

**INFORMATION ABOUT CRISIS LINES  
FROM RETHINKING PSYCHIATRY PRESENTATION  
“OUR WELLNESS ON THE LINE” October 3, 2018**

Kinds of crisis lines:

- County/state crisis lines
- Mental health agency crisis line (i.e. Lifeworks’ crisis line, Kaiser crisis line)
- National Suicide Lifeline (each state has a chapter - calls are routed to the state chapter matching the caller’s area code)
- Specialized crisis line for specific populations (such as the Trans Lifeline, Trevor Project for GLBTQ youth, the Alzheimer’s Association 24/7 helpline for people with dementia and their care partners)
- Sexual assault and domestic violence crisis lines (can be national or local)
- Military and Veterans’ crisis lines (the National Veterans’ crisis line is the same number as the National Suicide Lifeline, and veterans press 1 when they call).

Frequently asked questions:

**Do I have to be suicidal to call a crisis line?** No. It is fine to call a crisis line if you are having a tough time but not thinking of suicide - for example, if you need to talk to someone because you’re having a panic attack. Crisis lines are generally only able to provide brief emotional support and will often refer you to other resources for further help, but it is fine to call a crisis line for emotional support even if you are not having thoughts of suicide.

**Do crisis line workers always call police if someone expresses thoughts of suicide and/or violence to others?** Not always - in fact, not usually. If someone expresses thoughts of suicide and/or violence but denies intent to act on those thoughts and is able to make a safety plan, we do not need to call police. Sometimes there are gray areas in these situations, but crisis lines are supposed to avoid calling police unless absolutely necessary and to use the least restrictive means possible. Crisis line workers are trained in how to engage callers in safety planning.

**What if I call a crisis line and someone I know answers?** Statistically that is unlikely, but it does happen occasionally. If the call taker knows the caller from another context, they are supposed to transfer the caller to another call worker if at all possible. You can always hang up and call back if someone you know answers. Also, there are many different kinds of crisis lines to call (see above) so you can call one where you are unlikely to talk to anyone you know personally.

**How long are you allowed to talk on a crisis line?** It depends on several factors, including how complicated the situation is, what kind of safety concerns are present, how distressed the caller is, and whether there are any language or communication barriers. Some

calls take 10 minutes or less, some calls take about a half hour, and calls rarely last more than an hour. Crisis lines are available for brief, in-the-moment support, and we are rarely able to resolve ongoing issues on the crisis line. We frequently refer callers to other resources because many issues are beyond the scope of what we can solve on the crisis line. If you're just wanting to talk but not in crisis, often calling a warmline is a better option.

**Are the calls to a crisis line recorded?** Sometimes. Some crisis lines don't record their calls at all. Many crisis lines record their calls for quality and training purposes and keep the call recordings in a secure, locked place. Unlike 911 calls, crisis line calls are NOT publicly available. The only time someone outside the call center could ever legally listen to a call recording is if there was a court order - which is extremely rare.

**Is there a crisis line that won't call police on you no matter what?** The only crisis line in the U.S. that has a policy against "non-consensual active rescue" (i.e., they won't call the police unless expressly requested by the caller) is the Trans Lifeline.

### **Your rights when calling a crisis line**

You have the right to be treated with respect and listened to.

You have the right to call anonymously or to give a fake name.

You have the right not to answer all of the call worker's questions.

You have the right to speak to a foreign language interpreter or TTY services if applicable.

You have the right to the least restrictive form of help.

## REFERENCES

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