



# Counselor Fact Sheet

## Handling a Difficult Call

Situation	Suggested Response for Counselor
The caller asks the counsellor for personal information.	Do not give out any personal information about yourself.
Caller has just tested HIV-positive, he/she may want to know whether or not the counsellor is also HIV-positive.	I understand why you might be curious about my HIV status, but that knowledge really won't help your own situation. Let's talk about how you are feeling right now...
A caller is uncomfortable with the counsellor because of gender, age, ethnicity or other unchangeable characteristics.	Acknowledge the caller's discomfort and say that even though they are of a different gender/ethnic group, you are still able to listen to what the caller has to say and try and help him/her in an objective way. If the caller is still uncomfortable, offer to transfer him/her to another counsellor (if there is another one available).
A counsellor is not able to establish trust with the caller, and it is unclear why.	Acknowledge the caller's discomfort and try to discover the reason behind it. If possible, use the caller's response to improve the rapport/trust. If this is not possible, offer to transfer the caller to someone else or invite the caller to call back at another time.
A counsellor and caller know each other.	It is not appropriate for you to counsel someone that you know from your personal life. Sometimes you may recognize a caller but the caller may not recognize you; or a caller may think they recognize you and ask for your full name in order to verify this fact. In either case, do not reveal your full name. Explain to the caller that it would be best for him/her to speak with another counsellor who would be better equipped to handle his/her situation and proceed to transfer the call. If no other counsellor is available, take the call but be sure to respect the caller's confidentiality.
A caller talks continuously or inappropriately.	If the caller talks non-stop without giving you a chance to speak, or the caller does not seem to be making sense, try to redirect the conversation. For example, interrupting the caller in a polite way, such as stopping him/her to summarize what he/she said and make sure you understand the situation (e.g., "Let me just stop you for a minute to make sure that I have understood what you have told me...").





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<p>A caller becomes offensive or aggressive.</p>	<p>Callers may use offensive language or speak to you in a threatening way, especially if they feel frustrated with the conversation or are upset by information that you have given them. Some callers may also place “hoax” calls just to be malicious. If this happens, one strategy is to acknowledge the feelings behind the caller’s language and state that such behaviour will prevent you from helping him/her. (e.g. “It seems like you are very angry about your problem. Many people have this reaction. However, I will not be able to help you until you calm down”). If this does not work, or if the caller is extremely verbally abusive, terminate the call in a polite way. (e.g. “I can tell that you are angry, but I am afraid that I will have to end this call if you are not able to calm down. Goodbye”).</p>
<p>A client calls back repeatedly for one particular counselor.</p>	<p>Callers may repeatedly call a particular counselor if they like him/her and feel comfortable with him/her. While this is a sign that the counselor is doing a good job, it can also encourage the caller to become overly dependent on the Talkline. It is important to remember that the Talkline cannot provide psychological counselling for serious problems, and that the main function is to provide information and counselling. If you receive repeat calls from a client, clearly state the Talkline’s limitations and refer the caller to services that can best meet their needs.</p>
<p>A caller expects a service that the Talkline cannot provide.</p>	<p>Callers may misunderstand the role of the Health Talkline and may call to demand services that cannot be provided. For example, a caller may call to report that his/her neighbour has AIDS, and demand that the Talkline inform the proper authorities. Or a caller may expect to be able to have a face-to-face meeting with you. Whatever the case, always clearly state the services that the Talkline is able to provide, then refer the caller to other services that can best meet his/her needs.</p>