

SELF-DETERMINATION: NATURE OF SERVICE POLICY SECTION 6A



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

Procedures

All volunteers are prepared and trained to implement the self-determination policy when a caller says they are in the process of taking their life. Volunteers explore the caller's feelings and build a relationship of trust so that the caller can explore all options.

Volunteers explain Samaritans' stance on self-determination and make sure that the caller understands that calls will not be traced. No preventative action can be taken, other than offering emotional support, unless they give informed consent or have revealed their location. The procedures for telephone, email, SMS and face-to-face callers in the process of taking their own life are explained in the Operations Manual and are summarised below.

Telephone

When Samaritans does not know the caller's telephone number or location, the volunteer explains that:

- We will continue to offer support.
- We do not know the caller's phone number and cannot trace their call.
- If the caller does not tell us their phone number or location, Samaritans will not summon medical help.

SELF-DETERMINATION: NATURE OF SERVICE POLICY SECTION 6A continued

When Samaritans knows the caller's location, the volunteer explains that:

- We will continue to offer support.
- As we know their location, if they appear to become unconscious or unable to make decisions for themselves we may contact the emergency services.
- If they end the contact before that point we will take no further action.

When Samaritans know the caller's phone number but not their location, the volunteer explains that:

- We will continue to offer support.
- If the caller appears to become unconscious or unable to make decisions for themselves we may contact the emergency services but they may be unable to take action. The ambulance service would need the police to successfully trace the number before being able to attend. If the caller does not want police involvement, but does want medical assistance, they must give their location.

In all cases when in doubt Samaritans always errs on the side of life.

If the caller says they want to stay on the phone until they die and refuses help, the volunteer will ask their colleague to contact the Leader so that all volunteers involved have support.

When the caller wants medical help, the volunteer explains that the most effective way for them to get medical help is for the caller to ring the emergency services themselves.

SELF-DETERMINATION: NATURE OF SERVICE POLICY SECTION 6A continued

The volunteer will then explain that Samaritans service is always available, consider whether an offer of a follow-up call is appropriate, and then explain that we are ending the call so that they can contact the emergency services. The volunteer can offer to stay on the line to continue to support the caller, if the caller can use another phone line to call an ambulance.

If the caller appears to be unable to make decisions for themselves during contact, consideration can be given to contacting the emergency services. The volunteer, or a colleague, should discuss this with the Leader, who will make a decision. The decision will take into account the volunteer's recommendation and the Leader's objective view of the situation including any background information that may be known about the caller.

Email

If an email caller is in process of taking their own life, it must be remembered that:

- There will have been a time delay before their email has been read.
- They could be anywhere in the world.

The reply should explain that we will not summon help and that they should get help themselves from a local medical service, if that is what they want.

SMS

If an SMS caller asks us to summon help, and has provided their exact location and phone number, the volunteer speaks to the Leader and the emergency services are contacted immediately. The volunteer explains to the emergency services that we have received a text from the caller asking us to pass on their request for help.

SELF-DETERMINATION: NATURE OF SERVICE POLICY SECTION 6A continued

If an SMS caller is in the process of taking their life, the volunteer asks if the caller will agree for Samaritans to phone them. Once telephone contact is made, the volunteer follows the procedures for telephone callers.

If the caller refuses to be contacted by telephone, the volunteer explains that we can continue to support by text, but should the caller want us to summon help we will not be able to do so unless the caller sends us their exact location and phone number. The volunteer explains that we do not see their number and cannot identify where they are. (A caller may assume that we can see their mobile number or, if it has been given, that we may be able to trace their location, which we cannot).

Face-to-face

If a caller discloses during a face-to-face contact that they have already taken action that may be life-threatening (such as an overdose), the volunteer asks the caller if they want medical assistance, and if they agree, contacts the Leader and the emergency services. If the caller refuses, the volunteer explains that if they appear to be in need of urgent medical assistance or become unable to make a decision for themselves while they are still with the volunteer, Samaritans will have to make the decision for them and the emergency services will be called. The volunteer makes sure the caller understands that if they choose to end the contact, Samaritans will take no further action.

The volunteer also explains that if the caller takes any further potentially life-threatening action whilst on the premises, the emergency services will be contacted.

If the caller remains in contact with Samaritans and appears to be in need of urgent medical assistance or becomes unable to make decisions for themselves, the volunteer will continue to offer support, while their colleague consults the Leader before contacting the emergency services.