

Chronic Callers – Policies and Practices

Ron Walker
President
Telecare Distress Centers of Canada Inc
3647 Riverdale Drive
Washago, Ontario L0K 2B0
Canada
+1 705 689 2915
ronwalker@alumni.uwaterloo.ca

Chronic callers to distress lines call very frequently, and they repeatedly present the same issues and concerns while showing no appreciable change in their life. Some chronic callers exhibit a sense of entitlement to unlimited access in terms of frequency and duration of calls. However, chronic callers consume the limited resources of distress lines, to the detriment of other callers.

Some distress lines limit chronic caller access, or ban specific chronic callers, while others consider unlimited access to be an essential part of the service. There is debate about the value of our service to these callers, and debate about appropriate policies and best practices.

Some volunteers feel that these chronic callers need us as much as crisis callers need us, albeit in a different way, and these volunteers resist attempts to limit service to chronic callers.

Most volunteers find chronic callers to be frustrating and annoying. These volunteers dread chronic calls but may not feel empowered to refuse or limit the calls, resulting in volunteer frustration and burnout. A policy to limit service to chronic callers is helpful to these volunteers.

This workshop presents the results of an international survey of policies and practices, and describes a new policy adopted by a distress line in Canada. The input from a mental health professional and the presentation to volunteer members of the rationale for the policy and the expectations for conformity are discussed.

The workshop will be structured to include audience input and discussion, and will quite likely stimulate debate about best practices. Attendees will take away a basis for review and possible modification of their own policies and practices concerning chronic callers.