



Crisis Intervention Best Practices: Working with Familiar Contacts and Abusive/ Inappropriate/Prank Contacts

Presented by
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with special assistance appreciations to Stephanie Corzo, SPC Compliance Specialist

A presentation for Advocates for Human Potential and the California 988 Lifeline Network
11/12/2024

Agenda

1. Familiar Contacts
 - a. Special Handling
2. Abusive/Inappropriate/Prank Contacts
 - a. Special Handling
3. Vibrant Requirements
 - a. Vibrant Queueing Request
4. Frequency of Such Situations in 988
5. Impact on Crisis Counselors
6. Didi Hirsch Protocol
7. Group Discussion
8. Q&A





Familiar Contacts

- A “familiar contact” is someone who has used the 988 Lifeline’s services multiple times.
- This usage can occur through a single access method (e.g., phone) or multiple channels (e.g., phone, chat, text).
- As a result, the individual has become recognized by the Crisis Center staff.

Didi Hirsch has 509 established familiar contacts.



How Do We Identify Familiar Contacts?

- Crisis counselors may identify a familiar contact by name, the sound of their voice, their phone number or IP address, and the content of their conversation.
- Centers can share brief descriptions of familiar contacts for consistency, recorded in databases like CRM or EHR.
- A designated person/team is responsible for keeping this information updated and distributing it to crisis counselors.

Profile Example

History
Created 1/25/24 by Jenna G., Updated 3/19/24, 4/25/24, 9/3/24 by Jenna G.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 19, 20, 21, 22, 25 years old
- Female
- Hispanic
- Zip - [REDACTED]
- Oakland, CA

LIMITS

- 60 minutes, once per day
- If contact reaches out more than once:

LIMITS

- 60 minutes, once per day
- If contact reaches out more than once:
 - Gently share that you see they connected with a counselor earlier
 - Reassess immediate safety i.e. self-harm, current thoughts of suicide
 - Kindly ask if anything has changed since the last conversation
 - If contact is safe and nothing has changed, aim to wrap up in 10 - 15 minutes, focusing on safety plan

STORY

- Depression since 8 years old.
- Unable to sleep, constantly in pain, tired, and overwhelmed
- SI since 2017
- Past abuse from partner
- Heartbreak due to man who will not answer texts/calls
- Feels no support, does not have friends
- Vaginal pain and bleeding due to sexual activity
- Struggles with school, classes, and studying

SUGGESTIONS

- Responds well to open-ended questions
- Feels ignored by family/friends - provide empathy and validation for experiences
- Utilize active listening skills

SAFETY PLANNING

- Tried therapy in 2022 - does not like therapy
- Willing to create full safety plan and reach back out
- Has been given the following resources:
 - SAMSHA
 - Love is Respect
 - Insight Timer
 - 99 Coping Skills
 - Help Guide

CLOSING

- Offer full safety plan if criteria is met
- Offer FU if criteria is met - ensure a FU is not already scheduled

Group Discussion

How do Crisis Centers define thresholds for frequent or abusive contacts?
What protocols have been established?

Do Crisis Centers have scripts or sample language within their protocols for how counselors should respond to inappropriate, abusive, or frequent contacts?



Special Handling: Familiar Contacts



Supporting a Familiar Contact—Care Management

- Encourage engagement with treatment provider.
- Encourage connection to current provider.
- Consider discussing a familiar individual's plan with their current provider.
 - [HIPAA and care coordination](#)

Supporting a Familiar Contact—Repeat Contact in Short Time Frame

- Acknowledge the familiar contact.
- Always assess for safety and suicide.
- Create a collaborative safety plan.
- Remind them of the purpose of the 988 Lifeline.

Special Handling: Familiar Contacts – General Overview

Identify

Connect

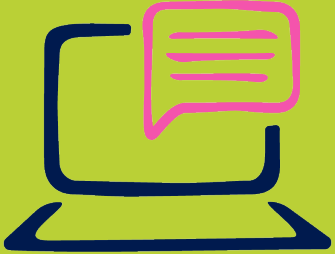
Advocate

Follow Up



Types of Inappropriate Contacts

(All merit alerting supervisors.)



Verbal Abuse/Yelling/Cursing

- Stay calm.
- Avoid saying, “Calm down” or “I need you to stop yelling.”
- Provide space.
- Focus on what they believe is their biggest crisis or concern.

Harassing Contacts

- Listen, validate, and allow them to express if their needs have not been understood.
- If assistance is denied, remind them of our services and end conversation.

Sexually Motivated Contacts

- Treat all contacts as appropriate until shown otherwise.
- Reflect and focus on feelings.
- If requesting to speak to a particular gender, do not grant request.
- Maintain neutral tone.

Prank Contacts

- Obvious signs: joking, giggling.
- Use warm and empathetic tone.
- Remind them to reach out whenever in crisis.
- Firmly end conversation.

Phishing/Spoofing Attempts

- Firmly let the contact know they have reached out to a crisis line.
- Let contact know that it is inappropriate to reach out.

Swatting

- Always use least invasive intervention.
- Follow Crisis Center policies and protocols.
- Follow third-party procedures.

Special Handling: Abusive/Inappropriate/Prank Contacts

Inappropriate Visitors

Restate

"This hotline is for people who are feeling suicidal or in crisis and needing support. If you can stop (fill in behavior), I will be happy to keep talking. Otherwise, I will need to end the conversation."

Refrain

"I am going to end this conversation now because you are continuing to (specify behavior), goodbye."

Threat to Others and Counselor

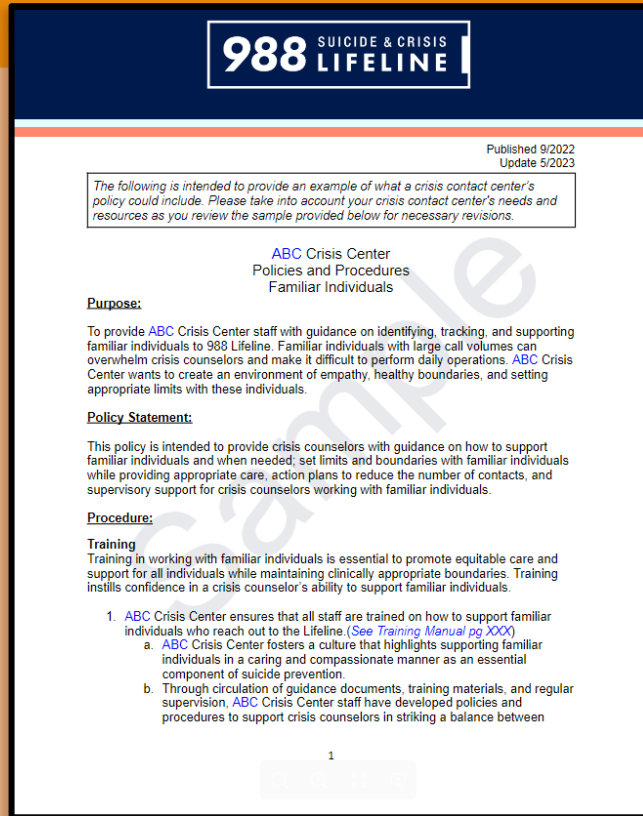
- Always assess for harm toward self and others.
- If there are safety concerns, assess desire, capability, intent, and possible buffers.
- Assess threat.
- If possible, create a safety plan.
- Alert supervisor.



Additional steps may need to be taken to address abusive or harassing contact behavior. SAMHSA does not allow the blocking of callers to 988.

[Utilizing a Voicemail Box for Abusive/Harassing Callers](#)

Vibrant Requirements



- ✓ All counselors should **receive training** on how to support familiar contacts.
- ✓ Crisis counselors must ask the **required prompt (safety)** questions for every **contact**, regardless of familiarity with the individual.
- ✓ Centers **will not queue, ban, block, or reroute** any familiar contacts.
- ✓ Crisis counselors will **decline requests to transfer callers to specific counselors** to avoid reinforcing frequent contact patterns.
- ✓ Crisis Centers will **perform monthly audits** of their phone system to determine if familiar contacts are affecting the Center's capacity.
- ✓ If a familiar contact adversely affects a Center's capacity, the Center will **create an action plan** to support that individual and **reduce their contacts to a manageable level**.
- ✓ Supervisors will **contact Vibrant's Clinical Best Practices team**:
 - ✓ When facing challenges in developing interventions and action plans for Familiar Contacts.
 - ✓ To explore options for reducing the volume of Familiar Contacts when established action plans and limits are not effective.

Vibrant Queueing Request



Important Note: Please consult with a member of the Clinical Best Practices team at the Lifeline to ensure that all other possible clinical interventions and appropriate limit-setting have been attempted without desirable results in changing the behavior before enacting this solution for Lifeline callers.

For phone call support, please reach out to askstp@vibrant.org.
For chat- or text-related needs, please email LCCT@Vibrant.org.

[Utilizing a Voicemail Box for Abusive/Harassing Callers](#)



Call Queueing Concept

- Calls are placed in a queue for 10, 15, 20, or 30 minutes.
- Time limits are determined by Vibrant's clinical team, not the 988 Crisis Center.

Purpose of the Queue

- Aims to de-escalate harassing behavior from callers.
- Allows callers time for self-reflection or to change their approach.
- Ensures continued access to 988 Lifeline during the wait.

Extension of Queue Time

- Queue time may be extended if the caller's abusive behavior persists.
- This is done to protect the integrity of the crisis line.

Group Discussion

What experiences have you had
regarding Vibrant's approach to
setting limits on frequent or abusive
contacts?



Impact on Crisis Counselors

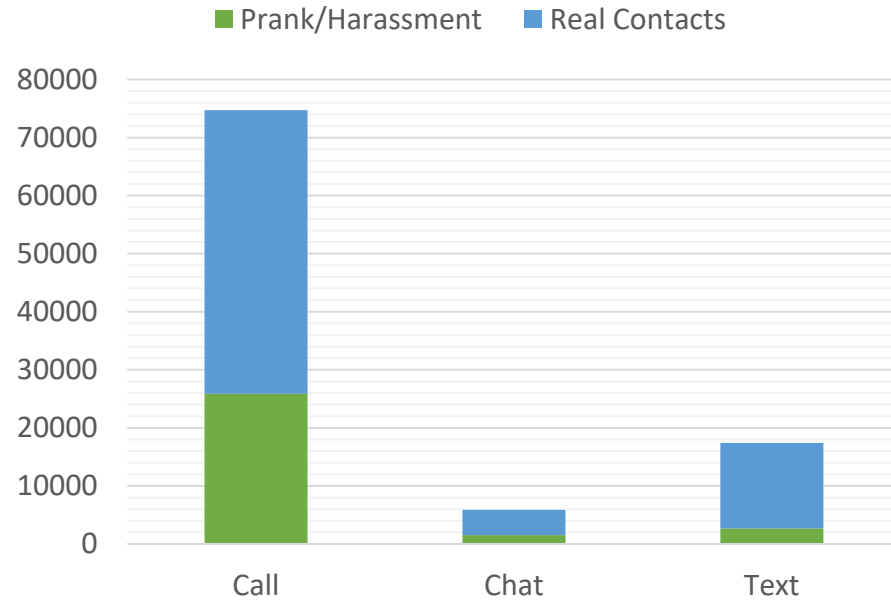
A cluster of approximately 10 yellow dots of varying sizes, arranged in a loose, upward-sloping pattern to the right of the title.

Didi Hirsch—Frequency of Abusive/Inappropriate/Prank Contacts

April–September 2024

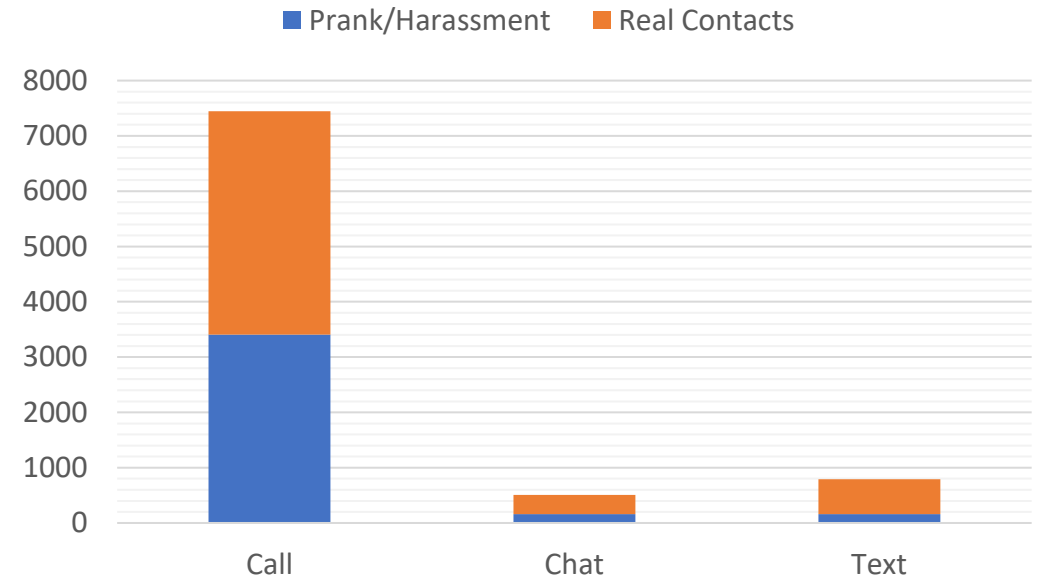
“Real Contacts” include: First-Party, Third-Party, Info Only, and Follow-Ups

988 Lifeline—English



Lifeline English - Calls, Chats, Texts			
	Real Contacts	Prank, Harassment, Silent, Hang-Up	Total
Call	48,842	25,872	74,714
Chat	4,380	1,507	5,887
Text	14,725	2,664	17,389
Total	-	-	97,990
This table includes data from the line "Lifeline" and the national-backup and statewide chat/text queues			

988 Lifeline—Spanish



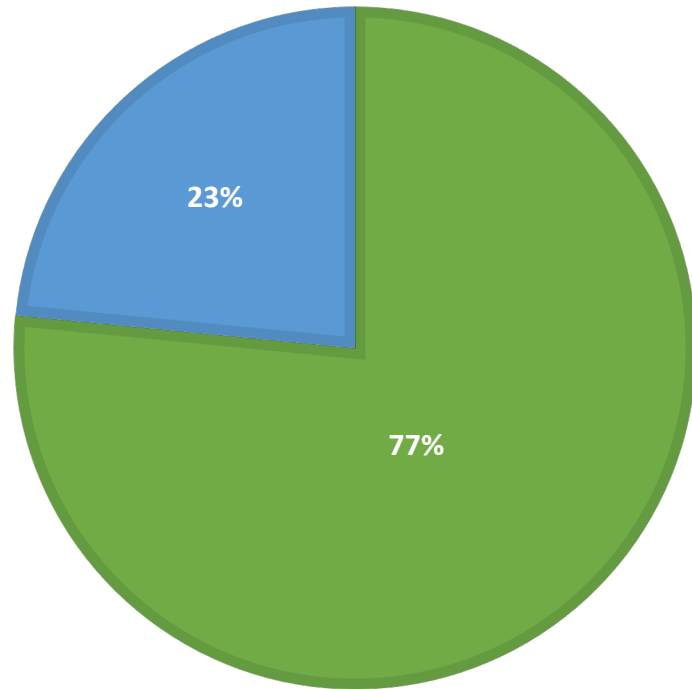
Lifeline-Spanish - Calls, Chats, Texts			
	Real Contacts	Prank, Harassment, Silent, Hang-Up	Total
Call	4,043	3,404	7,447
Chat	345	161	506
Text	631	159	790
Total	-	-	8,743
This table includes data from the line "Lifeline-Spanish" and the chat/text queue "988 Spanish"			

Didi Hirsch—Frequency of Abusive/Inappropriate/Prank Contacts

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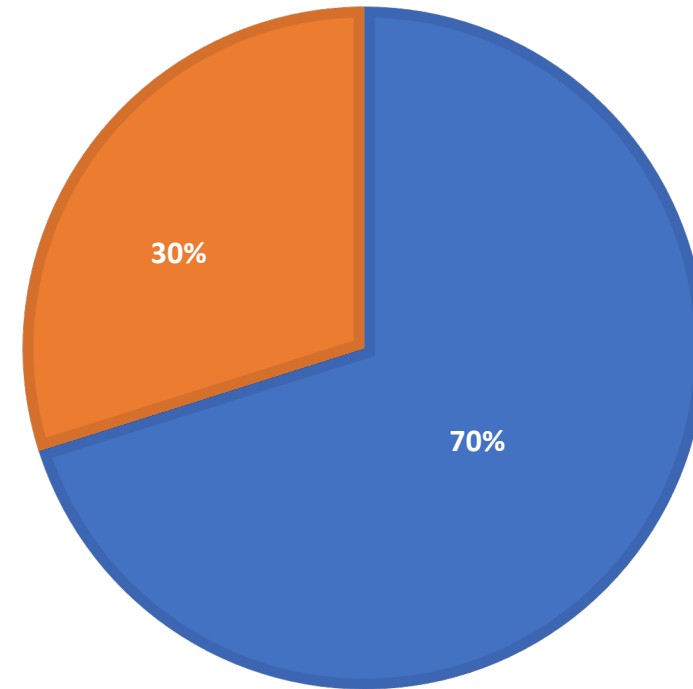
988 LIFELINE—ENGLISH

■ Total Real Contacts (Calls/Chat/Text) ■ Total Prank/Harassment/Silent/Hang Ups



988 LIFELINE—SPANISH

■ Total Real Contacts (Calls/Chat/Text) ■ Total Prank/Harassment/Silent/Hang Ups



Research

Research by Renate Willems, Constance Drossaert, Patricia Vuijk, & Ernst Bohlmeijer (2020):

- Working at a crisis line “may be rewarding,” but it can also “lead to distress or vicarious trauma” due to “highly complex topics in combination with inappropriate calls.”
- **Call complications:** Challenges include managing frequent callers and dealing with sexually inappropriate calls.
- **Impact on mental well-being:** Volunteers’ mental health affects care quality and safety, with poorer mental well-being leading to higher rates of absenteeism and turnover.
- “Pollock et al. reported in a qualitative study that volunteers experienced a lot of stress and frustration because of (sexually) inappropriate, abusive, and manipulative calls. It was regularly attributed as a cause of volunteers leaving the organization.”



Review

Impact of Crisis Line Volunteering on Mental Wellbeing and the Associated Factors: A Systematic Review

Renate Willems ^{1,*}, Constance Drossaert ², Patricia Vuijk ¹ and Ernst Bohlmeijer ²

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Abstract: Crisis line services, operated by volunteers, have been proven to be effective in decreasing psychological pain and preventing suicidality. Although working at the crisis line may be rewarding, for some the confrontation with highly complex topics (i.e., suicidality, abuse, and loneliness) in combination with inappropriate calls (i.e., sexually abusive calls), may lead to distress or vicarious trauma. The aim of this paper is to systematically review the studies that have examined mental wellbeing of crisis line volunteers and the factors associated with it. Thirteen published empirical studies on the topic were found. These showed that crisis line volunteers are at increased risk of declined mental wellbeing. However, a wide range of operationalizations were used and most studies did not use validated instruments. On the other hand, studies showed that many volunteers experience satisfaction and gratification from their work. This review gives insight into some of the work-related, organization-related, and volunteer-related factors that may be associated with the decrease of mental wellbeing. More high quality, comprehensive, and quantitative research using validated instruments is urgently needed to assess the impact of the work on mental wellbeing and the relative impact of influencing factors.

Source: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7084397/>

How can we best support crisis counselors?

- **Protective Factors Against Burnout:** Supervision and support from a supervisor can help reduce burnout and disruptions in beliefs.
- **Positive Effects of Supervision:** Effective supervision boosts overall satisfaction, intent to stay, affective commitment, and job satisfaction.
- **Importance of Training:** Adequate training also protects against burnout and enhances job satisfaction.

Impact of Crisis Line Volunteering on Mental Wellbeing and the Associated Factors: A Systematic Review

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988 Lifeline Cares Team



“The 988 Lifeline Cares Team’s goal is to ensure that staff have the knowledge and skills to address the risk of developing Compassion Fatigue (‘CF’), Secondary Traumatic Stress (‘STS’), and Burnout while helping to enhance Compassion Satisfaction and Resilience.”

- Organizations thrive by balancing business needs with a caring culture for staff.
- A supportive environment fosters social connections and a sense of meaning and belonging among employees.
 - The 988 Lifeline Cares Team offers direct support to 988 Lifeline Call Centers when needed.
 - They provide training and technical assistance for wellness programs at both individual and organizational levels.
- The program is part of the Vibrant 988 Lifeline initiative and serves all affiliated Centers in the network.

Didi Hirsch Protocol: General Overview

Established Contacts Committee creates profiles on familiar contacts as guidance to the crisis counselors.

Crisis counselors review profiles and follow instructions provided.

Safety is ALWAYS assessed.

Alert supervisor and debrief on shift.

Only use Abuse Line when appropriate.



Important Note: [Vibrant Expectations](#)

- Crisis counselors must always assess for safety and suicide.
- Crisis Centers will not queue, ban, block, or reroute any contacts.
- Crisis counselors will decline requests to transfer callers to specific counselors.

Established Contact Committee (ECC)

Who is on the ECC?

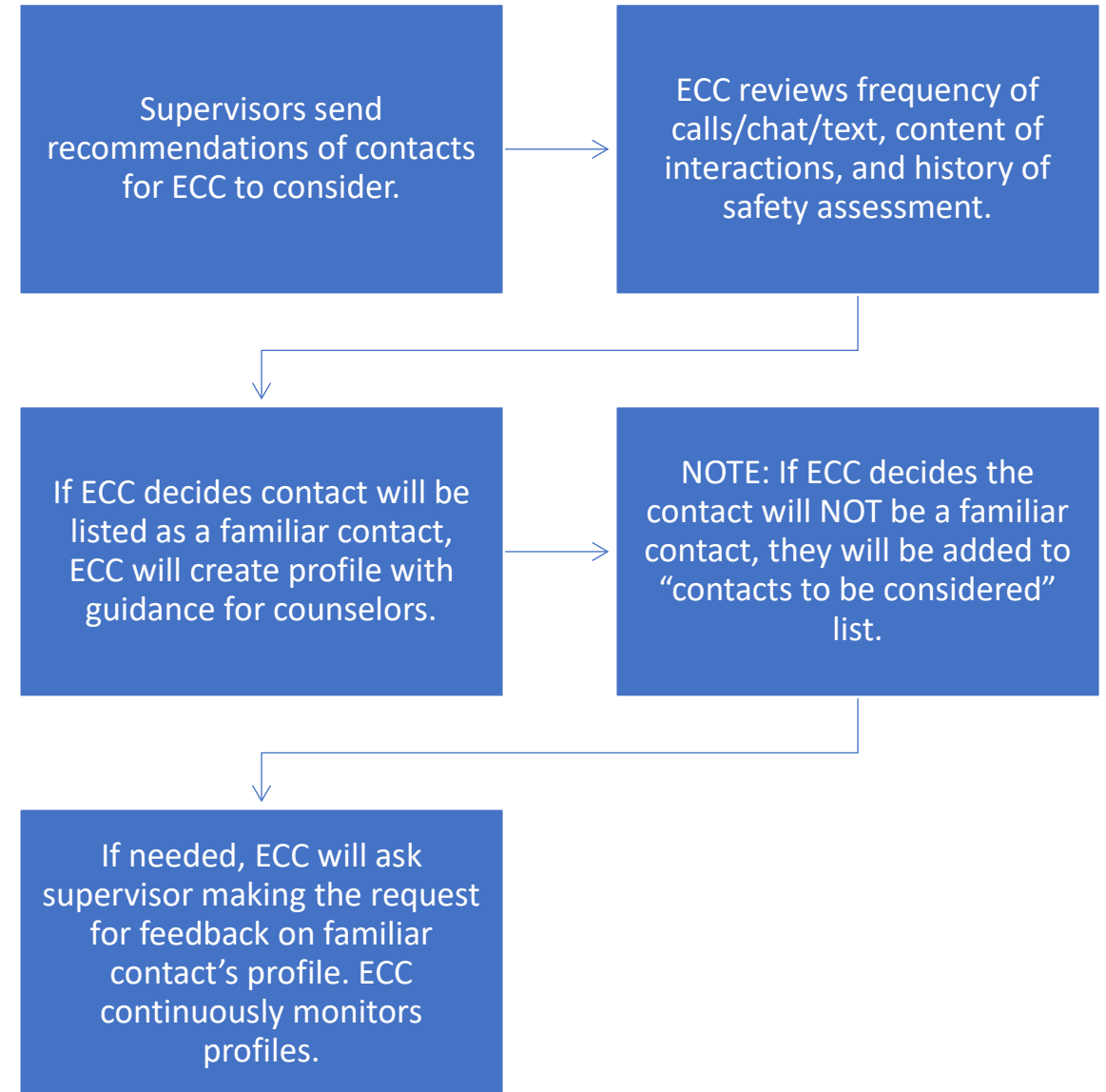
- The ECC is overseen by the following:
 - 1 - Call Team Program Coordinator
 - 1 - Chat/Text Team Program Coordinator
 - 5 - Shift Supervisors (3 – Call Team, 2 – Chat/Text Team—including one Bilingual Spanish Counselor)

How often does the ECC meet?

- The ECC meets twice a month to debrief and discuss updates to familiar contacts. Some contacts reach out by both chat/text and call mediums. Therefore, time is used to collaborate on guidance.

How many times does a contact need to reach out for them to even be considered as a possible familiar contact?

- This varies a bit, but in general, if a contact reaches out multiple times a day or for more than a couple of weeks, a profile is created for them. This is usually paired with safety factors, abusive or harassing language, length of calls, etc.





Didi Hirsch—Queueing Request Process

Established Contact
Committee

- Discusses as a team.
- Presents caller to Assistant Program Director.

Director or
Assistant Director

- Meets with Program Director overseeing ECC to discuss further.
- Fills out Queueing Request Form.
- Vibrant only contacted for queueing requests.
- Vibrant reviews process together.

Vibrant

- Reviews Queueing Request Form.
- Request will either be denied or accepted.
- Queueing requests are periodically monitored and reviewed with Crisis Center to see if caller can be released from list.



Note: The following slide contains information, including threats of rape, from a repeatedly abusive familiar contact.

This information may be disturbing to some individuals. Please monitor your own self-care needs, including in the discussion that follows.

QUEUEING SERVICE REQUEST FORM

CRISIS CENTER CONTACT INFORMATION

Center name: Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center

Contact name: Courtney Castaneda-Cruz Title: Assistant Program Director

Phone: [REDACTED] Email: Ccastaneda-cruz@didihirsch.org

ABUSIVE CALLER INFORMATION

Phone number(s) requested for submission to service: [REDACTED]

Frequency of calls from this number (calls per day, week or other): Past 7 days (6), Past 30 days (13) Past 90 days (66), averaging 22 calls/month

Abusive nature of calls (describe any provocative, aggravating or aggressive statements/behaviors, including threats, insults, etc.; also note if these statements/behaviors are characteristic of all, most or some of their calls):

"I want to know why you work for this organization"- "You're a worthless cunt"

"why we enjoy ruining lives", was not willing to engage in conversation

"[counselor name] I hope you get slammed to the ground and raped"

"Why would you work for an evil organization run by Nazis?", "If I met you, I would throw you to the ground and rape you", I would put my cock in your ass"

"Why did you ruin my life?" Kept repeating, would not engage in conversation (happened in 3 different call records)

"Why are you comfortable sending police to people" (would not engage in conversation and was very confrontational, unable to assess

"So you're ok ruining my life you fucking cunt"

He kept asking a counselor why they want to be a part of an organization who ruins people's lived like that. He stated that he "has intense hatred towards the world and he just wanted it to blow up." He also asked the counselor a bunch of personal questions, such as their age, where

their from, citizenship, etc. He also repeatedly told them that they have an accent, and that they don't know how to speak English well.

"Fuck you!"

"I'm thinking about how you ruined my life...Why are you comfortable working for a company that ruins people's lives?", "I just want you to know that you are a bad person"

"I'm calling because your organization ruined my life", "you called the f--king pigs on me", "no, no, you have to take responsibility"

Caller wanted to ask why we feel comfortable sending police with guns to someone's home, kept repeating and calling me a bitch,

"Your organization ruined my life" "You sent the police to me who ruined my life"

Said his first name was FUCK and last name was You.

"I hope you get raped and murdered" (2 separate call records)

"Bitch was a cunt" (talking about last counselor he talked to)

Are there known safety concerns for the caller (such as current or past suicidal ideation, threats of violence, self-injurious behavior, or substance use?):

Prior attempts. Has not answered safety questions or has denied thoughts of suicide in the past month or more. No known mental health treatment. Calls in the past few months have been unproductive because the caller declines to collaborate with the counselor and has not respected boundaries set by the counselor regarding time limits, frequency of calls, and abusive language

***Please have a supervisor listen in if there is ANY safety concern, caller has reported access to firearms and the desire to shoot himself and sometimes wants us to call ESI to confront an officer, or prior officer. Please assess for homicide if he makes these statements or infers that he wants to harm someone.**

What requests, if any, for assistance has the caller provided and what appropriate services, if any, has the center sought to provide in response to these requests? If the individual has a current behavioral health care provider, has the center offered assistance with care coordination?

None

Protocols currently in place for managing this caller: Discourage the individual from making further contact

This caller has a history of being verbally abusive towards counselors. The center internally discussed whether or not to queue him a month or two ago, but wanted to give a bit more time to see if boundaries could help modify the abusive language. He is still very abusive, so I wanted to see if he could be queued.

Current Limits:

--Time: One call per day - 10-15 min

--Frequency: Please base on safety concern

--Subsequent calls in a day: Please focus on safety planning and offer warmlines, after the first call of the day, please politely let him know we can not talk more today

Please submit this form to Miranda DelVecchio at mdelvecchio@vibrant.org and Megan Stone at mstone@vibrant.org.

Example of (Real)
Didi Hirsch
Queueing Request
Form to Vibrant

Group Discussion

How would you respond to a help seeker
cursing and yelling?

How can we best support our crisis
counselors while on shift?



Questions?



Thank You!

Matt Taylor (mtaylor@didihirsch.org)
Debbie Dawson Romero (ddawsonromero@didihirsch.org)
Stephanie Corzo (scorzo@didihirsch.org)