

## **Giving Crisis Line Services .More Substance**

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This presentation addresses a unique challenge. What role might crisis service providers that are not intended to be specifically oriented to substance abuse take when such issues inevitably arise, and how might they most effectively approach such issues? While it is primarily geared toward those who set policy or design training, the presentation will likely be of interest to crisis line phone interventionists and supervisors as well.

Alcohol abuse is an element of many crisis line calls. Often substance abuse is a primary issue, Even more often, it is a significant complicating factor in crises that are primarily centered on some other issue. Many approaches to serving callers with substance abuse issues have been tried. Often, crisis lines have attempted to use information and protocols borrowed from other treatment settings such as CD outpatient treatment or drug and alcohol help lines. It is common for phone interventionists to be provided general education on substance abuse and co-occurring disorders that may have limited relevance to their crisis line work. In some cases, this can create a situation in which, the general philosophical approach of the crisis line and its approach toward substance abuse issues seem distinct or even incongruent. Crisis line specialists may feel, an expectation to dramatically alter their approach when callers present with substance abuse issues. In some cases, we have seen this result in over reliance on hasty referrals to the area's drug and alcohol help line. While such a referral may ultimately be appropriate, this presentation questions whether there might not be ways to better serve callers and asserts that the role of crisis lines in addressing substance abuse issues is unique. Consequently, the training and protocols crisis lines use ought to be unique as well.

The most frequently presented information about substance abuse focuses on a small percentage of the population that is severely dependent, whereas crisis lines often serve a much broader and more diverse spectrum of callers. Information about alcohol use in the general population can inform our work with that broader group of clients. Information on alcohol abuse will be presented and the implications for protocols and training will be discussed. Suggestions for general-service crisis lines will focus on identifying the most common and effective paths to resolution of alcohol-related problems among the general population and how we can utilize this information in serving crisis line callers. Potential benefits of these suggestions will be outlined.

Distinguishing the role of crisis lines from that of other service providers with regard to substance abuse can serve to both enhance the work we do with callers facing such issues and help bring the crisis center's philosophical approach to the topic in line with its overarching philosophy.

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