

10 TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE HOTLINE ADVOCACY

A Reference Sheet for Rape Crisis Programs

When answering a crisis hotline, your primary goals should be to assess the survivor's immediate health and safety needs, establish a rapport with the survivor, and determine the survivor's primary reason for calling. Please remember that what the survivor sees as a priority may not align with your expectations for the call. It is vital that you follow the survivor's lead when establishing priorities. It is also very important that you validate the survivor's feelings in addition to assisting the survivor with problem-solving, identifying options and action planning.

There is no way for us to provide a script for how each call should go. Every call will be very different and each survivor/co-survivor will have different needs. As long as you keep the survivor and their needs as your top priority, you should be fine. However, to help you feel more comfortable getting started, we have provided a list of 10 helpful tips for effective hotline advocacy.

Hotline Advocacy Tips

1. **Be Prepared:** Make sure you have a quiet space that is distraction free. Ensure that your phone is working and fully charged, that you know the appropriate agency protocols, and you have access to your agency resource list.
2. **Be flexible and follow the survivor's pace:** Give the survivor the time they need to speak when they are comfortable and to collect their thoughts. At the same time, respect your agency protocol for call duration. Typically calls that last longer than 30 minutes may need to be referred out for more in-depth case management and/or mental health services.
3. **Allow for silence:** This is a difficult call for many survivors to make. It may take them a bit to speak. That is okay. Advocates should be comfortable with silence.
4. **Use focusing questions:** Questions such as "What would be helpful to you right now?" or "What prompted you to call right now?" allow the survivor to focus on one thing at a time.
5. **Allow the survivor to vent and avoid interrupting:** Often you are one of the only safe people the survivor has access to. Allow them to vent to you and to utilize language that is comfortable for them to describe their feelings.
6. **Be mindful of verbal communication:** Your tone of voice can change the way a survivor interprets your words. If you make noises such as gasps or sighs it can hint to a survivor that you are uncomfortable with the things they are sharing with you or are bored with the conversation.
7. **Know your role and stick to it:** We are limited as to what we can do for survivors on the hotline. Make sure you explain your boundaries to survivors and highlight the benefits of ongoing case management/support.

8. **Use only vetted resources:** Internet is easily accessible and we can usually find resources for survivors with the click of a button. However, we should avoid referring to services/agencies that we know little about. Un-vetted agencies may be providing services that are actually harmful to some survivors, especially those who are part of an underserved population.
9. **Use the survivor's language:** This can be in relation to how they describe themselves, the assault or even the perpetrator. A shared language can make you more relatable to the caller.
10. **Respect confidentiality:** Confidentiality is just as vital on the hotline as it is for in-person advocacy. When appropriate, make sure you disclose to the caller the limitations of your confidentiality. These limitations may vary by agency/position but may include callers who are suicidal, homicidal, or calls related to child and/or elder abuse.

This publication was supported in part by Rape Crisis Funding awarded by the Ohio Governor's office, administered by the Ohio Attorney General's office, and also in part by *Grant No. 2020-VOCA-132920668*. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Governor or the Ohio Attorney General's office.