LiveChat Guidance:
For CCP Counselors/Supporters

Contents

Introduction

Thank you for being part of CalHOPE: California's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other disasters. You are part of a network of organizations and individuals that are being trained to provide virtual support to Californians experiencing stress, anxiety and/or trauma because of the current pandemic. This document will guide you through the different pieces of CalHOPE Connect. Californians all over the state will be able to ask to speak to a counselor through this live chat application, and it will connect you with a Californian who is need of support. You will notice that there are pages of this guide with blank space. This is intentional, so that you can print out the guide and take notes.

The Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program (CCP) has key roles with definitions used in the United States when responding to disasters. CalHOPE's CCP is the first to provide virtual support. While the roles used for CCP remain consistent with the CCP model, this guide uses different terms for roles due to the chat platform. Below you will see how the CCP Terms are used throughout this guide.

- Crisis Counseling Program (CCP) Counselor
  - Supporter/Agent
  - Peer
  - Community Health Worker
  - Family Member
- Crisis Counseling Program (CCP) Program Coordinator
  - Coordinator
- Californians seeking support
  - Visitor/Customer

We want to acknowledge and thank Riverside County for their contributions to Peer Chat support services. CalHOPE Connect leverages the MHSA funded Innovation project developed by Riverside County *Take My Hand*. Their leanings and collaboration have been invaluable to supporting Californians.

Chatting

CalHOPE Connect is designed to implement the FEMA Crisis Counseling Program (CCP) to provide non-clinical emotional and crisis support in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and associated stressors. It is not intended for crisis support, but we do have a crisis protocol that will be covered later in this document.

When engaging in One-on-One text-based chat you will not have the benefit of body language and para-verbal communication.

Text alone may not accurately convey tone, emotion, or meaning.

In order to avoid confusion or misunderstandings, it helps to take your time, re-read the text, wait for the Visitor/Customer to submit their complete text before responding, avoid abbreviations, and be polite and professional. We want to elaborate on giving the Visitor/Customer time in the chat. Allow a minute or so to give the Visitor/Customer enough time to process their thoughts before responding.

Role model reflective listening by checking for understanding by restating what the person said and asking questions like, "Did I get that right?" "Is that correct?" "Did I capture that?"
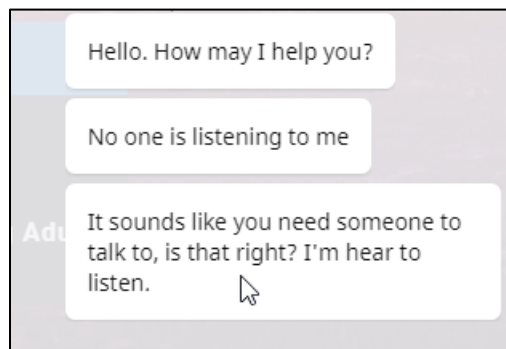
Demonstrate genuine acceptance, respect and understanding of the Visitor/Customer's experiences and feelings. Validate, celebrate, and provide support to help them accomplish their goals.

As a Supporter/Agent, you can share your story and the resilience and recovery practices that improve your life -- this inspires hope. You may also share what is comfortable for you related to feelings, stressors, etc. as it pertains particularly to the pandemic in order provide peer examples for the Visitor/Customer of what each of us are going through at this time and how you are using your resilience and other skills to cope. Coach, empathize and participate with the Visitor/Customer in self-discovery.

- Hope: 'You are reaching out and I hear hope in that'.
- Choice: 'What can you do to feel better about the situation'?
- Empowerment: 'I want to encourage you to set one small goal for yourself'.
- Spirituality: 'Focus on what gives you peace'.
- Recovery Environment: 'Who do you reach out when you're struggling'?

Safety and Security

Safety and security are top priority. Your Visitor/Customer's data is protected.

Please ensure your workstation protects the anonymity and privacy of those you serve. Secure the workstation if you must leave. Adhere to your agencies security protocols.

If you are active and logged into CalHOPE Connect/LiveChat and a Visitor/Customer presents in crisis, remember that they took the first step to reach out for support. Remain calm and reassure the Visitor/Customer that there you are there to help them get connected to resources. Think back to a time when you were in crisis and what helped you.

While you are providing the resources to get the Visitor/Customer connected to resources, it is helpful to them to know that someone (you, the Supporter/Agent) are here with them in the interim, even if it is over the phone or via text. It could also be helpful for them to hear that you, a Peer, have gone through crisis as well, and that the Visitor/Customer's feelings and experience are acknowledged. You are not expected to handle crisis calls. Rather your role is as a **connector** in helping people get quickly to the appropriate level of services and or supports by referring to a resource like those listed below under Crisis Resources.

Maintaining Coverage

It is important that Visitor/Customers be able to connect with a Supporter/Agent in a timely manner. To ensure continuous coverage, communication with your team is vital. We suggest using a format that all team members are able to access. When you take breaks, lunch, or sick/vacation time, please follow the practices and protocols of your agency.

If You Need Support During A Chat

There may be times when you may need support during a chat - we recommend some version of this, as described below. Please use your agency's practices and protocols when seeking extra assistance or support during a chat that may be challenging.

1) Determine what level of support you need. You may want to start with other Supporters/Agents on your team to get advice and or support. Reach out to other Supporters/Agents by your agency's preferred method of contacting each other.

2) If another Supporter/Agent is not available, or you need more assistance.

Escalate the Help Request: If you are unable to reach another Supporter/Agent, contact someone on your team or your CCP Program Coordinator. Please follow your agency guidelines about who to contact when in need of extra assistance on a chat.

Supervision

Any chat (not just crisis) can be supervised. Don't let the word "supervise" throw you. Think of "supervise" as having a coach or consultant alongside you and the Visitor/Customer who can help you with the chat. Rather than putting the Visitor/Customer 'on hold' and explaining everything to someone who is going to help you – the supervise function allows for someone to monitor the chat and provide suggestions to you about how to assist the Visitor/Customer. Use this as a tool. This may seem like eavesdropping, but we want to promote transparency and encourage learning. If you're struggling with a chat, you can text or call your CCP Program Coordinator to supervise and coach/consult with you and offer any suggestions. We encourage programs to also use the ability to supervise a chat to train Supporter/Agents on CalHOPE Connect. Anyone can supervise another chat, but we recommend asking for supervision only from your CCP Program Coordinator or other experienced counselor identified by your program.
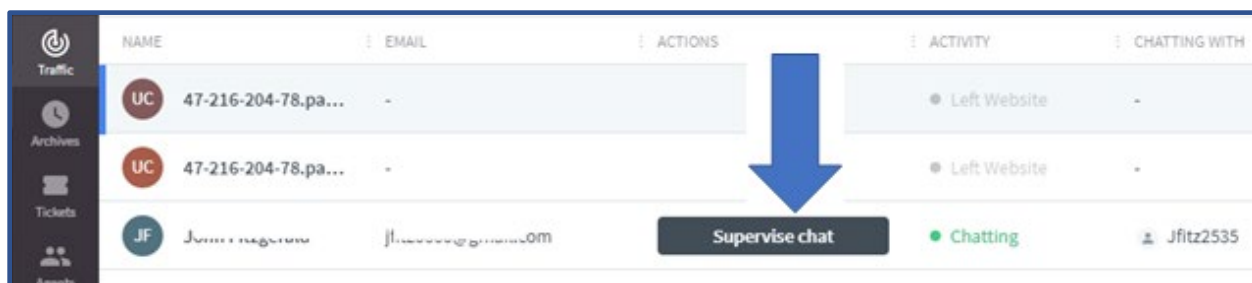
People With High and Complex Needs

There may come a time when you are working the chat when you encounter someone who may present with lots of challenging behavior such as cursing, name calling, making sexual innuendos, and 'screaming'. (in text that could be using ALL CAPS) Generally, these folks are really struggling and wanting connection or needing to have more control in their life yet may not have ways to articulate the need other than through unpleasant behavior or behavior that challenges us. Start with knowing your boundaries and your triggers. If derogatory language, sharing of sexually explicit language, etc. is a trigger for you, consider transferring the Visitor/Customer with another Supporter/Agent. Your job is to provide a listening spirit and support while also keeping yourself safe and present to help others. Transferring a chat is not a reflection of your ability. It reflects your self -awareness and desire to ensure Visitor/Customers are assisted by the someone who may not have the same set of triggers.
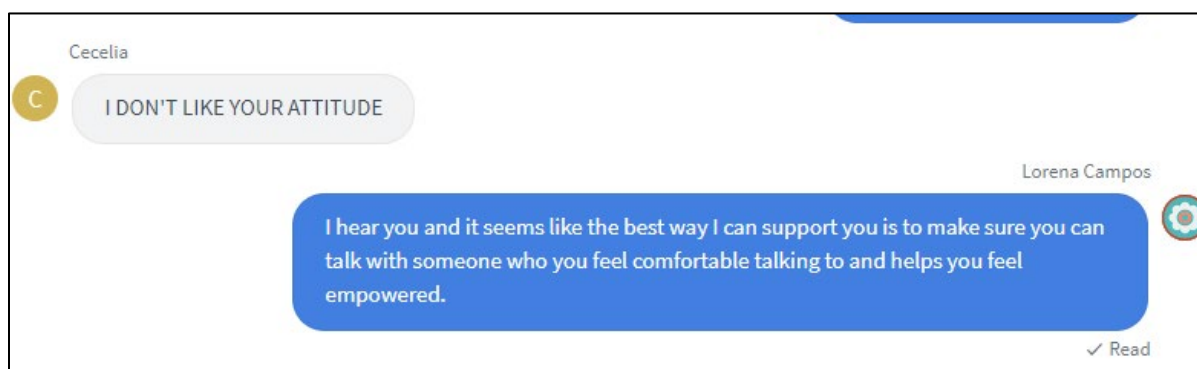
When a Visitor/Customer Presents with Challenging Behaviors in Their Conversation.

Please role-model rolling with resistance and try to redirect the conversation. Thank them for reaching out, acknowledge the importance of positive connections and work towards finding an area in which they would like to work toward being their best self. Does the Visitor/Customer feel they are at their best (their "best self")? If not, what is it like when they are their "best self" and what do they need to do those things when they feel most positive about themselves? Shifting the conversation can help to diffuse the behavior now that they are in a more adaptive mode. If that is difficult for the Visitor/Customer, give them time to move through this process with you. Often times, Visitors/Customers with this way of communicating (all the yucky stuff directed at or to you) have never had anyone take time to connect with them. This may be why the behavior persists and/or escalates. If your Visitor/Customer can share when they are their "best self", the goal now is to help them identify ways in which they can have more of those experiences (be more in that adaptive mode or "best self" that is giving vitality or "energizing" the adaptive mode). Again, this may take time over several texts or conversations.

If you are unable to redirect the chat, practice healthy boundaries and leave the conversation. Always with an opening for the Visitor/Customer to reconnect.

We would encourage you to report this to the Program Coordinator to debrief, but also to share with the team so we can all grow from the experience. Further it is important to share any information about the Visitor/Customer (both the tough stuff and any positives) so that when they reach out again, the next Supporter/Agent they have contact with will have some context from which to work.

There are also those who persistently call warmlines, text lines for other reasons. There are people who may be searching for entertainment, tactical, political, corporate, special interest reasons, and more. In any case, you can just remind them of the purpose of CalHOPE Connect. Politely let them know you need to be available to people who are seeking assistance with support to get through these tough times and will need to close the chat to assist the next person in the queue. Remember to report your experience to your Program Coordinator.

You Got This!

It is important to us that you feel equipped to support anyone who visits CalHOPE Connect.

While we can't anticipate every possible situation, we will do our best to provide you with the tools that will help you to appropriately and confidently address the challenges of each chat. If you come across a situation that seems to stump you, remember that all you need to do is listen, be present, be willing to learn, and be kind. We are here to support the Visitor/Customer, not to fix their situation. You can always transfer the chat, if you are feeling the information you receive is a potential risk to the person or others (crisis). Be transparent and intentional. Do not be afraid to ask for time. You could say something like, "Let me think about that. You have said a lot and I want to give you some value in this conversation. I don't have the benefit of being with you in person, and I don't want to make assumptions."

What we know to be true is you have the ability to intuitively feel your way through any chat challenge, and we are grateful to have you on our team.

Allow Your Visitor/Customer to Take the Lead.

We want to have a conversation with our Visitor/Customer that is comfortable, casual, and flowing. As Supporter/Agents, we can recognize when a Visitor/Customer is using language that makes us uncomfortable. If the language that's being used is not crossing your boundaries, take a deep breath and allow the Visitor/Customer to share. Let them direct the engagement. If the Visitor/Customer has not given us any reason to be concerned specifically for their safety, we don't need to ask if they are thinking about suicide. If the chat is leading in this direction, there are questions we can ask to better understand.

Examples of Questions to Ask

Start with stating: Help me understand. If you feel comfortable enough, try to describe the situation to me.

Then ask the following questions:

- Why do you think this makes you feel this way?
- What's the most important aspect of this challenge to you?
- Is there anything else I should know about you/the situation?
- Who usually supports you emotionally?
- Who have you turned to in the past?
- Who else have you trusted enough to share this information?
- How can the people around you, better support you on your journey?
- Why do feel that you cannot turn to (that person)?
- What are some things you have tried that worked for you?

Hold space and allow the Visitor/Customer to speak their truth. If the Visitor/Customer shares trauma, spend time listening.

If they share a current trauma first ask if they are safe.

Some open-ended questions that may be helpful:

- How can I support you?
- How are you doing with this?
- What has this been like for you?

It is important to not question stacking. Please do not stack question on question. After you've asked the Visitor/Customer a single question, give them time to answer and listen. **Take a moment before responding and/or asking another question.**

Examples of Red Flags:

- Giving away possessions
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Disturbed sleep
- Feeling desperate or worthless
- Researching how to kill oneself
- Increased drug and/or alcohol use
- Sudden mood change – even if that is positive. Ex: if a person who is down suddenly becomes chipper – it could mean that they have solidified their "plan" and feel relief.

Statements like "I don't want to be here anymore" or "It's just not worth living" are explicit signals that exploration is welcome. Your Visitor/Customer is most likely open to delving into their feelings with you.

Accept these invitations by following your intuition. Explore the meaning of the sentences you are reading in the chat. It may comfort you to know that as long as the Visitor/Customer is engaging with you, they are most likely safe. Continue the journey. Please refer to your list of Crisis open-ended questions listed above.

There are compelling reasons to ask directly about suicide, with use of the word "suicide." For example, "Have you been thinking of suicide?") It lets the person know that you are ready and prepared to talk about suicide and it clearly indicates that suicide needs to be addressed. If they are not thinking about suicide, it shows you care.

MAKING A HEART CONNECTION

Before moving forward...

Support the transition from no hope to the possibility of hope by ensuring the Visitor/Customer feels their story about suicide is heard before you move forward in rushing to resolve their issue or transferring them to other resources which may even include the Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Make sure you have a grasp on where they are emotionally and get a sense of understanding their choices. As always, no judgment.

Then you can help them get in touch with the part of them that wants to live!

The Power of Open-Ended Questions

This is where you can look for strengths in the Visitor/Customer and support them in connecting with their own hopes, dreams, and desires.

When they make this heart connection with themselves, it moves them to a crucial moment where they become less certain of suicide and willing to try to think of other options.

This vital moment can generate Hope; and with Hope, a plan for safety can begin. You can encourage the Visitor/Customer to make an appointment with a doctor soon, perhaps reconnect with a mental health worker, or build on anything positive; but be realistic. What is doable right now? What can be done in the next day? The next week? The next month?

When It is Time to Bring in Crisis Staff

If the Visitor/Customer is clearly a danger to themselves or others and you are unable to get them to see the hope, provide reassurance and connect the Visitor/Customer to crisis staff and or resources.

Crisis Resources

If you are in chat with a Visitor/Customer that needs more support due to an emergent crisis, refer to the following resources and or guidance from your agency as it pertains to other resources. As a reminder the FEMA response is one that is non-clinical – as is appropriate, continue to use non-clinical, active, reflective and empathetic listening while helping the Visitor/Customer connect to crisis resources.

- Urgent Care
- 911 for urgent health emergencies
- Crisis hotlines: The App includes shortcuts for each county's crisis hotline. Type in #countyname, and the number for that county's crisis hotline will pop up.
- #Suicide Prevention Lifeline
- #Crisis Text Line
- #LGBTQ Youth Trevor Project Text Line

If there is an immediate risk of danger to self or others, contact 911, provide info to the authorities including location via the geolocation area of the Visitor/Customer.

Or provide the Suicide Prevention Lifeline number and ask if they need anything further, let them know you or someone is always available to chat.

Don't Forget to Complete the CCP Data Forms

After the visit is completed, don't forget to complete the CCP data forms in the Online Data Collection and Evaluation System (ODCES). If the chat lasted longer than 15 minutes, you need to fill out the Individual/Family Crisis Counseling Encounter Log. If it lasted less than 15 minutes, you will include it on your Weekly Tally Sheet.

Debriefing and Self-Care

The debrief is important for Integration. It will help you make connections between knowledge and experiences for deeper insights and new understanding.

Debriefing

You may find it helpful to talk to your Program Coordinator if you have any unresolved feelings after a particularly difficult chat. You might experience some adverse reactions like sleeplessness, short temper, over reactions, or how ever anxiety presents in your body. These symptoms may last hours to days or may not present at all. You can debrief and integrate the experience through a supportive conversation. Please inform the team as well to any uncomfortable, negative interactions that you had while in the chat so the team is aware and can support each other.

We are all experiencing elevated levels of stress right now. It is possible that the Visitor/Customer's challenges may trigger you. Take time to decompress. Limit your time with social media. View the SAMHSA training video on stress management techniques or visit CalMHSA's Learning Management System for more self-care resources.

This way you will be able to provide quality listening by being fully present with the Visitor/Customer.

Because we promote self-care for the people we serve, we need to have our own self care practices onboard. Setting healthy boundaries help people make decisions based on what is best for them, not the people around them.

This autonomy is an important part of self-care.

CONCLUSION

A worst fear is injuring a Visitor/Customer. We hope this manual addresses any concerns and supports you in providing hope and encouragement to every Visitor/Customer, no matter the level of distress.

As always, you can look to your leadership if you have any questions or doubts. Remember, we are here to support your growth and empower you. You got this!

List of Canned Responses and Shortcuts

Canned responses are predefined messages that can store a large portion of text to be later recalled with shortcuts. To use canned responses in chats or tickets, simply type in # followed by the shortcut text for the response you wish to use. Even when using a shortcut or canned response, you can always follow up with another text to personalize the message as needed.

#End: Thank you for visiting CalHOPE Connect. At the end of the chat, you will see a link to a 2-question survey. Completing the survey will help provide feedback about the chat services.

#county: links to county crisis lines

#Queue – Welcome to CalHOPE Connect, A peer supporter will be with you shortly

#waiting for a response – While you are waiting for my response, try this brief meditation breathing technique – breathe in for 4 counts, breathe out for 4 counts, breathe in, breathe out…..

#Privacy – your privacy is very important to us. We do not share your information (INSERT WITH INFO IS OR IS NOT SHARED AND WHEN IT MIGHT BE SHARED AND WHAT)

#Referral to resources - Give me a moment to locate those resources for you…. (HERE A PEER SUPPORTER COULD ENTER A WAITING FOR RESPONSE SHORT CUT AS WELL)

#Waiting visualization – While you are waiting for my response, try this brief visualization technique – picture your favorite place to be – feel the air around you, the ground beneath you, the smell in the air, relax and enjoy your favorite spot…..

#Need to disengage from a Visitor/Customer – Thank you again for reaching out to connect with CalHOPE connect. The purpose of this service is to provide our Visitor/Customers with support and resources related to the emotional stressors because of the current pandemic. I will need to leave the conversation now to respond to other Visitor/Customers in the queue. Reach back to us again if we can be of assistance.

- #Suicide Prevention lifeline
- #Crisis Text Line
- #LGBTQ Youth Trevor Project Text line