



Core Competencies for Training

Updated 2007

INTRODUCTION

CONTACT USA'S core competencies represent the basic skills, attitudes, and knowledge that crisis line workers should possess. We expect accredited crisis line programs to develop curricula to meet their own needs, and we expect those curricula to include the CONTACT USA core competencies in whatever order seems appropriate. Modalities may include lectures, multimedia presentations, self-study, and written assignments.

In writing these standards, we have tried to allow for local variation in training, leaving room for diversity in training programs. Therefore, each section is divided into knowledge, attitudes, and skills, with the training methods left up to each crisis center.

We encourage the use of objective measures to evaluate trainees, such as pre- and post-instruction testing. We also believe that role-playing is a highly effective method of practicing crisis skills, and therefore place substantial emphasis on its use throughout the training program.

We expect that crisis centers will certify their workers after completing the training program, and will document the progression of each crisis worker through the training program.

These standards are a work in progress, and will grow and change to reflect the needs of the crisis center world. We hope you will find them useful.

CONTACT USA National Board, Winter 2007

Executive Director:	Virginia Bainbridge
Chair:	Eleanor Letcher
Vice-Chair:	Dorothy Triplett
Secretary:	Hollis Easter
Treasurer:	Tim Jansen
Members:	Molly Brack
	Peter Meyers
	Diane Wilgen

Accreditation Coordinator: Jan Schoop

HISTORY AND ORIENTATION

Knowledge

- Exposure to basic information about the history of the center and/or program and its affiliations.
- Overview of the program's:
 - Philosophy of care and crisis intervention.
 - Code of ethics.
 - Policy on confidentiality (and anonymity, if applicable).
 - Other policies and procedures.
- Understanding the requirements for training.
- Understanding how the program operates.
- The program's mission statement.
- The requirements and responsibilities as spelled out in the crisis line specialist's job description.

Attitudes

- Buying into the program's philosophy of care and crisis intervention.
- Buying into the program's policies on confidentiality, anonymity, other policies and procedures, ethics, and mission statement.
- Buying into meeting the requirements for training and the program's operations, and to the responsibility of a crisis line specialist.
- Regarding callers with unconditional positive regard and acceptance, compassion, empathy, and respect.
- Willingness to promote caller's independence and self-reliance.
- Buying into the role of the crisis line specialist.
- Willingness to participate in continuing education.

Skills

Ability to:

- Follow: the code of ethics, the policy on confidentiality, and the program's other policies and procedures.
- Demonstrate competency in all phases of training.
- Participate in carrying out the mission statement and role of the crisis line specialist.
- Follow and carry out the program's philosophy of care and crisis intervention.
- Demonstrate compassion, unconditional positive regard and acceptance, respect, and promotion of caller' independence and self-reliance.

Active Listening Skills

Knowledge

- The dynamics of the communication process, including tools for effective communication.
- Verbal and non-verbal barriers to effective communication, and ways to mitigate them.
- The role of empathy in helping relationships.
- The structure, dynamics, and value of listening skills in helping relationships.
- Understanding when and under what circumstances to terminate a call.
- Callers are best served by generating their own solutions.

Attitudes

- Openness to the depth of feelings in caller's remarks.
- Willingness to concentrate on feelings and facts as appropriate.
- Understanding of one's own attitudes and a willingness to suspend personal judgment about caller's behaviors, attitudes, or inability to progress toward problem and conflict resolution.
- Willingness to detach and separate one's own experience from caller's problems and issues.
- Callers are best able to solve their own problems.

Skills

Ability to:

- Use appropriate communication methods to establish rapport with the caller.
- Communicate empathy, respect, warmth, and a genuine interest in the caller.
- Identify and paraphrase feelings and circumstances described by the caller.
- Discern when to set limits and boundaries with callers; ability to terminate calls.
- Avoid making assumptions or giving advice while providing information.
- Follow center guidelines on call management (e.g., limits of frequency or call duration, approach to specific types of calls or frequent callers).
- Empower callers to solve their own problems by: summarizing the situation; helping them to set goals; helping them to examine and evaluate their own behavior; generating and exploring alternatives; helping them to plan and implement new solutions.
- Be nonjudgmental and accept caller's beliefs without compromising one's own.
- Focus on the caller and avoid distraction.

- Manage the call through techniques like minimal encouragers (e.g., “uh huh”, “go on”, hmm”), open-ended questions and statements, and attentive silence.
- Ability to teach callers a basic problem-solving technique, and guide them through the process.

Self-Awareness

Knowledge

- Knowledge of personal values and biases.
- Knowledge of stress triggers and coping mechanisms.
- Knowledge of non-verbal habits, traits, and mannerisms.
- Motivations for and expectations of volunteering and serving callers.
- Familiarity with local ethnic groups and cultures.

Attitudes

- Unconditional positive regard for callers and coworkers.
- Respect for divergent points of view.
- Understanding of and respect for the importance of confidentiality.
- Acceptance of agency philosophy and policy.

Skills

Ability to:

- Identify personal values and biases.
- Accept feedback and take direction and supervision.
- Identify local ethnic groups and cultures.
- Identify personal stressors and practice self-care.
- Ask for supervision as needed.

Crisis Intervention

Knowledge

- Distinction between an emergency and a crisis.
- Emergencies may require interventions: crises ordinarily do not.
- Knowledge of applicable laws.
- Risk factors.
- Warning signs.
- Appropriate responses, interventions, and referrals.
- Crisis line program's policies and procedures.

Attitudes

- Self-awareness of feelings, attitudes, and beliefs.
- Acceptance and non-judgmental response to callers.
- Acceptance of possibility that callers might choose destructive behaviors despite our best efforts.

Skills

Ability to:

- Establish rapport with callers by communicating empathy, respect, and genuine interest. **See Active Listening Skills section.**
- Assess caller's likelihood and immediacy for violence.
- Use appropriate responses to callers who are threatening or engaging in destructive behavior.
- Proficiency with crisis line program's intervention procedures.

Suicide

Knowledge

- Myths about suicide.
- Risk factors for suicide.
- Warning signs for potential suicide including suicidal ideation, plans, means, and lethality.
- Appropriate responses to callers who are contemplating, threatening, or attempting suicide.
- Appropriate interventions and community resources for suicidal callers.
- Crisis line program's policies and procedures for dealing with suicidal callers including program's philosophy of suicide prevention and intervention.
- Survivor's issues (people left behind, not failed attempters).
- Use of terminology for suicide.

Attitudes

- Self-awareness of one's feelings, attitudes, and beliefs about suicide.
- Acceptance and nonjudgmental response to callers while encouraging alternatives to suicide.
- Acceptance of the possibility that caller might choose suicide despite our best efforts.

Skills

Ability to:

- Establish rapport with callers by communicating empathy, respect, and genuine interest. **See Active Listening Skills.**
- Assess caller's lethality using the crisis line program's lethality assessment form.
- Use appropriate responses to callers who are threatening or attempting suicide.
- Be proficient with crisis line program's intervention procedures.
- Be able to facilitate caller's safety plan.

Mental Illness

Knowledge

- Elementary knowledge of the indicators and symptoms of common mental illnesses.
- Community support services available to people with mental illness, including resources for those of limited means.
- Crisis line program's relationship to mental health services.

Attitudes

- Respect for the dignity of callers.
- Acceptance of the strengths, weaknesses, and abilities of people with mental illness.
- Understanding that mental illness is a serious disease, not merely a weakness.

Skills

Ability to:

- Provide supportive listening.
- Discern the difference between an acute, time-limited personal crisis and a chronic, ongoing mental illness.
- Provide appropriate referrals for mental health services when indicated.

Depression

Knowledge

- Indicators of the symptoms of depression.
- Types of depression (including situational, organic, and chemical).
- Distinction between sadness and clinical depression.
- Community support services available to callers who are depressed.
- Short-term coping mechanisms.

Attitudes

- Respect for the dignity of callers.
- Acceptance of the strengths, weaknesses, and abilities of depressed callers.
- Understanding that clinical depression is a serious disease, not merely a weakness.

Skills

Ability to:

- Actively listen.
- Use non-verbal techniques (e.g., vocal pacing to uplift caller's mood).
- Empathy and acceptance of caller's depression.

Loneliness

Knowledge

- Understanding loneliness and its impact.
- Possible relation to other issues (e.g., grief, loss, depression, suicide, mental illness, substance abuse).

Attitudes

- Openness to depth of feelings in caller's presentation of their loneliness, and a willingness to concentrate on the content of the call.
- Willingness to detach and separate one's own experience and story from the caller's problems and issues.
- Acceptance that overcoming loneliness is a process that may be lengthy and complex.

Skills

Ability to:

- Use appropriate open communication and active listening. **See Active Listening Skills.**
- Communicate empathy, respect, and a genuine interest in the caller.
- Identify and reflect facts and feelings expressed by the caller.
- Offer appropriate information and referral if applicable.

Frequent Callers

Knowledge

- Types of frequent callers.
- Indicators of frequent callers.
- Crisis line programs are a part of the continuum of care for callers who are homebound or have chronic mental illness.
- Value of the crisis line to the frequent caller.
- Agency policies and protocols.
- Symptoms of burnout.

Attitudes

- Respect the dignity of callers.
- Acceptance that supportive, compassionate listening helps to improve the frequent caller's quality of life, even if it cannot cure the caller's mental illness and/or loneliness.
- Acceptance of the program's policy regarding frequent callers.

Skills

Ability to:

- Identify frequent callers.
- Discern the sources and consequences of manipulation of crisis line specialists by people who call frequently.
- Follow agency policies and procedures.
- Ability to identify when frequent callers are experiencing a crisis above and beyond their ordinary circumstances.

Grief and Loss

Knowledge

- Typical physical and emotional responses to grief.
- Grief and loss are parts of the human condition, and each individual's response is unique.
- Grieving callers may need to repeat their stories many times to process them effectively. This always requires patience from the listener.
- Understanding the “stage” and tasks involved in the grieving process.
- Change=Loss=Grief. The loss can be many things other than death of a loved one.
- Grief is a complicated, multi-dimensional, individual process.
- Awareness of the availability of grief counseling.
- Grief and loss may increase the risk of suicide.

Attitudes

- Openness to depth and variety of feelings in caller's presentation of grief and loss.
- Understanding of one's own attitudes about the grief and loss process, and a willingness to suspend personal judgments.
- Belief and understanding that it is most helpful to reflect facts and feelings and to express unconditional positive regard and empathy.
- Understanding that time does *not* heal all wounds, and that coping with grief and loss may be a lifelong process.
- Patience with grieving callers.

Skills

Ability to:

- Use appropriate open communication and active listening. **See Active Listening Skills.**
- Communicate empathy, respect, and a genuine intent to listen to the caller.
- Identify and reflect facts and feelings expressed by the caller.
- Detach and separate one's own experience from caller's problems and issues.
- Validate callers' current emotional conditions and experience of grief.
- Suspend personal judgment.
- Offer appropriate information and referral.
- Complete a lethality assessment of the caller as needed. **See Suicide.**

Addictive and Compulsive Behaviors

Knowledge

- Addiction and compulsion in their many forms.
- Common addictive substances and terminology.
- Understanding the dynamics of co-dependence and enabling.
- Treatment options and community resources.
- Understanding the roll of support systems and third parties in intervention and recovery.
- Relapse and recovery.
- Relationship of substance abuse to depression, suicide, and violence.
- Program policies regarding intoxicated callers.
- Signs and symptoms of addictive and compulsive behavior.

Attitudes

- Self-awareness of feelings, attitudes, and beliefs.
- Buys into program policies regarding limits and limitations.
- Acceptance of possibility that callers might choose addictive behaviors despite our best efforts.
- Willingness to refer to specialized resources.

Skills

Ability to:

- Set limits as required by program policies.
- Make appropriate referrals.
- Maintain “professional distance” and avoid enabling behavior.
- Explore issues of depression, suicide, and violence.
- Identify signs and symptoms of addictive and compulsive behavior.
- Respond appropriately to people with addictive or compulsive behavior and to third parties (e.g., families, friends, coworkers).

Violence, Neglect, and Exploitation

Knowledge

- Types of calls involving violence, neglect, and exploitation, including an overview of each that is applicable.
- Typical responses to violence (e.g., learned helplessness, Stockholm Syndrome, PTSD).
- Dynamics between perpetrators and victims.
- Resources in the community for victims and perpetrators of violence.
- Victims of violence have an increased risk of suicide and homicide.
- Agency policies and procedures for calls involving violence, neglect, and exploitation.

Attitudes

- Belief that no one deserves to be a victim.
- Callers have the right to determine their response to violence.
- Sensitivity to the helplessness and loss of control that callers may feel.
- Perpetrators will be treated respectfully when calling for services.

Skills

Ability to:

- Assess caller's immediate safety.
- Use active listening skills (especially being non-directive and allowing time to build rapport). **See Active Listening Skills.**
- Do a lethality assessment as appropriate.
- Assist callers in safety planning.
- Connect to community resources.
- Follow agency policies and procedures.

Information and Referral (where applicable)

Knowledge

- General knowledge of community services and resources.
- Ways to access the above information, including eligibility criteria, in order to make appropriate referrals.

Attitudes

- Openness to depth of feelings in caller's remarks and willingness to concentrate on their feelings and content of call.
- Willingness to explore potential underlying problems.
- Adequate understanding of one's own attitudes and a willingness to suspend personal judgments about the nature of caller's inquiries.
- Willingness to detach and separate one's own experience from the caller's problems and issues.
- Acceptance that there will not always be adequate referrals for caller's inquiries.

Skills

Ability to:

- Identify specific needs for information and referral, in order to respond to both their immediate and future needs.
- Access information and provide appropriate referrals in an effective manner.
- Discern when to move beyond the reflective listening process toward offering referral(s).
- Encourage callers to use recommended referrals by communicating the benefits that could be realized.
- Encourage feedback.
- Encourage feedback if referrals are unsuccessful.

Apprenticeship (Practicum)

Knowledge

- The physical layout of the phone room: locations of training materials and relevant policies and procedures.
- Familiarity with correct and appropriate use of phone systems, computers, and any other applicable technology.
- Familiarity with correct and appropriate use of forms, reference materials, and any other applicable materials.

Attitudes

- Commitment to competence.
- Commitment to continuing education and self-improvement.
- Commitment to arrive on time and ready to work.
- Commitment to the values and philosophy of the program.
- Willingness to accept supervision, feedback, and evaluation.

Skills

Ability to:

- By the end of the apprenticeship/practicum, the trainee will be able to function, without constant supervision, as a beginning-level crisis line specialist.
- Use the tools provided to help callers.
- Show up on time for shifts.
- Use the phone systems and other technology.
- Integrate the knowledge, attitudes, and skills taught in the basic program into safe and competent practice.