**Setting Limits and Boundaries with Callers**

**Managing challenging behavior with callers**

1) Identify the inappropriate behavior which may include:

a. Discussing sexually explicit content.

b. Threatening or verbally attacking the phone counselor.

c. Attempting to find out personal information about the phone counselor.

2) Identify the corrective behavior for the caller.

a. We can discuss the sexual experience but stay focused on the emotions and not the details of the physical event.

b. I am here to listen and provide support if you communicate without personal threats or verbal attacks.

c. I am here to listen and discuss your issues or concerns but please do not ask about my personal information.

3) Communicate the consequences for failing to correct the inappropriate behavior.

a. If you continue to discuss the physical details of the sexual experience, I will need to end the phone call.

b. If you continue the verbal attacks toward me, I will need to end the phone call.

c. If you continue to ask about my personal information, I will need to end the phone call.

4) Give the caller the opportunity to adjust the inappropriate behavior. This is to allow the caller to demonstrate that she recognizes the issue presented and corrects the behavior.

5) Follow through on consequences if the caller continues to exhibit the inappropriate behavior, e.g., communicate that you are hanging up and then do so.

We have callers who do not attack the phone counselor personally but are very upset and angry about their circumstances. They may be experiencing loneliness, physical challenges, financial challenges, relationship challenges, etc. These callers will on occasion express their anger about their circumstances in a very escalated manner, and at times even hang up the phone on the phone counselor. When this occurs, please keep in mind that the aggressive presentation is not directed at you personally, but is displaced anger about their personal circumstances. When you have a caller that is angry and escalated, please use the following strategies:

\*Remain calm

\*Allow the caller to vent without interrupting.

\* Keep communication simple after the caller begins to calm. When a caller is escalated it is very difficult for her to receive and process information.

\* If the caller begins to calm and is in a more receptive state, you may then use reflection, affirmation for their sharing, and prayer when receptive.

After experiencing difficult calls please do not hesitate in calling me at 630-988-7395 to debrief. this is important for your own mental health and it is received as an indication of your strength and openness to share.

**Ending long calls, especially with frequent callers to the hotline**

There are repeat callers that will attempt to stay on the hotline for extended periods of time even when they are not experiencing an emotional are challenging issue or concern. It is important at times that phone counselors end these calls in order to be available to other callers that need their support. It may be helpful for the phone counselor to begin prompting the caller that she will need to end the call. Some options may include:

\*We have been talking coming up on 30 minutes so we will need to end the call in 10 minutes. Again, prompt the caller when there is 5 minutes left.

\* If the phone counselor has been discussing an issue or concern with the repeat caller for an extended period of time, the phone counselor may ask how the caller is feeling to determine if it is an appropriate time to end the call.

\* The phone counselor may communicate to the repeat caller that since she calls the hotline frequently, the phone counselor will need to end the call to serve other callers in need of support.

It is important to let the repeat caller know that their needs are important and to please call back to the hotline.

\*Particularly for callers of faith, the phone counselor may ask if she may say a prayer for the caller before ending the call. This serves as a prompt, spiritual support and a way of reaching closure with the caller.

Some of the information regarding setting limits and boundaries above was used from an article from MacDonald, D.K., 2017, "Setting Limits and Boundaries with Callers," retrieved from <http://dustinkmacdonald.com/setting-limits-and-boundaries-with-callers/>.

**Maintaining Relationship Boundaries**

In Motivational Interviewing there are Four Aspects of Acceptance including: Absolute Worth,

Accurate Empathy, Autonomy Support and Affirmation.

**Absolute Worth**

This involves accepting the caller and what she brings. It is valuing the inherent worth of the individual. It does not mean that you approve or agree with the actions or behavior of the caller. It is treating the caller as an individual with inherent worth, respect and dignity.

**Accurate Empathy**

This involves demonstrating interest and making an effort to understand the caller’s perspective or to be able to see the world through the caller’s eyes.

**Autonomy Support**

This involves respecting and honoring each caller’s autonomy, their irrevocable right and capacity of self-direction. Miller & Rollnick (2013) describes it well, “This involves letting go of the idea and burden that you have to (or can) make people change. It is, in essence relinquishing a power that you never had in the first place.” (p.19).

**Affirmation**

This involves seeking and acknowledging the caller’s strengths and efforts. Through open ended questioning and reflective listening the phone counselor may identify where the caller has put forth effort and achieved goals that can be acknowledged.

When interacting with repeat callers and those receiving Extended Caller Support, it is important to ensure that relationship boundaries are maintained. When a phone counselor interacts with a caller on a regular basis, it is more likely that relationship boundaries may be crossed. The phone counselor may unintentionally begin to share personal information about themselves. It is important for phone counselors to self-monitor in order to ensure that anonymity is maintained as they become more familiar and at ease with regular hotline interactions.

Transference as it applies to the hotline may be defined as feelings and thoughts a caller may have towards a phone counselor. Counter-transference as it applies to the hotline refers to feelings and thoughts a phone counselor may have towards a caller. It is important that the relationship remain professional and ethical between the phone counselor and callers to the hotline. Many of the callers to the hotline are lonely and may at times pursue personal information and a relationship with the phone counselor. It is up to the phone counselor to maintain ethical boundaries.

As phone counselors have regular contact with callers, it is common that a relationship forms and the phone counselor will begin caring about the wellbeing of the caller. This can be particularly challenging when the caller is experiencing extended and complex challenges in her life. The phone counselor may feel the need to take control and direct a caller or to attempt to fix the problems that the caller is experiencing. However, it is the caller that must take the lead and to ultimately decide whether or not to change. The phone counselor may facilitate the caller in the change process by assisting in weighing the pros and cons of change, establishing reasonable goals consistent with the caller’s values broken down into small steps, considering skills and resources needed, making referrals, providing affirmation as the caller progresses toward the goal, etc.

The confidentiality of the callers’ information should remain within the Upper Room except for the following exceptions: Imminent harm to the caller or a third party or when there is reasonable cause to believe that a child may be abused or neglected by the caller.

(W.R. Miller & S. Rollnick, 2013)

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