Crisis Center Follow-Up Calls Reduce Risk of Suicide

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Follow-up telephone calls may be a safe and inexpensive method of helping crisis hotline callers who report suicidal ideation, according to the authors of a study of callers to six crisis hotlines affiliated with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Crisis hotline clients who received follow-up calls and agreed to participate in an evaluation reported that the follow-up calls “stopped them from killing themselves” (79.6 percent) and “kept them safe” (90.6 percent). The more follow-up calls an individual received, the more likely they were to report that the calls helped in one or both of these ways. None of the clients participating in the study reported that the follow-up calls “made things worse.”

Clients who were assessed to be most at risk during the initial crisis calls perceived the most benefit from follow-up calls. This included callers who had attempted suicide at some point in their lives. People with demographic characteristics associated with suicide risk, such as low levels of education and periods spent homeless, reported greater benefit from the follow-up calls than clients without those risk factors, even after adjusting for initial level of suicide risk.

Clients whose counselors engaged in activities from the Safety Planning Intervention (SPI) and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) were more likely to report that the follow-up intervention was successful. Such activities included discussing settings to use as distractors, social contacts to call for help, safe or no drug and alcohol use, and reasons for dying.


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