

Having Boundaried Conversations

**Webinar for
COVID support line teams and
shielding calls teams**

May 2020



During this session, we will think about:

- How to spot signs of distress during a call
- How to have a conversation with someone in distress and putting helpful boundaries around the conversation
- What to do if someone is in distress or in crisis during a call

To do this, staff from the Children and Families Contact Service, Adults Social Care and Mental Health Services will:

- Share our experience of having boundaried conversations with someone in distress
- Share some of our strategies that have helped us make sure our conversations stay boundaried and helpful
- Think about how to react if someone is a) in crisis or b) in need of safeguarding
- Really important – we are not giving you procedures to follow – your managers will do that and these are a crucial part of helping you and the person you're speaking with to stay safe and well.**

How the session will run:

- ❑ 10 minute presentations from Children and Families Contact Service, Adults Social Care and Adults Mental Health
- ❑ Q and A where you can ask any questions you like of our expert by experience panel

Sue Crane, Senior Early Help Coordinator, Children and Families Contact Service

Making or receiving calls

- Identify yourself and whether this is an appropriate time to talk (listen to any background noises)
- Explain purpose of the call
- Consider your own non-verbal communication on the phone – for example voice expression, keeping the same tone, standing up can help if the call feels awkward
- Its ok to acknowledge that the call may not be meaningful at that time and own it
- Always end the call with a plan (if needed)

How to spot signs of distress during the call

- Be honest with yourself and respect healthy boundaries - you cannot control others behaviour but you can control your response to others
- Be genuine - listen to hear not to respond (closing eyes can help to hear)
- Be realistic and honest to manage expectation – what can you do and what can't you do
- Use positive reinforcement and strength-based questions
- Seek consent where needed to contact the callers support circle whether professional or family – ask who their support network is and who helps them
- It is important to understand the limitations of your role and personal capabilities - its ok to seek further support for yourself as well as the client.

If the person on the phone appears in crisis

- Explore who is at home with the person and who supports them
- Ask the person if they can keep themselves / others safe they may have children? Repeat their response back to them
- Always name the task and emotion, as this can be helpful. Reinforcing their safety/ family is paramount
- Check who is in their professional network – they may already have a mental health worker, social worker etc
- Keep the individual talking, focus on how they are feeling avoid confirming or denying their beliefs
- Encourage them to seek help themselves or to contact emergency services
- IM team members / your Manager for support during the call and follow your procedures

Robina Khanom, Senior Screening Officer, Children and Families Contact Service

- ❑ Making or receiving calls
 - ❑ Listening to the caller's first words to identify nature of the incident.
 - ❑ Establishing caller's needs – asking relevant and appropriate questions. Asking open/closed questions to find out further can be useful in some scenarios
 - ❑ Adjusting to caller's needs; vocal image, tone and control.
 - ❑ Being efficient – try and capture information accurately, obtain relevant information within reasonable timescale, just in case the line disconnects
 - ❑ Managing expectations – be informative and explain the process, what we can or cannot offer. Consider alternative services who may be in better position to help/assist. Summarise the call, keep them informed

- ❑ How to spot signs of distress during the call
 - ❑ Consider background noise, clarify, and confirm key statements. Focus on the caller and build on what they say. Often, people just want someone there who can listen to them off load.
 - ❑ Being mindful that if the caller is upset and distressed, adjust your tone and language, I can often get their attention and obtain the information I may require in order to get them help or advice accordingly.
 - ❑ Display ways of talking that creates easy rapport with the caller, adjust your tone of voice to suit caller's needs. Display empathy, sound alert and ready to help

- ❑ If the person on the phone appears in crisis
 - ❑ As soon as you identify the person is in crisis, consider obtaining name, address, a contact number
 - ❑ Listen to background sounds, if you feel the person does not sound well, consider calling an ambulance.
 - ❑ Keep calm and display empathy that you are here to help.
 - ❑ Contact your line manager during the call to seek support and decide next steps – follow your procedures

Eni Salawu, Team Manager, Adult Social Care

- Making or receiving calls
 - Paying attention to the callers tone, language and demeanour
 - Physical features – breathing for example
 - Speak clearly and stay calm
 - Listen and validate
 - Be sensitive
 - Have empathy and not sympathy
 - Acknowledge your responsibility – put the person at ease – but also your boundaries and what you can and can't do

- How to spot signs of distress during the call
 - Be patient with the person allow them to speak freely about their concern
 - Active listening – empathic and validating phrases “that must be tough for you, I hear how difficult things/situation has been for you”.
 - Restate the outcome
 - Don't try and resolve prior to conversation
 - You cannot expect to always solve the situation – for example of a bereaved person
 - One person's solutions is another person's nightmare, people are unique
 - Learning from experiences, reflection: what have I learnt from this piece of work, what went well, how this could be improved.

- If the person on the phone appears in crisis
 - Attempt to establish whether the person is in immediate danger**
 - Do you feel safe right now
 - Is anyone doing anything or saying things to you that make you feel scared or putting you at harm
 - Is this the best number to contact on
 - Knowing your limits/boundaries on how to support that person**
 - Be honest and transparent – I would really like to support however I do not feel best placed to do so, can I get a colleague to call you back, or can I find someone who can help you with that

Cat George and Rashal Ullah

Clinical Psychologists, Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust

How someone might present on the phone / information they give you	What you might experience, how you might feel? What might you notice?	Ideas / Tips for what you could say Keeping boundaries in place & keeping you feeling safe
Speech / thoughts might be disorganised or the person seems confused.	Hard to follow the conversation, things seem to jump around a lot or feel stuck. Feeling drained or irritated by the conversation – sense of it being a difficult, hard work etc.	Validate what the person is saying and gently guide them back to the initial topic e.g. “I understand there might be lots of things for us to consider today but it is really important we focus on the following question” e.g. “ I just want to check I have understood you correctly.. <i>Give summary of that they have said...</i> ”
Person speaks very quickly.	Difficult to hear everything. Difficulties trying to process and retain the amount of information being given. Feel like you might be missing something Feel tired	Ask the person to slow down, reminding them you are trying your best to help them today and that by slowing things down it will help you to understand their difficulties/situation better Ask the person to repeat what they are saying at your given pace E.g. “I am just going to make notes on what you are saying, please could you repeat things from the beginning” –then feedback sentence at a time
Person might go into excessive detail about something or avoid a conversation / topic	Feel stuck, possibly irritated Conversation feels difficult, either taking too much time or not getting the information you need.	If too much – thank them for the level of detail being provided but explain that for the purpose of this call only certain information is needed. Make sure you have for the information correctly – check in with them.. “I just want to check I have got the essence of what you are saying... <i>give a summary and check this with what you have understood</i> ” If too little – recognise it is difficult to share information sometimes, check if there is anything which would make this easier or check if there is a reason they don’t feel able to answer a certain question. E.g. “I've noticed this question seems particularly difficult for you to answer, is there anything I can do to support you to answer it?” TED technique: Tell me; Explain to me; Describe to me.
Person sounds like they are crying or tells you they are upset / anxious	Feel unsure how to support them Feel sad	Validate them (“it sounds like this is a very upsetting conversation for you”) Check if they would like a few moments, reminding them you will stay on the phonenumber Check if there is anyone around that can provide them with some support Check if they would prefer to speak at a different time Normalise and signpost: “it’s a very difficult time at the moment and sometimes we need a bit of extra support, have you spoken to anyone about how you are feeling? / have you considered talking to your GP in order to try to get some support ”
Person is irritable or angry. Voice raised etc. Person is abusive	Feel scared / anxious Feel stuck Feel irritated	Validate if possible – “I can hear this is something very important to you” Put in your request and boundaries – “It sounds like it would be helpful for us to have a conversation about this and I want to be able to support/help you.. however, if you continue to shout at me I'm afraid I will end the call”

Tips on helpful conversations & boundaries

- Procedures key – scaffold/guide the conversation
- Keep things as clear as possible. Repeat to someone if needed.
- Know what you are happy to tolerate what you will not tolerate – need to look after you as a priority
- Try to allow space for someone to speak so you can understand their situation better. This can help you to validate and reduce their distress (i.e person feels listened to). This can help them to better understand your points + boundaries
- Don't try to diagnose – signpost to others services – GP, Samaritans, crisis lines etc.
- Normalise where appropriate “it's a really tough time atm, sometimes people needs some extra support to help manage this, if this is something which might be helpful I can give you the contact details for XXX”
- Gently remind people what your remit is and why you are speaking with them “I'm sorry you feel this way, I am a call worker trying to help assess people.... This is not my area of expertise but I know you can contact XXX for more advice and support relating to this.
- Give yourself thinking time if you need this, tell the person you will help them but you just need to check to make sure you are signposting to the correct service.
- Try to give brief summaries of what the person is saying, this shows them you are listening and ensures that you have understood what they are saying correctly. This provides containment.
- Give verbal feedback to the person e.g. “ok” “uhum” – This helps someone know you are listening to them
- Notice how you are feeling and use this to guide you – how does your body feel? Any emotions you feel?

Know your limits

- If your stuck, ASK FOR HELP form a manager e.g. “this is a really important question, please could you hold whilst I seek advice from my manager” or “given what you have explained to me today, I think it best I transfer you to my manger who is best placed to deal with your complaint/concern”
- Request a debrief after, we all need time to unwind and process difficult conversations. Please try to do this on the same day so you don't take it home with you
- If it's been a difficult conversation... take 5-10min break, go for a walk, make a cuppa, chat to a colleague, do some relaxation
- **Know what you are responsible for / what your role is – be aware of what you are NOT responsible for**
 - You are not responsible for someone's actions
 - You are not a MH team / therapist etc.

*****Self-care*****

Key to be mindful of your own wellbeing and to actively look after your mental health. You cant support others before you are supported yourself.
Try to be kind to yourself, we are all human and we are just trying our best in a difficult situation.

Crisis management tips

- If suicidal
 - 111 / GP
 - Immediate harm → 999 or attend local hospital
 - Local crisis MH lines (24/7)
 - Samaritans and other helplines
 - If they have a MH team ask them to make contact with them
- Harm from others
 - Ask yes / no questions to assess risk (someone might be listening to their call)
 - Signpost to relevant services (silent calls to police – dial 999 – then 55 if you can't talk)
 - AGAIN – follow your teams procedures

Your Q and A

Any questions you would like to ask Sue, Robina, Eni or Cat