

5 Stages of Conversation: How-to Guide

This guide will give an in-depth look on how to navigate through each of the 5 stages of conversation as well as provide you with example phrases.

Stage 1: How to Build Rapport

Rapport involves skills that help you convey empathy and that you're listening to the Help Seeker. Adding tone can be tough, especially when everything is sent via text message or chat.

Tips:

- Use good contact techniques, reflection and paraphrasing, validation, tentafiers, empathetic responses, strength IDs, and open-ended questions.
- Use strong feeling words let Help Seekers know that they are being heard and understood. Finding the right words builds a strong connection between you and the Help Seeker.
- Grammar & Spelling. Proofread your messages to ensure they're clear and grammatically correct.
- Informal Language. Use informal language to make the conversation feel warmer and more personal, while avoiding unprofessional messages that involve text speak.

Example Phrases:

- “Thank you for reaching out today, I’m (name). I see that you’re having issues with family. Can you tell me more about that?”
- “I’m honestly impressed with your strength. You care greatly about your uncle and are carrying the weight of his pain. You seem like a thoughtful person.”
- “It sounds like your sister is really upsetting you. Can you tell me more about how she’s been horrible to you?”
- “I’m hearing that your feelings about your weight are painful and upsetting.”
- “You were strong to reach out for support today, do you feel comfortable sharing your name with me?”

Stage 2: How to Explore

In the flow of a conversation, think of exploring as the ramp-up. We start exploring once the texter feels comfortable enough to share the details of their crisis with us.

Tips

- Try to focus on the Help Seeker's emotions, not just the situation or the facts.
- Give the Help Seeker the space to take the lead as much as possible, meet them where they are.
- Be patient. Fight the urge to jump into problem-solving too quickly.
- It may take some time to build enough rapport so that the Help Seeker feels comfortable enough sharing the root of their crisis.

Steps

1. Explore their **crisis**. What experiences and thoughts led to the Help Seeker's crisis?
2. Explore their **risk**. Is the Help Seeker suicidal, experiencing abuse, or self-harming?
3. Explore the **impact**. How is the Help Seeker's crisis impacting them?

Example Phrases

- "Thanks for opening up to me about this. No one deserves to be treated that way."
- "It sounds like you're feeling frustrated. Did something specific happen with your wife that made you reach out to us tonight?"
- "You mentioned you don't want to wake up tomorrow, are you having thoughts of suicide?"
- "It sounds like this has been bothering you for some time now. How long have you been feeling this pressure?"

Stage 3: How to Identify the Help Seeker's Goal(s)

Often Help Seekers will list multiple issues they are dealing with. We can't fix these concerns, but we can guide them to identify what's bothering them most.

Tips

- **Identify**. Identify the Help Seeker's main goal to show you're on the same page.
- **Background Information**. Explore what the Help Seeker is going through and review some background information on prevalent issues we see among our Help Seekers.
- **Terminology**. Be aware of the phrases you use when referring to the Help Seeker's experiences. Mirror their language.

- Cultural Awareness. We support a diverse population of Help Seekers so it's important to have cultural competence throughout your conversations.
- Ask. If you're unfamiliar with a specific issue, then ask the Help Seeker to share their experience with you.

Example Phrases

- “It makes sense that you’re feeling overwhelmed with so many difficult things at once. It would be helpful for me to know which of these are the most painful for you right now?”
- “What might some type of relief look like for you right now? I hear how much pain you’ve been in, and you deserve to feel supported.”
- “You deserve to feel supported today. What do you think would be best for us to focus on?”
- “Opening up about [insert issue] shows true courage. It's important that you get what you need today. What do you see as your options right now?”
- “I hear how difficult this is, and I can tell how much you want things to improve. In an ideal situation, if everything went your way, what would happen next?”

Stage 4: How to Discover Next Steps

Discovering next steps empowers our Help Seekers, develops their self-efficacy, and puts them in the driver’s seat to identify coping skills, social support, and resources.

Tips

- You're the guide and the Help Seeker drives. Explore what they think might be helpful.
- No advice. Refrain from offering suggestions or advice.
- Resources! If the Help Seeker is unsure what might help and is open to resources, then share a few that might help them get started.
- Help Seekers may show ambivalence towards brainstorming next steps: they may not be ready to think about the future, and that’s okay too.
- Coping Skills. Explore what coping skills are in the Help Seeker’s arsenal. You can ask what they've tried before or about skills or hobbies they are interested in trying.
- Support. Explore their current support system and who they usually talk to about their problem.
- Resources. Explore the resources the Help Seeker has available to them but may have not used yet, or resources we might be able to offer.

Example Phrase

- “You have been under immense stress with school and family issues. Can we explore ways that you relax?”
- “I appreciate your honesty. What’s something you’ve done in the past to keep yourself safe?”
- “I’m hearing that you used to enjoy writing poetry, but you haven’t done it in awhile. Is this something you can make time to do today? You deserve some peace.”
- “It’s overwhelming to deal with this alone. Perhaps we can brainstorm together on ways you can connect with support.”
- “It’s frustrating when nothing seems to be helping. I’m here for you, and we can work together on some options that you can try.”

Discovering Next Steps with Imminent Risk Help Seekers

While we follow the same process for discovering next steps with all Help Seekers, we recognize that supporting those who are high risk can be especially stressful. We also want to encourage and work with the them so that they can Discover Next Steps to stay safe from suicide. It can be especially tempting to rush through discovering next steps with suicidal Help Seekers because we want to help take their pain away. However, many of them are in crisis because they don’t feel connected.

The most powerful thing we can do for someone in crisis is offer connection first!

Tips

- The goal of Discovering Next Steps with an imminent risk Help Seeker is to work with them to come up with their own “next steps” that will keep them safe for now from suicide.
- If the Help Seeker is at imminent risk of suicide, your goal is to explore the impact their suicidal thoughts have on their life so they feel heard and supported. Remember that they reached out for a connection, and you are there with them.
- Many Help Seekers are relieved to be able to talk openly and honestly about their thoughts.
- Separation from Means: After risk assessment is complete, ask the Help Seeker to put the means away or to remove themselves from the means during the conversation so that they are safe in the moment.
- After exploring further with them and identifying a shared goal to keep them safe, we transition to working together to discover the next steps they can take to stay safe for now from suicide.
- Like risk assessment, once we begin discovering next steps with an imminent risk Help Seeker, we want to stay focused on the goal of encouraging them to come up with next steps to keep them safe.
- *Your supervisor is there to support YOU as you are there to support the Help Seeker.*

Steps

1. Explore Impact: Explore what brought these feelings on today. Support the Help Seeker with non-judgmental compassion and remind them how brave they are to be sharing these feelings with you.

2. Safety From Means: Ask how they will keep themselves safe from the means. It's common for the initial response to this question to be, "I don't know". We are giving the Help Seeker the space to come up with their own ways to Discover Next Steps for Safety.
3. Coping Skills: Ask what has helped them in the past when they've felt this way, what activities can distract them from their thoughts.
4. Social Support: Ask who can distract them from the crisis such as family members or friends who can offer support. Many can find support and comfort from their pets as well!
5. Resources: Ask if they would like a resource link that you feel may be helpful to them, for example, distraction techniques, clinical professionals, agencies to contact for help, etc.
6. Help Seeker Check-in: Do they feel safer now that they have created next steps to keep them safe?
 - i. -6.1. IF YES: Transition to wrapping up the conversation, and have texter restate their Next Steps for Safety.
 - ii. -6.2. IF NO: Continue Discovering Next Steps: Ask "What can we add to your next steps to help you stay safe for now from suicide?"
7. Supervisor Check-in: Before ending the conversation, check-in with your Supervisor to confirm that the conversation can be closed.

Example Phrases

- Separation from Means: "You mentioned earlier that you have XYZ available to end your life. Could you put the item in a drawer or another room while we chat?"
- Explore Emotions: "It sounds like this has been an especially hard time. Did something happen today that brought you to this point?"
- Validation & Strength IDs: "This sounds painful and overwhelming for you right now. I admire your courage to be able to share this with me."
- Safety From Means: "I'm wondering what you can do to keep yourself safe from suicide today?"
- Coping Skills: "I'm curious what you've tried in the past to help you get through difficult times and to stay safe from suicide?"
- Social Support: "Who do you feel you can talk with when you're under stress?"
- Resources: "What else do you think you can try to distract yourself to relax and stay safe for now?"
AND "I have links to some resources that you may find helpful right now. Would you like to see those?"

Stage 5: How to End the Conversation

Setting expectations to show that we're short-term support is ideal, whereas someone becoming dependent on our service is not. Moreover, just as body language can be a huge signifier when having an in-person conversation, certain statements can help the Help Seeker understand we're coming to the end of the conversation.

Tips

- To aid in ending the conversation, ask yourself:
 - Did you risk assess the Help Seeker?
 - Does the Help Seeker know that they can contact us in times of crisis, 24/7?
 - Did the Help Seeker get a chance to share their pain?
 - Have you helped the Help Seeker de-escalate their current crisis?
 - If the Help Seeker is Imminent Risk, loop back and ask if they feel that they can keep themselves safe, or summarize coping skills discussed in your conversation.
 - Summary of their Next Steps
 - Warm Closing Message

Steps

1. Ask the Help Seeker our Simple Survey Question
 - a. “Now that we’ve been talking for some time, do you feel the same, better, or worse in comparison to when we first began talking?”
2. Offer the Help Seeker to schedule a follow-up visit with you
 - a. This can be via telephone, video call, chat, or text
 - b. If the Help Seeker chooses to have their next counseling encounter with you via telephone, use these following steps:
 - i. Offer to have the Help Seeker call our warmline (855) 838-6910 at the scheduled time
 - ii. If the Help Seeker requests that you make an outbound call to them, use the CallRail app to make the call or call them blocked in order to protect your privacy. In addition to this, let the Help Seeker know that the call may come through as private
3. Summarize what you and the Help Seeker discussed as well as the coping skills/Next Steps that have been created and warmly end the conversation

Example Phrases

- “I appreciate you sharing this with me today, I admire your strength. Before we wrap up in a moment, what might help you feel like yourself today?”
- “We have a couple of minutes left here. I’m wondering if you could share with me something that helps you feel relief? You deserve time to relax.”
- “We’ve talked about [coping skills] and [resource if given]. This a great start towards a productive next step after we wrap in a few minutes.”
- “I know one conversation might not change how you feel, it can be a process. You’re taking steps towards growth, and that’s what matters.”
- “I’m so glad we got a chance to talk today - take care and be well, (Help Seeker’s name).”

