

Responding to Investigation Inquiries from Police about Lifeline Contacts

Before you Get a Request: Review guidelines and make some decisions ahead of time about how you want front line crisis counselors and supervisors to respond to these kinds of inquiries. For example, should crisis counselors immediately escalate these calls/chats/texts to a supervisor or manager, or do you want them to handle taking information about the police request directly?

REMEMBER: It's important to determine if the investigation is regarding a local conversation to your crisis contact center or a Lifeline conversation, and from there important to determine if the conversation was handled at your center or by another back-up center in order to know which course of action to take.

Recommended Steps:

1. Explain to the investigating officer that you will not be able to respond more without further investigation, but that generally all calls/chats/texts to your local crisis contact center as well as the Lifeline are confidential and you may not be able to share any details with them following your investigation. Let them know that you would like to take information about the conversation and that someone will get back to them as soon as possible. Then gather needed information from the investigating officer:
 - What is the nature of the information request?
 - What are the details about the crisis conversation and individual?
(*Name, date and time of call/chat/text, phone number that placed the call/chat/text*)
 - What is the contact information for the investigating officer? (*Name, title, phone number, email address*)
2. Check your internal systems (ACD reports, contact records) to determine if this conversation was handled by your crisis contact center or not.

If your crisis contact center handled the conversation in question:

1. **If your center initiated contact** with the police/emergency services for an imminent risk or other emergency situation (imminent homicide threat, active child abuse witnessed, etc.) and the call is follow-up, it is generally advisable to provide additional information about the specific conversation or set of circumstances that led you/your staff to place that call. It is generally not advised to provide historical information about the individual (if you have spoken to them more than once) not relevant to the immediate emergency situation at hand.

Many crisis contact centers respond to these types of inquiries with a follow-up email or fax containing a summary of details that caused them to initiate a call to emergency services in the first place. Giving this record in writing is often enough to complete the need for further investigation with your center from the police.

2. ***If your center did NOT initiate contact*** with the police about the contact but they are looking for information in an investigation into a suicide death or other kind of case and have reason to believe that the person contacted your crisis line, respond to the investigating officer that all conversations are confidential, and that callers/chatters/texters are not required to provide identifying information to receive services from your crisis contact center. Let them know that any information about your contact records can only be requested via a subpoena and offer to give your center's address or fax number if they would like it in order to do so (do not give the contact info for the Lifeline, the subpoena would go directly to your center if you handled the conversation). It's important to protect the confidentiality and privacy of ALL individuals to Lifeline by asking for the subpoena before releasing any records or discussing any conversation details with the investigating officer. It's not that we don't want to be helpful, but being consistent with confidentiality protects and helps all individuals to our service.
 - If the investigation was about a suicide loss:
 - Use the Lifeline postvention guidelines as needed (available on the NRC), which provides guidance on how to inform and debrief specific staff that handled the conversation, what you might want to do to inform your team of the loss and administrative considerations in handling the loss.
 - Inform the Lifeline, there is a form we're required to submit to SAMHSA that we'll need to work on with you and we'll make ourselves available for extra support to your crisis contact center.
 - If the investigation was about something else and you have questions or need additional support, reach out to the Lifeline and we can try to offer guidance.
 - Consult your own internal policies and procedures throughout the process and reach out to your own legal counsel for additional guidance as needed regarding the investigation and keep the Lifeline informed as needed.
3. If the conversation was a Lifeline conversation but was NOT handled by your crisis contact center, take the information detailed above from the investigating officer and pass the information gathered from the investigating officer on to the staff at the Lifeline. We will handle it from there making sure the police get a response as well as reaching out to the responding crisis contact center so they can investigate.