

Guided Tour Vibrant Emotional Health's 988 Training: Fundamentals of Crisis Counseling

Introduction

This is a guided tour of Vibrant Emotional Health's 988 crisis counseling elearning modules and supplemental practice activities, which are part of an online training called Fundamental of Crisis Counseling. This training is for crisis counselors on the national 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. No login is necessary to access these elearning modules and practice activities.

Fundamentals of Crisis Counseling

1) **Module – Crisis Counseling: Core Competencies**

<https://www.illumina-interactive.com/ehla/vibrant2023/fundamentalsM2/scormcontent/>

Supplemental Practice Activity – Understanding Expressions of Anger

<https://www.illumina-interactive.com/ehla/vibrant2023/PAanger/story.html>

2) **Module – Crisis Counseling: Looking Inward**

<https://www.illumina-interactive.com/ehla/vibrant2023/fundamentalsM3/scormcontent/>

Supplemental Practice Activity – Cultivating Self-Awareness

<https://www.illumina-interactive.com/ehla/vibrant2023/fundamentalsM3/scormcontent/>

This guided tour includes background on the organization and highlights of this training.

Organization

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a national network of 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. 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.

These elearning course modules and supplemental practice activities provide foundational skills for crisis counselors, such as conveying empathy, clarifying information, and helping a person in crisis create a plan that can reduce their risk of suicide. Since each individual who reaches out to 988 has unique needs and concerns, these skills must be tailored to each individual's experience.

The elearning modules are intended to help crisis counselors develop these essential skills and adapt them to different situations. Case studies and realistic scenarios throughout the training provide opportunities for learners to practice offering empathic support and communicating effectively with individuals in crisis. After completing a module, learners are given supplemental practice activities. These short interactive learning experiences go into greater depth on an area covered in a course module and address aspects of conversations that crisis counselors often find particularly challenging.

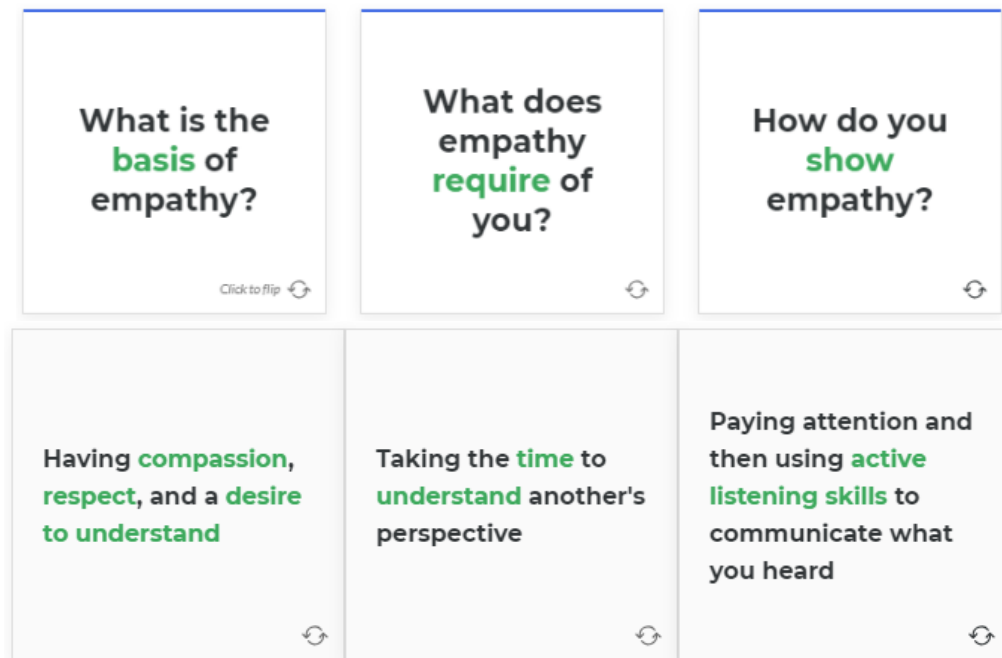
Both modules and supplemental practice activities are composed of a large variety of engaging animation, video, audio, and elements of graphic and instructional design that teach and reinforce concepts. Ultimately, these forms of media help crisis counselors remember and apply their skills during real-life calls, texts, and chats with individuals who contact 988.

1) Module – Crisis Counseling: Core Competencies

This module focuses on teaching the core competencies that crisis counselors need to effectively support individuals in crisis: conveying empathy, communicating respect, and prioritizing safety. To facilitate learning and understanding of these core competencies, different types of interactivity and multimedia are used throughout the module along with scenarios.

Flip Cards

Flip cards are used to present written content in an interactive format that is easy to understand.




Multimedia

Throughout the module, short video clips show interviews with real people sharing their personal experiences and insights as crisis counselors.



Images with quotes from real people are used to show a crisis counselor's perspective and to reinforce an important concept.



"To prioritize someone's safety means if someone is imminently at risk of harming themselves or someone else, then we have a responsibility to do our very best to intervene in some way. But it also means asking ourselves: what does safety look like specifically for that person and how do I collaborate with someone around what safety looks like and feels like for them?"

- Caitlin Maxwell, 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Realistic Scenarios

Scenarios based on realistic situations are displayed in various ways to illustrate the types of conversations and experiences crisis counselors may encounter. Some scenarios also include a related multiple-choice question that encourages critical thinking.

Scenario: Wendy

Wendy gets a text from a youth in crisis. As the conversation progresses, she learns that their concerns are related to their sexual identity. She becomes worried that she won't be able to express empathy very effectively because she doesn't think she'll be able to relate and is concerned she'll say the wrong thing about their emotions.



What is the most appropriate thing for Wendy to do in this situation? *Select all that apply.*

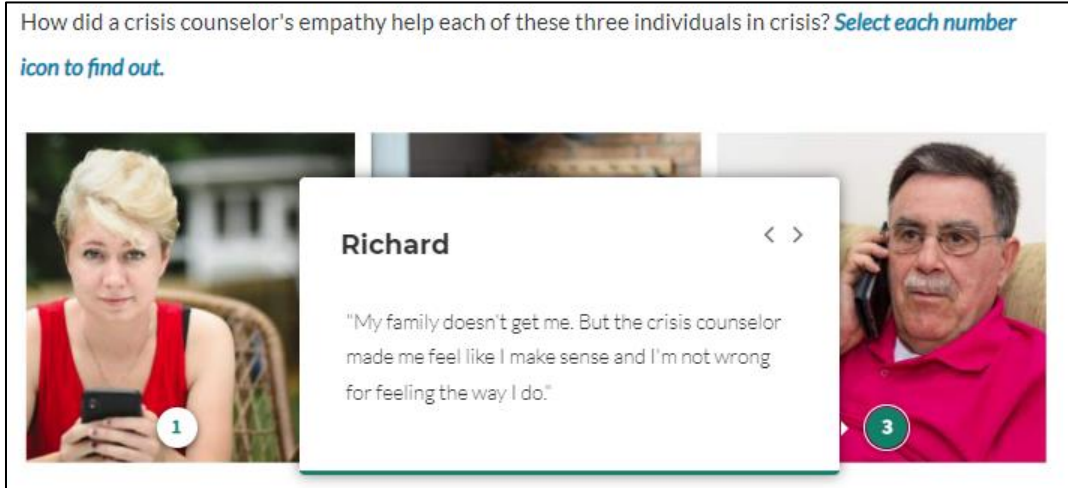
Wendy should intentionally place her focus on the individual's emotions, instead of on their experience.

Wendy should ask the individual to continue to clarify the experience they are describing until she can relate it to herself.

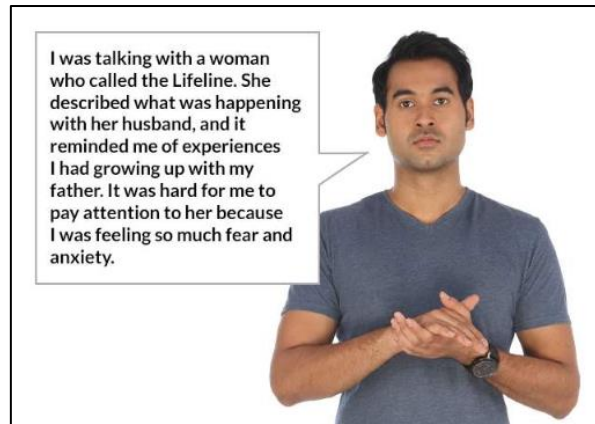
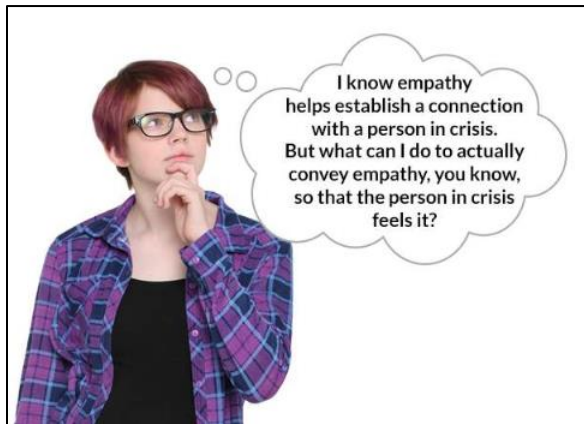
Wendy should help the individual explore and process their own emotions and respond empathically to whatever they are feeling.

SUBMIT

Images with interactive hotspots convey several different real-world examples on a common theme, such as the impact that a crisis counselor's empathy can have on individuals in crisis.



Cutouts with thought bubbles and speech bubbles show common reactions that crisis counselors may experience when getting accustomed to their role. This technique can help to validate learners' concerns, especially if they are new to crisis counseling.



Supplemental Practice Activity – Understanding Expressions of Anger

This practice activity focuses on a common challenge for crisis counselors—how to respond when someone is expressing anger. It supplements the course module shown above, Crisis Counseling: Core Competencies. In this practice activity crisis counselors learn about the causes of a person's anger, how to respond to these expressions of anger with empathy, as well as how to set boundaries when appropriate.

Realistic Scenarios

As a way of increasing empathy for someone expressing anger, crisis counselors are introduced to three people in crisis who have reached out to 988 and said something in an angry tone. Clicking on each individual allows learners to learn more information about the person's circumstances that may be the source of their anger.

Meet Samantha, Deven, and Isela

During their conversations with crisis counselors, these individuals are expressing themselves in ways that may come across as angry. *Click on each person to learn more.*

Samantha



Deven



Isela ✓



"Seriously? I get misgendered all the time. You gave your pronouns earlier, so I thought you'd be better at this."

Isela


What Isela says to the crisis counselor:

"Seriously? I get misgendered all the time. You gave your pronouns earlier, so I thought you'd be better at this."

What the crisis counselor doesn't know:

- Recently quit part-time job after facing discrimination at work
- In danger of losing financial aid for tuition and housing due to failing grades
- Frequently misgendered by professors
- Feeling helpless about low grades
- Feels stressed and angry reading about transgender political policies

Return



Multimedia

After finding out more about each person, learners choose an empathetic response to the individual in crisis. Then they listen to or read a transcript of the conversation with their response along with the person's reaction to it. In this way learners can see how their response may have helped to de-escalate the person's anger.

Responding to Samantha

Both of these responses on the right are appropriate. Which one would you feel most comfortable saying in this situation? *Select one response then click Submit.*

Samantha



Play

"Look, I'm tired of answering your stupid questions. Like, I gotta prove how fucked up my life is before you'll help me."

"It makes sense you'd react that way after everything you've gone through. I can't imagine being in that situation and staying as calm as you did. Do you wanna tell me more about what happened?"

"I can tell this situation's really bothering you. I get that. Do you wanna talk more about what happened?"

Submit

Responding to Sa

Select the audio icon to listen to the conversation transcript.

Samantha



Play

Transcript

"Look, I'm tired of answering your stupid questions. Like, I gotta prove how fucked up my life is before you'll help me."


Samantha: Look, I'm tired of answering your stupid questions. Like, I gotta prove how fucked up my life is before you'll help me.

Crisis Counselor: It makes sense you'd react that way after everything you've gone through. I can't imagine being in that situation and staying as calm as you did. Do you wanna tell me more about what happened?

Samantha: [calmer tone] I've got so many problems, I'm worried all the time. I keep calling, but nobody actually helps me.

Responding to Samantha

Samantha



Pause

Transcript

"Look, I'm tired of answering your stupid questions. Like, I gotta prove how fucked up my life is before you'll help me."

Did your empathetic response have an effect on Samantha's anger? *Select Yes or No.*

Yes

No

Submit

In summary at the end of the section, a crisis counselor reflects on what she has learned about responding to people who express anger.



Personalized Dialogue

Next, learners experience what it would be like as a crisis counselor interacting with people who express anger during text-based conversations. After sharing their name (as a crisis counselor might do in a real crisis conversation), the learner must decide whether the individual's angry comments are a way of venting and coping, or if it's necessary to set a boundary.

In order to personalize the following scenarios, please enter your name or alias in the box below.

Please type your name below and select Continue to begin.

Name or alias that you use on the Lifeline:

Continue

Age Prejudice

Person in Crisis
Look Anna, I know you get paid to talk nice to me but you're clearly too young to understand what I'm going through.

Anna
I hear that you are frustrated, but I still want to support you in the best way possible. Could you tell me more about what happened at work?

Person in Crisis
What are you, 20? How are you going to understand any of this shit I'm going through? I'm pissed and nobody helps

Send

In this situation, is it necessary for you to set boundaries?
Select Yes or No.

Yes
 No

Submit

2) Module – Crisis Counseling: Looking Inward


This module uses realistic scenarios, interactive features, and multimedia to encourage crisis counselors to reflect and explore how self-awareness can impact their readiness, satisfaction, and effectiveness in their role.

Realistic Scenarios

Realistic scenarios are presented to show the different motivations that crisis counselors may have for choosing this work and how their expectations may differ from reality.

Select each of the 5 motivations below to learn more.

- > Help Others
- ✔ Save Lives
- > Do Meaningful Work
- > Gain Professional Skills
- > Share Lived Experience




Meet Amol

"I read news stories about people dying by suicide, and then it hit close to home when I learned that someone in my community died by suicide. I was compelled to do something to help save lives. That's when I decided to become a crisis counselor."

Select the button to learn more about this motivation.

Learn More

✔ Help Others
✔ Save Lives
> Do Meaningful Work



Related expectation:

I'm going to be able to help save the lives of people who are suicidal.

While a crisis counselor must prioritize the safety of everyone they interact with on the lifeline, the reality is that you cannot predict who will act on their thoughts of suicide. Your work as a crisis counselor is to show empathy, provide immediate support, and engage all available resources to help maintain a person's safety during the conversation and after it ends.

Self-Reflection

Learners have the opportunity to identify and reflect on their own motivations for doing this work.

Your Motivations

- Help Others
- Save Lives
- Do Meaningful Work
- Gain Professional Skills
- Share Lived Experience
- Other

What expectations do you have based on your motivation? Type the expectations that pop into your mind immediately. This can help you become aware of any unconscious expectations.

type your expectations here

Since a crisis counselor’s motivations and expectations may differ from the reality of crisis counseling, “self-check” activities are intended to increase self-awareness. Based on the question, learners move the slider to one of the options. Depending on their choice, they receive specific feedback that focuses on ways they can be an effective crisis counselor.

How well do you generally tolerate uncertainty in your day-to-day life?

Move the marker to where you are and then select the Submit button. There is no wrong answer.

Low
Medium
High

While I prefer certainty, I do okay with uncertainty. How comfortable or stressed I feel with uncertainty often depends on the details of what is uncertain.

You indicated that you have a **medium tolerance for uncertainty**.

Given your level of tolerance for uncertainty, take a few minutes to answer the following questions.

- How will you cope when you are worried about someone in crisis but don't know the outcome?
- How will it impact you mentally and emotionally when certain situations and conversations on the Lifeline lack closure?

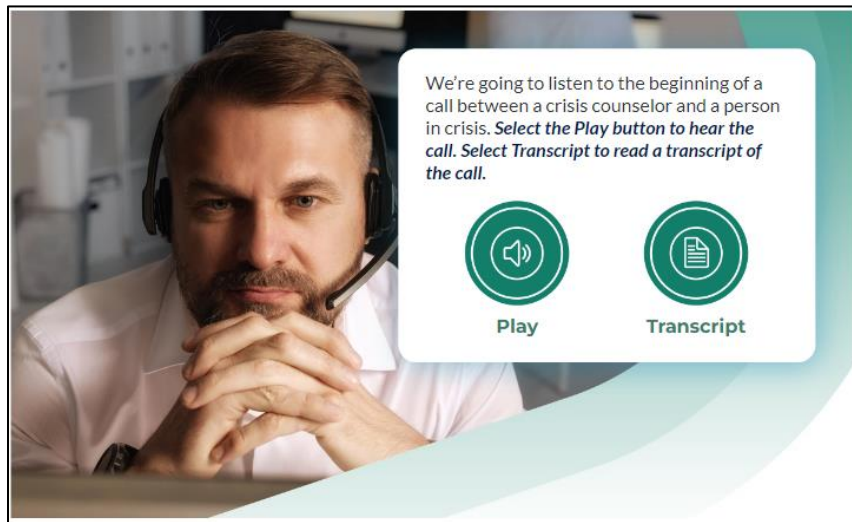
Anywhere you fall on this scale right now is fine. Remember, the goal of this activity is to increase your awareness so that you know what to focus on for your own growth and success as a crisis counselor.

Supplemental Practice Activity – Cultivating Self-Awareness

This practice activity focuses on recognizing the importance of practicing self-awareness during a crisis conversation. It supplements the course module shown above, Crisis Counseling: Looking Inward. In this practice activity crisis counselors have the opportunity to identify their own emotional reaction, manage their reactions, and debrief with supervisors when necessary.

Multimedia

Learners listen to or read the transcript of the beginning of a call between a crisis counselor and a person in crisis, and then reflect on their own emotional reaction to the conversation.

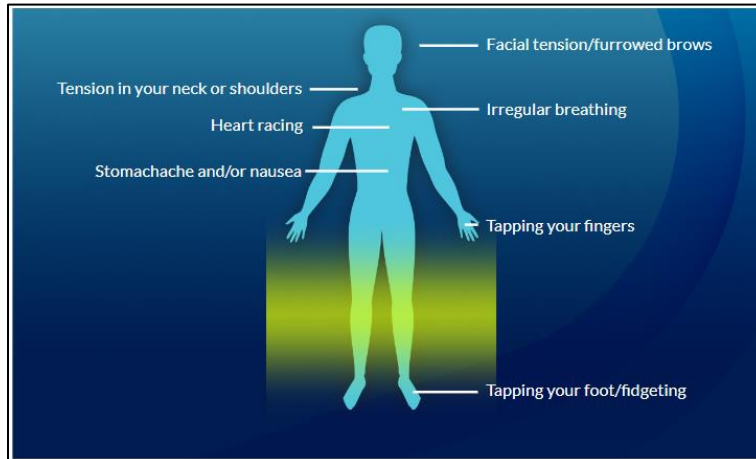


The Zoom call between the crisis counselor and his supervisor demonstrates the benefits of debriefing after a difficult crisis call, chat, or text is completed.



Visual design

Various interactive visual design elements are used to engage learners and help them identify physical cues to emotional reactions, as well as their feelings, and the reasons for them.



You may be familiar with the Feeling Wheel.

Imagine that you were the crisis counselor in this conversation.

Which one of the four Feeling Wheel quadrants would most closely match your reaction to the scenario?

Select that quadrant to continue.

If you have feelings in more than one quadrant, click on each before moving on.

Why do you think you would react this way after hearing the individual's story?
Select all that apply.

- Personal experiences [?]
- Professional experiences [?]
- Unconscious (or implicit) biases [?]
- Other

Type your response here.

Submit

Animation and interactive elements are also part of the visual design to encourage crisis counselors to engage in self-reflection and self-care. Through these practices, crisis counselors increase their ability to maintain their own well-being after emotionally intense conversations, thereby growing more confident in their role.

What are some ways that you choose to reflect on your experience or care for yourself after a crisis conversation has ended? *Select all that apply.*

- Eat or get a snack
- Supervision
- Journaling
- Meditation/mindfulness
- Positive self-talk
- Speak to a colleague
- Participate in a hobby

There are many simple ways that you can reflect on your experience and care for yourself after a crisis conversation has ended. Whether your self-awareness and self-care are primarily cultivated through activities you do on your own or with other people, the most important thing is that you do so intentionally.