personalize your connection, instead of saying ma'am or sir.
  - Use neutral verbal nods frequently, such as "Mmmhmm", to indicate you are paying attention.
  
- ✓ **When suicide is first suspected, confront the caller:**
  - "I noticed you said \_\_\_\_\_, are you thinking about killing yourself?"
  - Euphemisms for suicide may include "can't go on anymore", "tired of living", "want to sleep forever" and others.
  - Always refer to the act as "killing yourself".
  
- ✓ **Make statements that convey empathy.**
  - Empathy is feeling *with* the person, putting yourself in their shoes.
  - "I'm here to help you work through this."
  - "I can hear the pain in your voice."
  - Avoid saying "I understand" or "I know".
  - Make sure to acknowledge and validate the caller's feelings. "I can tell you're devastated that your check didn't come through in time for your daughter's birthday party."
  
- ✓ **Find out if there is a plan and record identifying information.**
  - "Have you thought about how you would kill yourself?"
  - "Do you have access to (pain killers, a gun, a knife, etc.) right now?"
  - "Have you decided when you are going to kill yourself?"
  
- ✓ **Find out if the caller has initiated their plan.**
  - "Have you done anything to hurt yourself already?"
  - "Do you need medical attention?"
  
- ✓ **Contract with the caller.**
  - "Can you promise me that you will not do anything to hurt yourself while we are talking on the phone?"
  - Convey to the caller that you are concerned for their safety and that this promise means a lot to you.
  
- ✓ **Engage the caller to talk about their current situation.**
  - "What has happened that is making you want to kill yourself?"
  - "It sounds like you're feeling overwhelmed with all of your bills right now."
  - "I'm really glad you called today. Can you tell me more about what is going on?"
  
- ✓ **Explore the side that wants to die.**
  - Help the caller to work through their feelings about the situation they are in, for example "I can hear how hopeless you feel since you lost your job."
  - Gently explore the act of killing themselves: "How do you think you will feel as you swallow the last pill?"
  
- ✓ **Explore the side that wants to live.**
  - "What do you think you will do about \_\_\_\_\_ if you don't kill yourself?"
  - "What will it be like to be able to attend your son's wedding?"

- ✓ **Explore the caller's prior coping.**
  - "What have you done in the past that has helped when you feel this way?"
  - "Is there anything you have already thought about trying to find a new job?"
  
- ✓ **Develop a plan for the immediate future.**
  - "What do you think you will do when we get off the phone today?"
  - "Is there something you do that helps you to relax?"
  - Encourage the caller to dispose of the method: "Do you think you could ask a trusted friend to keep your gun for you?"
  
- ✓ **Let the caller know about the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255),** a 24-hour confidential suicide prevention hotline with trained counselors standing by to help.
  
- ✓ **Contract with the caller to reach out for help if they are suicidal again.**
  - Help the caller make a list of things the caller can do such as: 1) Call 1-800-273-TALK. 2) Call a family member or friend. 3) Watch TV or read a book. 4) Take a bath. 5) Call their doctor or counselor.
  - Allow the caller to come up with their list first, make suggestions if they can't think of anything.

*For more information, please contact the Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention at (850) 488-9557.*