

SAMPLE VERBAL RESPONSES IN A CRISIS
Some Simple Do's and Don'ts

The **best practice response** to someone in crisis is to LISTEN. When you respond, focus on letting them know:

You are listening:

- “Can you tell me more about how you’re feeling? I really want to hear about what’s making you so sad.”
- “It sounds like you’re really upset about the divorce. Is that right? Are there other things that are hard?”
- “So I hear you saying you feel like there is just nothing to live for... when did you start feeling that way?”

You believe that they are serious:

- “You’re telling me you’re ready to end it, and I believe you. I’m hoping we can just talk for a little bit more.”
- “I understand how serious this is, and that you feel there is no hope. Did anything specific make you start feeling this way?”
- “It sounds like you feel like no one believes you’re really serious about this. I do. I can see you are in a lot of pain.”

You believe that their problems are real problems, and not trivial:

- “I can hear how much pain you’re in.”
- “You sound incredibly sad and anything that is making you feel that bad is a serious issue. I want you to know you can tell me about it, no matter what it is.”
- “It doesn’t matter that she told you it was no big deal. It was a big deal for you – I can see that.”

You understand that while they need support and help, only they can solve their problems:

- “I know that no one can really understand exactly how you feel. But I can listen and try to understand, and see if I can help.”
- “I know there are no easy answers, and that it feels to you like there are NO answers right now. But I believe you are strong enough to figure out answers... you just need some time to feel better.”
- “It’s hard to come up with solutions when you’re feeling so sad. If we can find some help so you don’t feel so terrible, I believe you could figure out some next steps.”

There is hope:

- “I know it is hard to see right now, but there are reasons to live.”
- “There is no easy fix, and I can’t promise there is one. But I can promise that there are reasons to make it through to tomorrow, even if you can’t see them right in this moment.”
- “There are people who care about you, who want to help and who want to see you feel better. I hope you will let us help you.”

They are not alone in their pain, in the moment or in general.

- “I’m sitting right here with you. You’re not alone. You can keep talking to me.”
- “I want you to know that a lot of people get to a point of wanting to die. A lot of people have lived through it and gotten help. It’s possible, and I believe in you – I believe you can get through this.”
- “I know that nobody’s situation is exactly like yours, but a lot of people do get so hopeless. There is help to get through that feeling.”

SOME CAUTIONS!

People always mean well in crisis situations, but it can be easy to fall into common responses that can do more harm than good. These tend to be the reverse of the best practice suggestions from the previous page!

Not listening carefully:

- Talking over the person: “I can tell you right now that you don’t want to do this.”
- Insisting they listen to you: “I know you’re upset but you need to listen to me right now.”
- Assuming you know what is really wrong: “So you didn’t get the job – you would have hated it anyway.”

Don’t say or imply that you don’t believe they are serious about dying:

- “If you were really going to do it, you wouldn’t be talking about it, you’d be doing it.”
- “You expect me to believe you would actually kill yourself? Stop talking nonsense.”
- “You’re just saying this to manipulate us and it’s not going to work.”
- “We’ve been through this before – you’re never serious. How many times do we have to go through this?”

Don’t say, or imply, that their problems are trivial:

- “A lot of people have it a LOT worse than you do and THEY don’t threaten to kill themselves.”
- “Everybody goes through break ups. Don’t be so dramatic.”
- “Hey, I know really down now, but by next week, this will seem like nothing.”

Don’t tell them their problems are easy to fix or that you have the answer for them:

- “You just need to pull yourself up by your bootstraps! It’s all in your attitude!”
- “You just need to look on the bright side. Be grateful for your blessings!”
- “The way to get kick depression is to eat right and get good sleep. I’ll teach you how to meditate.”
- “You need some good antidepressants. My doctor can get them for you.”

Don’t insist that things will get better or give empty promises:

- “Things will be FINE next week, you’re just having a bad day.”
- “You’ll get a new job before you know it.”
- “Forget him. You’ll find a new guy who will be even better.”

Some other easy traps:

- Don’t get angry or yell at them. “What are you thinking?!”
- Don’t try to guilt them. “How could you do this to me, to your parents?”
- Don’t try to ‘shock’ them out of it: “Go ahead, kill yourself. I know you won’t do it.”

OFFERING HOPE VERSUS EMPTY PROMISES:

It can sound confusing to say “offer hope” and then say “don’t promise things will get better.” But there is a big difference between encouraging a person to get through the moment and that you will help them find solutions on the other side, versus saying you “know” things will change for the better. You don’t know things will get better for them, and the person in crisis knows you don’t.

Offering hope tells the person that you believe in them, and you believe that they can find their own solution with help, that you believe solutions do exist, even if neither of you can think of them right in the moment. Telling them you know it will get better says to the person that you don’t really understand how bad things really are, that you think their problems aren’t serious, and that you know the solutions to their problems better than they do.