

Peace4Crawford's Hope Line

Compassionate Companionship Guide

(Adapted from Keystone Crisis Intervention Team
Basic Crisis Response Training Manual)

The simple act of an empathetic listening presence (compassionate companionship) offers callers support, comfort and caring. It allows a person to feel they are not alone, to share their pain and to gain strength for the tasks ahead. It offers the security of belongingness and community that allows them to move beyond the crisis.

Compassionate Companionship offers the support of being mindfully present with a caller while providing practical assistance as they go through the current crisis. Assisting the caller to identify needed tasks, offering support and encouragement, pointing out potential problems and solutions, and teaching coping skills are all part of this process.

Safety and Security:

The purpose of this goal is to help the caller feel more safe and secure. Until safety and security needs are addressed, callers will have a more difficult time addressing other concerns. Some basic safety questions to ask may include the following:

- Is the caller in immediate danger or in need of medical care?
- Does the caller have warmth, food, water, and clothing?
- Does the caller have family and friends they can reach out to via telephone or other means of communication?
- What information does the caller need to feel more secure?

However, callers who are physically safe may still feel insecure. Volunteers can assist callers with feeling more secure by reassuring them that their reactions are acceptable and not uncommon. Furthermore, volunteers can help callers solve immediate problems that have been caused by the current crisis which, in turn, may help them re-establish a sense of control over their lives.

Volunteers must be mindful of the fact that the questions they are raising and the activities the caller is going through may bring up reactions they are not ready to deal with. Additional assistance, support, and encouragement may be needed for them to get through the crisis.

Ventilation and Validation:

Ventilation refers to the process of allowing a caller to "tell their story." The goal of validating a caller's experience, normalizing their reactions to the crisis, and identifying potential triggers are all important components of the conversation. Volunteers should ask their questions in a casual way through the

normal course of the conversation. Volunteers should offer the caller encouragement to continue talking without pressuring them for too much information.

Volunteers can provide a compassionate presence on the phone by doing any of the following:

- Speaking distinctly and clearly with modulated tones.
- Pacing their words so they are not speaking too rapidly or too slowly.
- Facilitating the flow of story-telling by asking clarifying questions that begin with “How,” “What,” “Where,” “Who,” and “When.” Volunteers should not ask questions that begin with “Why.”
- Echoing words or phrases that callers use to indicate that they are paying attention and following their stories.
- Giving information that may help the caller understand the situation more clearly.
- Instilling peace through silence by waiting for callers to decide when they may want to continue their stories.
- Journeying with callers through their narratives;
- Not probing for information the caller may not be ready to talk about.
- Remembering to keep their values, beliefs and judgments to themselves.

Validating a caller’s experience is done more personally as well, and is based on effective hearing by the volunteer. Volunteers can thank the caller for trusting them with their “story.” This can be very helpful in building the relationship. Also, normalizing reactions and concerns is an important part of the validation process. When a caller talks about their reactions, volunteers should validate the courage it took to even bring them up. Volunteers should look for ways to reassure the caller that their concerns are not unusual and are in no way a sign of weakness or fault.

Predict and Prepare:

The goals of identifying triggers or specific problems, providing positive solutions, teaching coping strategies, proving hope and fostering resiliency are essential aspects of the Peace4Crawford Hope Line. Volunteers must look for opportunities to predict potential problems and assist the caller in planning or implementing potential solutions. Volunteers should place a very strong emphasis on the caller’s own resiliency and coping abilities. Proving hope and encouragement for a positive future is a major part of this intervention.

In addition to predicting what might happen throughout this crisis, it is helpful for volunteers to assist callers to prepare and plan for various eventualities. For example:

- Provide callers with as much information as they want or need
- Help callers with developing plans for future protection of themselves and their families.
- Provide callers with referrals and additional resources.
- Give callers accurate and truthful information.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep.

As the volunteer begins to assist the caller in preparing for potential problems, they begin to allow the caller to feel more in control of their lives. The more the volunteer can allow the caller to do for themselves the better. Volunteers should always be cognizant of the risk of becoming more of a caretaker than a helper.

There should be an attempt to end the companioning call with a review of the prediction and prepare phase. Volunteers can go over specific problems that the caller has overcome or working to overcome. Volunteers can review the potential problems discussed in the conversation and the possible solutions. Volunteers should review coping skills and resources the caller can use if problems arise. Volunteers should tell the caller they are sorry they have to go through this crisis and always end the conversation with looking toward the future.

HOPE:

All crisis interventions are based on hope. Interventions aim at a healthier future and an end to the distress the current situation is causing. Without hope people give up. Without hope people feel more out of control of their life heightening the intensity of the trauma and stress.

The most important role a volunteer can play on the P4C Hope Line is that of a “Carrier of Hope.” Volunteers will be walking alongside someone who may be so caught up in the current crisis that they cannot see any hope for the future. Volunteers offer the callers hope until they become able to remember how to give it to themselves. Volunteers provide this hope in four ways:

- By helping callers focus on the future, and preferably on a positive future.
- By reassuring callers that what they are experiencing and going through is typical of individuals in crisis and that they will likely come back to their normal state once the crisis has passed.
- By emphasizing the caller’s own resiliency, volunteers remind them that they have the strength and power to affect their future.
- By assisting people in crisis to be aware of potential challenges in the future and to be prepared to meet those challenges, volunteers offer them more control over their future.