

[Patrons in Crisis](#) [1]

On rare occasions, AskAway librarians may find themselves dealing with a patron in crisis. Crisis calls may contain threats of suicide or indications of abuse.

Examples

- I am going to kill myself
- My boyfriend punches me
- My father was touching me

Some of these calls may be pranks, but we should always assume that the call is real and take the situation seriously.

It can be hard to know how what to say to someone who appears to be in crisis, particularly in the online environment, where you are unable to see or hear the patron. While AskAway service providers are not trained counselors, we can refer patrons to the BC Crisis line to seek professional help.

How to respond to a patron in crisis

The following guidelines are intended to help prepare service providers for the possibility of a crisis call and provide appropriate steps to take in the event of a crisis call.

- Always treat suicide or other crisis calls as serious until proven otherwise.
- Answer calmly, professionally, and non-judgmentally. Strike a balance between professional behavior and supportive behavior. If the patron is in trouble, we want to be friendly, supportive, and approachable, as with all of our patrons. However, remain professional and give resources rather than advice.
- Do a reference interview. Ask open-ended questions like How would you like me to help you? One or two clarifying questions will determine if the call is personal cry for help, or a scholarly question (perhaps from a student researching criminology, social work or psychology).
- Use the **Problem - Crisis Centre** script to send the following message: *If you are in crisis or want to talk confidentially to someone about a personal issue, you should call the BC Crisis Centre 1-800-784-2433 (24 hours) or chat online (7 days a week, noon-1am) at <https://youthinbc.com/>* [2]
- Avoid providing institution-specific information unless it is requested. Providing links to institution-specific information may actually cause more harm than good if there is any question as to the student's real affiliation or location, or the accuracy/currency of the information you are sending. Sending the BC crisis line information via the **Problem - Crisis Centre** script will give the patron immediate access to help no matter where they are.
- **Don't** be afraid to show personal sympathy to the patron. You can use variations of the statements below as a way to open a dialog in which you can make a referral.
 - I'm glad you connected with me today.
 - That must be so hard. How can I help?
 - I'll do my best to get the information you need.
 - Let's work together to figure something out.
 - I want to help you.
 - It makes me sad to hear that.

- I might have resources to help you.
- If you feel that the person is a real danger to themselves or others, you may ask for their contact information so you can alert authorities to their situation. Do whatever you feel you need to do in an emergency situation, don't worry about policies in that case!
- Always report the transaction (with the day, approximate time, and name of service provider) to the [AskAway Administrative Centre](#) [3].

Source URL: <https://askaway.org/staff/patrons-crisis>

Links

[1] <https://askaway.org/staff/patrons-crisis>

[2] <https://youthinbc.com/>

[3] <https://askaway.org/staff/contacts>