

## Guided Tour

### Vibrant Emotional Health's 988 Training: Crisis Conversations on Chat and Text

#### **Introduction**

This is a guided tour of Vibrant Emotional Health's introductory online course Crisis Conversations on Chat and Text. Background information is provided on the organization, as well as an explanation and highlights of this online course for crisis counselors on the national 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. No login is necessary to access these elearning modules.

#### Crisis Conversations on Chat and Text

- Module 1: What to Know  
<https://www.illumina-interactive.com/ehla/vibrant2023/chatM1/scormcontent/>
- Module 2: Active Engagement  
<https://www.illumina-interactive.com/ehla/vibrant2023/chatM2/scormcontent/>
- Module 3: Supporting Safety  
<https://www.illumina-interactive.com/ehla/vibrant2023/chatM3/scormcontent/>
- Module 4: Closing Conversations  
<https://www.illumina-interactive.com/ehla/vibrant2023/chatM4/scormcontent/>

#### **Organization**

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States.

Vibrant Emotional Health is the administrator of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, which is grant funded by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

#### **Background**

Nationwide, the need for crisis counseling unfortunately continues to rise. Crisis counseling is intended to provide brief support, reduce a person's distress, address their immediate needs, and reinforce their ability to cope. People experiencing crises can anonymously contact 988 by phone, text, or chat.

To help ensure that anyone who contacts the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline receives effective, consistent, research-based support from every crisis counselor, Vibrant launched an online training portal for crisis counselors in November 2022. These elearning course modules provide foundational skills for helping people in crisis and assessing their safety and suicide risk.

The courses are developed by a team with extensive experience in the field of crisis counseling and instructional design. The content is based on current research and incorporates findings from evaluations specifically conducted on the Lifeline's services. The instructional design is grounded in adult learning theory and tailored to the needs of adult learners.

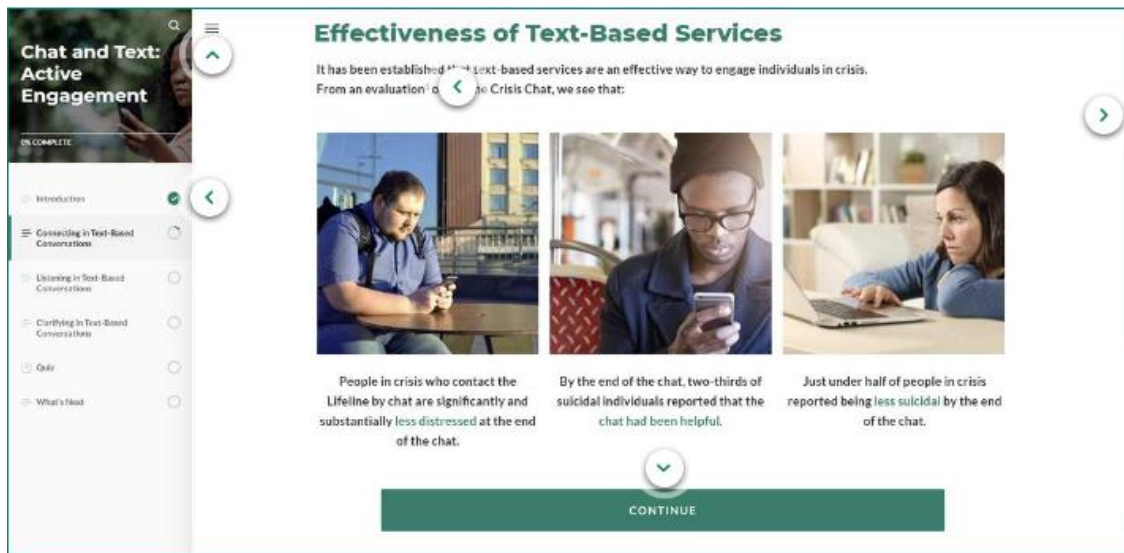
Each online course goes through an extensive review process by multiple individuals with experience in clinical best practices, chat and text, equity and inclusion, as well as specific subject matter expertise (e.g., substance use disorder prevention). In addition to these reviews, center administrators and crisis counselors have provided feedback during two separate pilot tests. Everyone who completes a course is also asked to fill out a feedback survey, which will help to inform future changes and updates to a course.

This guided tour is for a course that was developed to help crisis counselors provide effective crisis counseling over text and chat. The need for effective text-based emotional support has expanded dramatically in recent years and continues to grow. Young people today also prefer to use chat and text for crisis counseling services.

Providing crisis intervention using text-based modalities requires unique skills and techniques. In this online course, crisis counselors learn about the differences between text-based and voice-based crisis modalities; they also learn how to support people in crisis over chat and text, such as conveying empathy via text and helping people create plans to reduce their risk of suicide. In addition, there is guidance specific to text-based crisis counseling about how to support individuals at imminent risk of suicide, when to request emergency services, and how to empathetically guide individuals through this process.

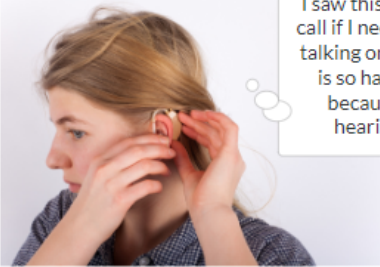
**Starting the Course**

The intended audience for the course consists of crisis counselors who respond to chats or texts on the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Each training module begins with an introductory lesson that outlines the learning objectives and includes a brief overview of the main topic. Navigation tips can also be found towards the end of each introduction to assist learners in easily navigating the course.



**Module 1 – Chat and Text: What to Know**

The first module covers the benefits of text-based conversations for both people in crisis and the crisis counselor. Research is also presented to show the effectiveness of text-based services in crisis counseling. For example, according to one study, two-thirds of people with suicidal thoughts reported that their chat conversation had been helpful.



I saw this number to call if I need help. But talking on the phone is so hard for me because of my hearing loss!

**Benefit of Text-Based Services**

**Access**

Text-based conversations can provide necessary support for people from the Deaf or Hard of Hearing community and for other people with barriers to accessing voice-based services. Text-based services are also the preferred modality for young people. Youth are more inclined to reach out to crisis services over text and chat.

**PREV** **NEXT**

Since many crisis counselors begin as phone-based crisis counselors, the module covers the similarities and differences between phone- and text-based conversations. For example, text-

based conversations are usually longer and involve a younger audience. People who reach out through text also are often at a higher risk for suicide than people who reach out over the phone. This module prepares crisis counselors for these and other unique aspects of text-based crisis counseling.

To explore unique aspects of communicating with and actively engaging a younger audience, select each of the four number icons.

The course includes several illustrations of realistic text-based crisis conversations. The first module highlights how the same text conversation may sound differently over the phone.

Stevie reaches out to the Lifeline by text.  
Read her interaction with a crisis counselor. Then select DONE.

Here is the same conversation, but this time Stevie has reached out by phone.  
To listen to the conversation, select the Play button.

**Current Interaction** × +

**Crisis Counselor**

**Stevie**

**Crisis Counselor**  
How did you feel when she told you that?

**Stevie**  
idk bad ig

**Crisis Counselor**  
So it sounds like it really impacted you when she said she didn't want to be around you anymore.

**Stevie**  
isnt that a messed up thing for your mom to say tho like who says that

**Send**

**See a Transcript**

**Play**

Excerpts of conversations help learners recognize challenges with text-based crisis counseling, such as clarifying a person's emotional state when audio cues and tone aren't available. Showing learners the different ways in which a person's emotional state can be perceived teaches them to avoid making premature assumptions.



## **Module 2 – Chat and Text: Active Engagement**

Module 2 describes how crisis counselors can form a connection with people who contact 988 via text or chat. Forming a connection is critical to effective crisis counseling.

Asking several back-to-back questions can make the conversation feel more like an interrogation. Remember, you are unable to use your tone of voice to convey warmth like you would over the phone.

Question 2 of 2

?

Sometimes I ask several shorter questions back-to-back. Doesn't this help to move the conversation forward?


**RESET**

A woman with dark hair and a necklace stands with her arms crossed. To her left is a text-based interface with a question and a "RESET" button.

Case studies are first introduced in this module with Cole, a young person who is in distress out of fear of losing his job. The module explores what the crisis counselor can do to effectively establish a connection with Cole by reflecting and clarifying his concerns in an empathic way.

**Case Study: Cole**

Let's take a look at Cole's conversation with a crisis counselor on the Lifeline. Notice how the crisis counselor specifically responds to the concern that Cole shares.



**Cole**

i cnt get myself up fr anythig anymre theres no point in trying nothin is ever getting bettr im about to get fired at my job anyway

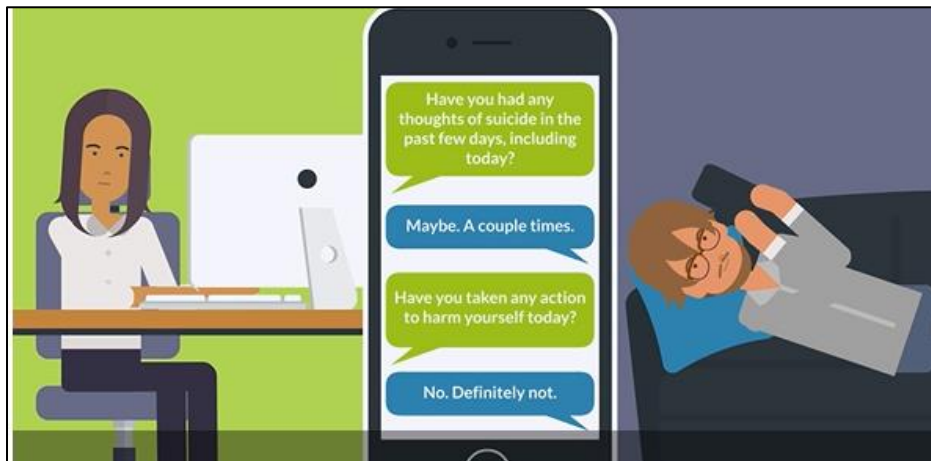
**Crisis Counselor**

So in addition to everything you shared about what's happening with your friends, it also seems like your job might be on the line right now too. I can see why you're feeling pretty hopeless about things getting better.

Send

### **Module 3 – Chat and Text: Supporting Safety**


In module 3, crisis counselors learn how to assess the suicide risk and safety of individuals who contact 988 by text and chat. Examples illustrate what to say to understand a person's suicidal intent and capability to follow through with their intent.



The module also explores challenges crisis counselors can encounter when assessing suicide risk, such as feeling overwhelmed or making false assumptions about the person's safety.

**The Person's Tone** 2 of 3

An individual may be at risk of suicide even if their tone (i.e., their choice of words and the pacing of their messages) does not immediately indicate distress.



**False Assumption**

Their tone is so calm. I'm relieved that they're safe.

**NEXT**

The final lesson of this module shows learners how to collaborate with individuals in crisis on creating a plan that will reduce their risk of suicide.



**Safety Planning Challenges** < >

Some people don't know **who else to turn to** or **how to cope** with their situation.

**1**

**Current Interaction** × +

Crisis Counselor

Ruth

**Ruth**  
It's just hard taking care of my mom. She's so dependent on me.

**Crisis Counselor**  
You mentioned wanting to know more about how others have dealt with this situation. Would you be interested in me looking up some online support groups for children who have parents with cancer?

**Ruth**  
Sure. I'd like to know more about support groups.

**Send**

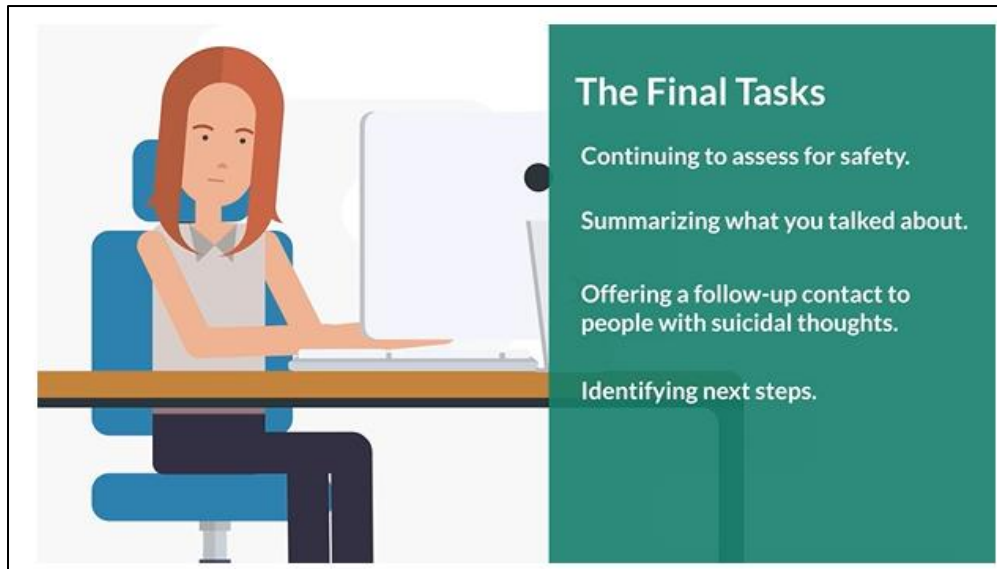
**NOTICE**

Because the crisis counselor **asked permission**, Ruth was more open to **exploring the resources** the crisis counselor suggested.

**CONTINUE** →

**Module 4 – Chat and Text: Closing Conversations**

Module 4 focuses on how to wrap up a text-based conversation appropriately and empathetically. It can be tempting to end the conversation quickly, particularly if there are other texts, chats, or calls waiting to be answered. However, crisis counselors must use great care when wrapping up the conversation so that an individual in crisis continues to feel supported.



Sometimes people in crisis don't want to end the conversation. This is more common with text-based modalities than calls. Crisis counselors need to identify why this might be occurring, validate the person's hesitancy, and review what the person will do when the conversation ends.

Why Joon May Be Hesitant	What You Need to Know
<p><b>Reason #1</b></p> <p>To Joon, the conversation feels unresolved.</p>	<p>Not all problems are easily solved; the goal is to de-escalate the crisis and help Joon identify coping skills to try on his own.</p>
<p><b>Reason #2</b></p> <p>It can take time to figure out what to do about a problem, and Joon feels he needs more time.</p>	<p><i><a href="#">Click here for further insight.</a></i></p>



At the end of the module, crisis counselors learn how to wrap up the conversation differently if the person in crisis is at imminent risk of suicide. While involving emergency services may keep a person from ending their life in the moment, it can lead to significant adverse outcomes as well, particularly for people of color and others who face active discrimination. Crisis counselors must consider all alternative options in an effort to determine the least invasive intervention. Consultation with a supervisor is essential in imminent risk situations. If it is necessary to enlist emergency services in text-based crisis conversations, guidance and procedures are provided.

Why do you think it's important to consult with a supervisor as soon as you think a person in crisis might be at imminent risk?

*Type your ideas (they won't be saved). Then select **SUBMIT** for more guidance.*

Type your response here.

**SUBMIT**



Involuntary emergency intervention is a **last resort**.