

Disengagement Techniques

Tools for Compassionate Professionalism

A potential challenge in performing crisis intervention over the phone is wrapping up and ending the call in a kind and professional manner. There can be a lot of anxiety generated for both parties. For the caller a connection has been made and if she has few resources, she may feel we are the only ones who can help her. If we're the first people that have ever held space for her story, believed her, and tried to support her, it may feel scary to be "cut off" even though she has the option to phone back should she need us again. There can be added layers to a caller's situation (mental health issues, etc.) that make it difficult for her to let go.

For staff, it can be hard to let go since the confidential nature of the Hotline prevents follow up and resolution. Not knowing what happens to callers and if our work with them on the line was effective can feel uncomfortable. As well, with any helping profession, feelings of obligation or guilt around not being able to be infinitely supportive or to listen for an indefinite amount of time or having all the answers, solutions, and resources that a caller needs can make it hard to let go.

Disengagement is neither rude nor unkind. It allows staff to be good stewards of their time and emotional resources. It also provides clear boundaries and creates space and invites callers to process their experience after the call and hopefully take next steps. For most, disengaging does not come naturally; it requires practice and a real understanding.

Steps for Disengagement

- ***Summarize Key Points with Caller***
 - "We've talked about how to make your safety a priority and some of the options and resources that are available to you."
- ***Acknowledge Steps Made***
 - "I know it took a lot of courage to call us today and talk about everything that's been happening to you."
- ***Offer encouragement for Plan of Action***
 - "I encourage you to try those numbers I gave to you."
 - "I hope you'll try some of the self-care steps we talked about."



NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE-ADVOCATE GUIDE

- ***Clearly/Directly State That You Will Be Getting Off the Phone***
 - “I’m going to wrap up with you now and move onto the next call.”
 - “We have other calls coming in that I need to answer.”

 - If your caller expresses anxiety, frustration, anger etc. that you have to get off the phone, **ALWAYS** address/validate the emotion expressed and proceed with letting go: “I hear you’re frustrated/upset etc. that our conversation has to end, but I’m going to have to release the line/move onto the next call, etc.”

- ***Remind Her We’re Always Available***
 - “Please know that you can call us back when you’re ready for next steps.”
 - “We’re here 24/7 should you need us again.”

For Consideration

- Disengaging from every call may not require each and every step listed above, nor will it always happen sequentially.

- For callers with whom you’ve pre-established a time limit at the beginning of the call, you may need to add an extra step of reminding them when you’ve reached the end of the established time.

- You are NOT being unkind by holding the line and sticking to the established time limit.

- Even if you are using your most kind and genuine tone, a caller may still get angry or frustrated that the call is wrapping up; remember not to take on the caller’s response.

- Please remember to access your resources, other advocates or a coordinator, to debrief and seek support if need be.