

NATURE OF SERVICE

Round the clock availability

Callers can contact Samaritans by telephone, email, SMS and Minicom. The commitment to making these means of access available any time of day or night will be maintained by all branches (except Festival and Correspondence branches). They will cover the rota according to the number of active listening volunteers they have as members.

Callers can visit a branch for face-to-face support (except Correspondence branch). Each branch will advertise when they are available for face-to-face support.

All branches will negotiate and co-ordinate their availability with their Regional Director.

Samaritans' aim is to ensure that telephone and Minicom callers are not kept waiting for a response and that as many as possible get through first time.

The objective for distributing calls via one number is to cascade calls geographically, by locality and region, to try and make sure that no caller receives the engaged tone when a volunteer is available to take a call.

All branches (except Correspondence and Festival branches) will have regionally agreed diversion plans.

Confidentiality

All information relating to a caller is confidential to Samaritans unless:

- We have informed consent from a caller to pass on information.
- We call an ambulance because a caller appears to be incapable of making rational decisions for him or herself.

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- We receive a court order requiring us to divulge information.
- We are passed information about acts of terrorism or bomb warnings.
- A caller attacks or threatens volunteers.
- A caller deliberately prevents the service from being delivered to other callers.

Samaritans maintain confidentiality even after the death of a caller.

Honesty

Samaritans publicly state how information relating to a caller is used.

Callers are informed of what volunteers can and cannot offer.

Samaritans do not make recordings of calls but a colleague may listen in for training purposes and/or to offer support to the volunteer engaged with a caller.

All complaints will be investigated fully and sympathetically and callers will receive a response in the shortest possible time.

Emotionally supportive

Callers in need of Samaritans' service are accepted without prejudice and encouraged to talk or write about their feelings, acknowledge their emotions and explore options.

Volunteers use their listening skills, recognise the needs of the callers and respond appropriately.

Volunteers will not impose their own convictions, or influence callers in regard to politics, philosophy or religion.

If a caller is at risk of suicide, or in despair, follow up contact is offered.

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With a caller's permission, and after consultation with the person responsible for caller support, a group of volunteers may be assigned to a caller, to offer support through a period of distress.

If a caller is in need of other help, information may be passed on about other agencies (if held). With a caller's informed consent, and after consultation with the person responsible for caller support, referral will be made on their behalf.

Samaritans will also welcome appropriate referrals from other agencies or individuals.

Carefully structured

Samaritans aims to offer a consistent service to callers. The care being offered is regularly reviewed and evaluated, to make sure it encourages callers to work towards managing their lives without dependency or attachment.

Samaritans volunteers are subject to a police record check (except in Ireland) and are then selected and specially trained.

To guarantee the safety and welfare of callers and volunteers, Samaritans' service is only available while volunteers are fully supported by a colleague and a leader.

If a volunteer risks the emotional or physical safety of callers, or the reputation of the organisation, this will be deemed as an act of serious misconduct for which they will be dismissed.

Samaritans strives to make the service as accessible as possible to those most in need and supports the Disability Discrimination and Equal Opportunities Acts.

Samaritans volunteers reserve the right to end a call or withdraw the service if it is being used inappropriately.



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Self-determination

Callers remain responsible for their lives and do not lose the right to make decisions even if that decision is to take their own life.