Sevenoaks Samaritans

Suggested phrases &

Best Practice

Telephone Callers

Please note that Samaritans policies and procedures take precedence and can be found on Samaritan Home.

The purpose of this document is to give support with useful phrases and best practice.
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1. Phone Calls

1.1 Beginnings - Useful Phrases

• What made you call The Samaritans tonight?

• Has something happened to make you call Samaritans today?

• It can be difficult to know where to start...

• Tell me a little more about that...

• Please go on/take your time...

• What’s on your mind this evening?

• How can Samaritans best help you today?

• We are glad you found Samaritans and felt able to contact us at this time...

• Thank you for trusting us with your thoughts, this is a safe place to share what is worrying you most...

1.2 If caller is concerned about someone else

• I know you are worried about [x] but we are here for you too, this sounds like it could be difficult for you. If you need to share your own fears this is a safe place to do so.

1.3 Asking about a caller’s name

• Is there a name I can call you?

• Would you like to tell me your name?

Early on in a call is the time for gathering information, once that early phase is over, then may be a good time to say, ‘My name is [Sam]; may I ask your name — but only if you want to tell me, of course?’. When asked in this way, the caller realises you have trusted them with your name; they still have a safe option if they want to remain anonymous.

1.4 Silent calls

Your tone of voice and words used are crucial, so be patient. It can take a long time and/or many calls for the caller to feel able to talk. After the initial ‘Samaritans, can I help you’, wait a while, maybe 20 seconds or so, to avoid any impression of hurrying the caller.
into speaking. Then try, ‘I am here to listen to whatever is concerning you or is causing you, please take as long as you like, there’s no hurry.’

Other lines at intervals might include:

• Sometimes it can be so difficult to find the right words, can’t it?

• I’m guessing you have called us today because you are upset. I would really like to help if I can. Would you like to try and tell me what’s happened, perhaps?

• Is there anything I can do to try and make it easier for you to speak? We can just talk about something general if that would help?

• If you’re there and can hear me, could you please tap the phone so I know there’s someone there?

You will need to use your judgment about how long you stay on a silent call. Samaritan guidance suggests 20 mins maximum.

1.5 Confidentiality

It is important that we are honest with all our callers and do not make any promises. We should NEVER say that everything is confidential.

• ADULT - I can promise to take your privacy very seriously, and usually everything that you might say stays between us. There are sometimes things that I might need to speak to someone else about, but if our conversation seems to be entering into an area that we can’t keep confidential I will tell you and we can talk about what you would like to do. Would you like to tell me about what has been going on?

• CHILD - If we feel you are unsafe, we may need to share information with another Samaritans volunteer to see if we can get you the help you need. In order to do that we need you to provide your name and address or the name and address of your school, please.

• A small number of calls are listened to for quality and training purposes. All information will remain within Samaritans unless there is a concern that a child or adult at risk is at risk of harm, abuse or neglect. Samaritans’ calls are not recorded.
1.6 Honesty

Some of the time, owing to a heavy accent, a poor telephone line, background noise and so on, it may not be possible to hear every word a caller says. In these circumstances we should be honest. ‘I’m sorry I really can’t hear you’, ‘the line is really bad, and I cannot hear.’ It is really important not to try to second guess what a caller is saying. We should be honest with the caller and suggest they ring back if necessary.

2 Middle

2.1 Useful phrases

- How are you feeling about the situation?
- What would you like to do?
- What do you feel able to do?
- What are you finding most worrying at the moment?
- Tell me a little more about that...
- What do you feel is the hardest part of this?
- What makes you think that?
- How are you coping with all this?
- What (professional) support do you have around you?
- What would you have wanted them to know?
- How do you feel about that now?
- With all that’s going on at the moment, how are you coping with life on a day-to-day basis?
- When did these feelings start?
- Can I ask you, is it this that is really upsetting you or is there something else?
- How has this affected you/is this affecting you day to day?
- If you look ahead, how do you feel about the future?
• What’s that like for you/what impact is that having on you?

• Tell me more...

• How have things been for you recently?’

• A little while ago, you mentioned xxx.

• Would you like to tell me a little more about that?

2.2 Exploring Choices & Options
• What/who do you think might be able to help?
• What options do you feel you have at the moment?
• What would that mean for you?
• Let’s look at the options together
• What do you feel like doing/what would you like to happen?
• How would you like things to be in 6 months’ time?
• If you could change just one thing, what would it be?
• What would you like to change about your situation?
• Have you spoken to anyone else about what’s happening?
• What kind of help do you think you need?

3. Endings
3.1 Suggested phrases
• We have covered quite a lot on our call haven’t we, how are you feeling now?
• How do you feel after talking with us?
• I wonder if we should stop there so we can both think about what we’ve discussed.
• What do think you’ll do after this call?
• Maybe you could use some time to think about what you’ve shared with me tonight.
• You know you can call us again later [today/tonight/in the week] if this is all still on your mind.

• So, what are you planning to do with the rest of your evening/morning/day?

• You sound a bit tired, why don't you see if you can have a bit of a rest, but feel free to ring us back if you need to

• We've been talking for quite a while and we've covered a lot of ground in this call, so perhaps we could each take some time to think things through and you call us back again in if you're still struggling and need to talk some more

• Could I interject here? We've discussed [X] now several times. Do you feel that talking with Samaritans today has helped you to clarify your thoughts a little more?

• You seem a bit calmer now. Has talking helped?

• Please do remember we care and are here for you whenever you feel that life is getting on top of you.

4. Confidentiality

It is important that we are honest with all our callers and do not make any promises. We should NEVER say that everything is confidential.

• **ADULT** - I can promise to take your privacy very seriously, and usually everything that you might say stays between us. There are sometimes things that I might need to speak to someone else about, but if our conversation seems to be entering into an area that we can’t keep confidential I will tell you and we can talk about what you would like to do. Would you like to tell me about what has been going on?

• **CHILD** - If we feel you are unsafe, we may need to share information with another Samaritans volunteer to see if we can get you the help you need. In order to do that we need you to provide your name and address or the name and address of your school, please.

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5. Misuse of Service

A caller is using the service inappropriately when they:

• make repeated sexually demanding calls
• are threatening, abusive of directing personal insults towards volunteers and staff.
• refuse to observe the terms of their support plan
• persistently refuse to accept the boundaries of the service

Volunteers have the right not to be subjected to any sexually demanding, abusive, threatening or insulting behaviour directed at them,

All volunteers should end the call immediately and not get drawn into further conversations by saying

‘This call is not appropriate and I’m ending it now’

Similarly, a call must be ‘ended on recognition’ (EOR) if you recognize a caller on the MOS list by saying ‘Samaritans cannot help you’

6. Conversations about Suicide

6.1 Adult

• We respect the callers right to make their own decisions. However, this does not mean we passively accept someone telling us they have made the decision to kill themselves.

• We need to be very careful with our wording, phrases that we may have routinely used in the past, such as, ‘we are here for you’, ‘we’re here to support you’, ‘we’re here to help you’ or ‘Samaritans will support you’, could be seen as encouraging or assisting suicide when spoken or written in response to a caller expressing suicidal thoughts

• Remember to use the stepped approach when exploring suicidal thoughts, feelings and plans, using the callers’ own words and reflecting and clarifying them in a way that naturally leads them to share how they are feeling and see if we can help them find a way to live rather than end their life

• If the caller is either not suicidal or has suicidal thoughts and feelings but no plan, we should use our skills to climb back up the steps and explore their feelings further and what other options they feel they have
• If the call becomes a **Suicide in Progress** alert your leader as soon as practical via your shift partner.

• **With an actively suicidal caller, always ask the caller if they want help from the emergency services and remind them to phone 999** if they are in need of medical help. If that offer has previously been refused, check back during the conversation to make sure that the caller has not changed their mind. We should never ask just once and accept that as a final answer

• Encourage the caller to seek their own help and explore if they are able to take action to keep themselves safe

• If the caller has not shared their details, ensure they understand that we don’t know where they are so are unable to summon help on their behalf

### 6.2 Phrases that might be helpful when exploring suicide

#### Initial contact

• How bad do things get for you?

• Does it ever get so bad that you feel you can’t go on?

• Do you ever get to the point where you think you just want it all to stop?

• Do those feelings ever get so overwhelming that you don’t want to carry on living?

• Do you ever feel so low that you’ve had thoughts of ending your life?

• If it would help you to be able to tell us more about these difficult feelings, we are here to listen and explore your thoughts with you,

#### 6.3 Further down the steps

• When you say you’ve been thinking about dying, do you mean you’ve been having thoughts of suicide?

• Can I ask if you’ve made a plan to end your life?

• When you say that you just want it to end, is it that you want your life to be over, or for your problems to end?

• Does ending your life feel like the only option for you?
• Do you feel able to let us know if your thoughts of suicide have got as far as a plan about how you may end your life?

• I wonder whether there is anything you are thinking you might miss, or find hard to leave behind?

• Has something happened that has prompted you to start questioning the point of living?

• Can you tell me more about your thoughts and feelings when you’re at your lowest?

• It sounds as though you are in such a dark place at the moment - are you able to see anything hopeful about the future?

• It sounds as though you’d perhaps like to press the ‘pause button’ on life to give yourself a rest/break from the pain. Is that the case for you, or is it something more?

• We really do want to help you by giving you the space to off-load your emotions, no matter how dark or painful they may be.

• We want to be here to help you think through your thoughts and hopefully find a way through this.

• You have talked about your plans to end your life - have you thought when you might do this?

• We respect your freedom to make your own decisions, but we hope that, through talking to us, you’ll get to a place where you see your situation in a different light

• Is there somewhere or someone you do feel safe with?

• What has helped you to cope with these dark thoughts in the past?

• Are there any things you could do that would help you to feel safe?

7. Potential Safeguarding Situation with children/adults at risk - calls and e-mails

Recognising a Safeguarding Concern - see flow chart at each Duty Station

• Where you have identified, or suspect that the caller is a child (ie under 18 years old) in a harm situation (which includes suicidal thoughts, plan and/or self-harm), you must
Act to protect the child. A child is not considered able to make their own decisions in relation to situations of abuse and harm.

- **We are obliged to try and get identifying information** - name and location and/or home or school address so we can see if there are steps we can take to help keep them safe

- Actively encourage the caller to share this identifying information

- Be honest with the caller and let them know you are concerned about them and why

- Be aware that emails sent from a school/college account may have the school/college details in the footer which can be used as identifying information

- **Be honest about the limits to confidentiality**, particularly if we have identifying information.

- Explain you will need to share the information they have given us because they are a child/adult at risk and have told us they are being harmed or could be harmed. We will always work with the caller and try and get consent before taking any action

- Explore what support the caller already has around them. What sort of support do they have and is it helping?

- If they do not have support, what do they feel would be helpful for them and what sort of help do they want?

- If the caller does not give identifying information, we must still act to protect the caller and encourage them to seek their own help. This means we encourage them to talk to a trusted adult who may be able to help them stay safe e.g. parent, teacher, other friend or relative

- Consider signposting to a relevant organization on the National Signposting List (Childline, The Mix, Shout)

- Consider offering a follow up call if the caller feels able to share their phone number (check MoS and NCB numbers)

- Consider temporarily assigning (if contact is by email) to your own workstation for 2 hours
• Urgent, immediate and imminent harm situations - Immediately contact the Leader who can authorise contact with emergency services. Continue to support the caller

• Non-Urgent harm situations - Continue to support the caller

• Tick the Safeguarding box on E Log (even when you have no ID)

• If you have identifying information, record all the details on the concern form via E Log

• If you are unsure, err on the side of caution and check with your Leader who can call the Safeguarding Line for advice.

7.1 Some useful phrases in a Safeguarding situation:
• You mentioned that you’re experiencing abuse/harm; can you tell me more about that?

• I am concerned about you. You’re in a harmful situation/are being harmed/are talking about ending your life/are self-harming and are unable to protect yourself.

• We are worried about you, and we want to help you to find the best way to keep yourself safe

• You’ve reached out for support, and we want to help you stay safe.

• What sort of support might make a difference to you?

• When we are worried about someone’s safety, we try to see if we can get some additional help for them

• Please share your name and address (or the name and address of your school) with us, we need to share this with another Samaritan so that we can see if we can get you the help you’re looking for

In the absence of the caller providing identifying information, encourage the child or Adult at Risk to take action to protect themselves:

• Is there someone you trust and feel able to talk to about what is happening to you?

• Do you feel you need to get medical help for the bleeding?

• Do you feel able to look after yourself and get the help you need?

• Is there someone who could help you stay safe tonight?
• We have a list of other places that may be able to offer more specific help for you – see signposting list

• I could ask one of my colleagues to ring you tomorrow/x date to see how you are doing
  - is that something that you would like? (Check MoS/NCB numbers)

• If at any time you feel you are in immediate danger or harm, please make sure you speak to a trusted adult and/or call for the emergency service. Samaritans will continue to be here for you to share your thoughts and feelings during this difficult time

8. Other useful phrases in specific situations

8.1 When asked for advice
Position your response to say what we can do rather than what we cannot do

• Why don’t we start with you sharing what’s troubling you/ what’s led you to ring us today

• Let’s talk about what’s troubling you and see if together we can find a way forward.

• Have you spoken to a Samaritan before? Let me tell you a bit about how we work, we provide a safe space for you to share your worries and feelings without judgement and through talking things often become clearer and you begin to see things in a different light and discover more choices about how you could go forward.

• We can listen and provide emotional support, through sharing our worries and fears the way forward may become clearer would you like to tell me what’s on your mind today

• If a friend was going through the same situation, what would you suggest they do?

8.2 Uncooperative Callers

• Samaritans are here if you’re going through difficult times. We are not able to answer questions about x

• I can’t give you the answers to the questions you have been asking If you want to talk to us about your feelings or your difficulties, we can support you.

• Samaritans are here for people who are struggling to cope or going through a difficult time. We are here to offer emotional support, but you seem unwilling to talk about
your feelings. I think perhaps it would be better for you to end the call now. Please call us again if you want to talk about your emotions.

- Samaritans can’t help you with this
- I don’t need to know the details, but would like to know more about the emotional pain you are feeling

Remember

Remain calm.

Silence - If you are caught off guard by something a caller says, it is better to remain silent than to sound flustered.

Boundaries - Be clear about what the boundaries are and what we as Samaritans will and will not do

Either

End the call - If it is sexually demanding, abusive, threatening or personally insulting

Or

Warning - If the caller is asking for something that we do not offer other then warn them that you will end the call if they persist

Do be prepared to talk over the caller if it is necessary to re-establish control of the call

8.3 Personal Questions

When some callers ask a personal question about you it can be awkward to reply without sounding unfriendly, and thus breaking down trust you may have established with the caller. A cordial way of declining to divulge personal information could be:

- Lets bring this back to you
- I hope you won’t mind, but I’d prefer not to talk about myself, so that I can really concentrate on the issues causing you distress. You mentioned x— would you like to tell me a bit more about that?
- I can best support you if the focus stays on you
- Can I ask why that’s important to you?
- What I’m interested in is how you feel about x
Conversely, in MOS type calls, the questions about us from callers may be far more direct, and potentially aggressive. In such cases, it may be appropriate to be slightly more assertive - ‘I am not going to talk about myself, but I would like to try and help you if I can. Maybe you would like to tell me a bit about what’s upsetting you most at this time?’.