Guided Tour
Vibrant Emotional Health's 988 Training:
Mental Health Concerns and People in Crisis

Introduction

This is a guided tour of Vibrant Emotional Health's online course, *Mental Health Concerns and People in Crisis,* is for crisis counselors on the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline who often interact with individuals experience challenges related to their mental health. Background information is provided on the organization, as well as an explanation and highlights of this online course. No login is necessary to access these e-learning modules.

Mental Health Concerns and People in Crisis

- Module 1: *The Impact of Mental Health*
  https://tinyurl.com/n4j7j8ku
- Module 2: *Mental Health in Crisis Conversations*
  https://tinyurl.com/nr54avnt

Organization

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States.

Vibrant Emotional Health is the administrator of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, which is grant funded by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Background

Nationwide, the need for crisis counseling unfortunately continues to rise. Crisis counseling is intended to provide brief support, reduce a person's distress, address their immediate needs, and reinforce their ability to cope. People experiencing a mental health crisis, emotional distress, or thoughts of suicide can anonymously contact 988 by phone, text, or chat.

To help ensure that anyone who contacts the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline receives effective, consistent, research-based support from every crisis counselor, Vibrant launched an online training portal for crisis counselors in November 2022. These e-learning courses provide foundational skills for helping people in crisis and assessing their safety and suicide risk.

The courses are developed by a team with expertise in the field of crisis counseling and instructional design. The content is based on current research and incorporates findings from evaluations specifically conducted on the Lifeline's services. The instructional design is grounded in adult learning theory and tailored to the needs of adult learners. A formal evaluation

of four prerequisite courses was recently conducted that showed gains in knowledge, self-efficacy, and skill development.

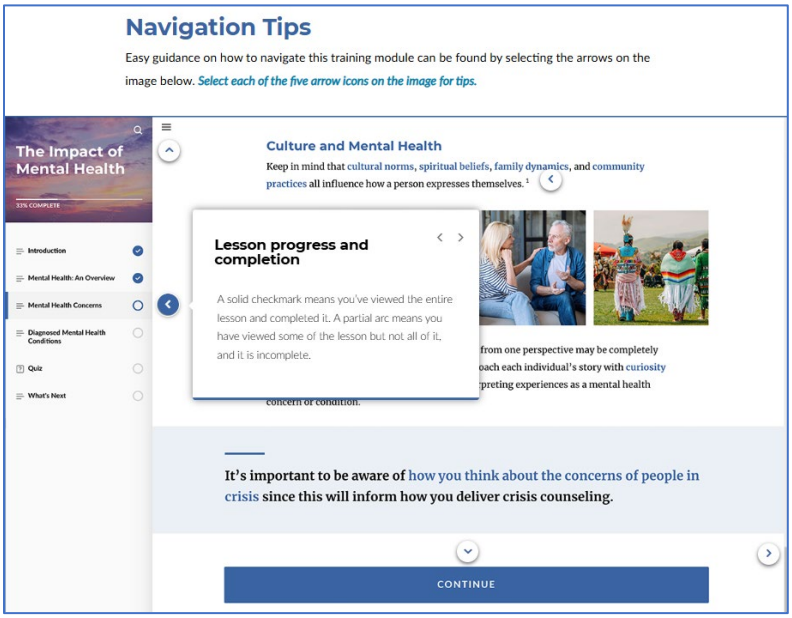
This guided tour is for a course, *Mental Health Concerns and People in Crisis,* that was developed for 988 crisis counselors to build their understanding and skills in providing compassionate and effective crisis counseling to individuals who may be experiencing mental health concerns. Supporting these individuals can be complex, and sometimes even scary, especially when it seems like the person may be facing serious or even life-threatening concerns related to their mental health.

Although it is not the crisis counselor's role to diagnose or treat people for mental health conditions or be an expert in mental health, they do need to have a basic understanding of some of the most commonly diagnosed mental health conditions as well as how mental health can impact a person's life. The course covers this foundational information. Crisis counselors also learn how to offer interventions that can help individuals de-escalate and feel calmer during the crisis conversation. The end of the course focuses on how to help individuals plan for their safety and well-being after the conversation ends.

During the development of this course, it went through an extensive review process by multiple individuals with experience in clinical best practices, chat and text support, instructional design, accessibility, as well as specific subject matter expertise in mental health conditions. In addition to these reviews, everyone who completes the course is asked to fill out a feedback survey, which informs future changes and updates to this course and others. To gauge knowledge gain, each module ends with a five question quiz, and there is also a course pretest and posttest.

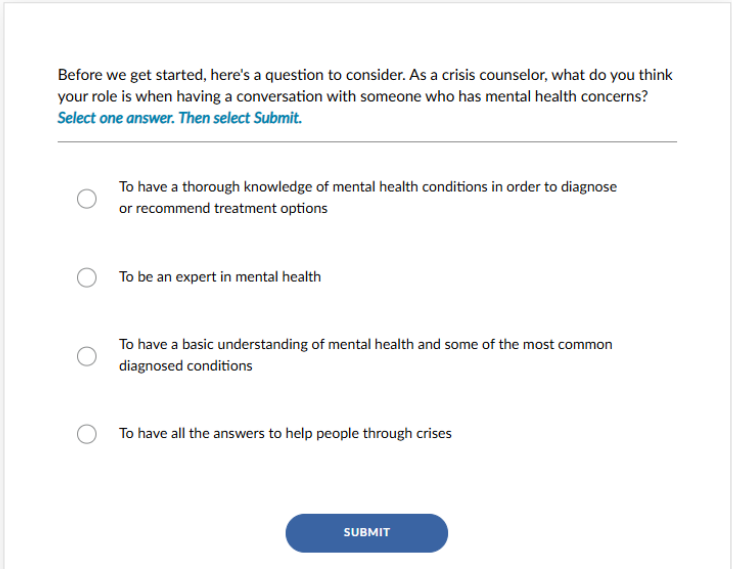
Starting the Course

Each module begins with an introductory lesson that outlines the learning objectives and includes a brief overview of the main topic. Navigation tips can also be found towards the end of each introduction to assist learners with progressing through the course easily.

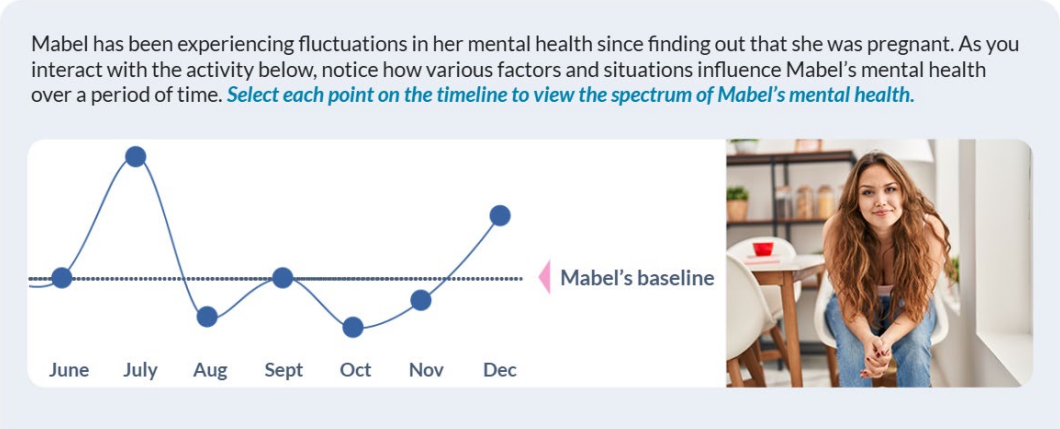


Module 1 – The Impact of Mental Health

The first module provides an overview of mental health with basic information about common mental health concerns and conditions. Since crisis counselors may have experience or expertise in mental health, their role on the 988 Lifeline is explored and clarified: they provide emotional support, instead of a diagnosis and treatment.

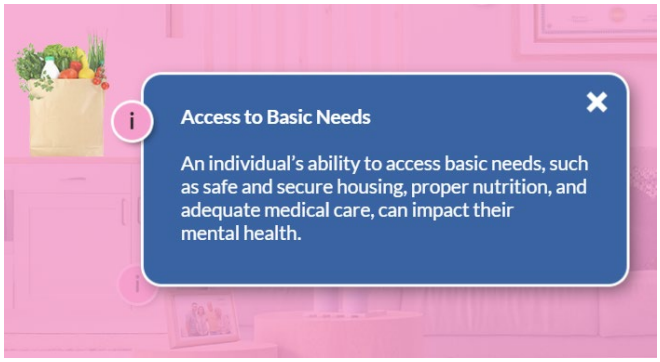


The module begins with introducing the spectrum of mental health, emphasizing that a person's mental health is not static and can fluctuate over time, depending on a person's stage of life as well as a variety of factors or situations. Mabel's case study demonstrates this concept.

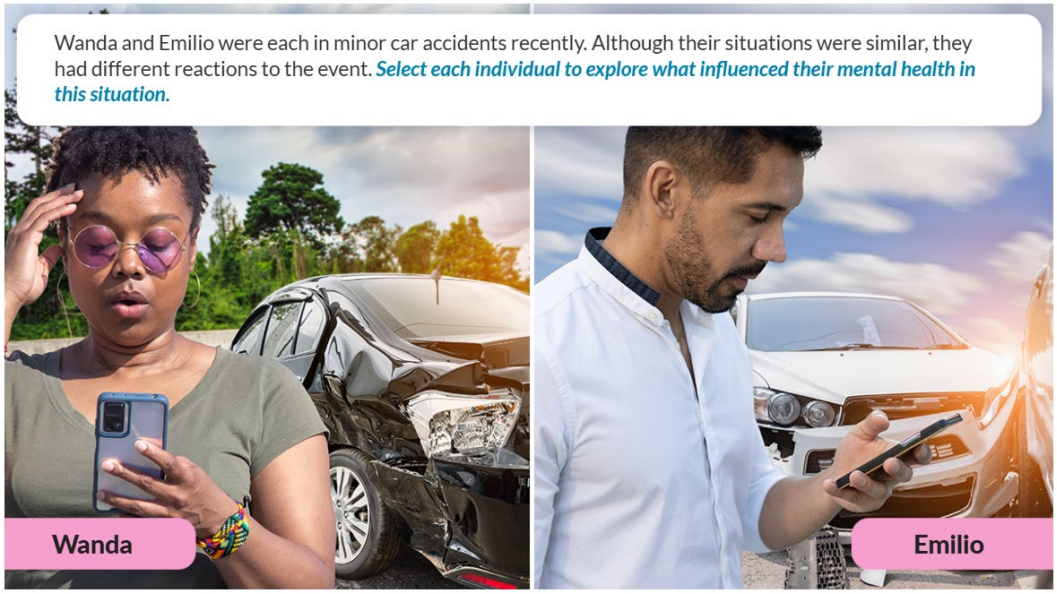


To learn more about the different factors that can influence a person's mental health, Mabel's case study continues. Learners are provided with a visual of her apartment where they can click to reveal information about specific factors, such as access to basic needs like food.

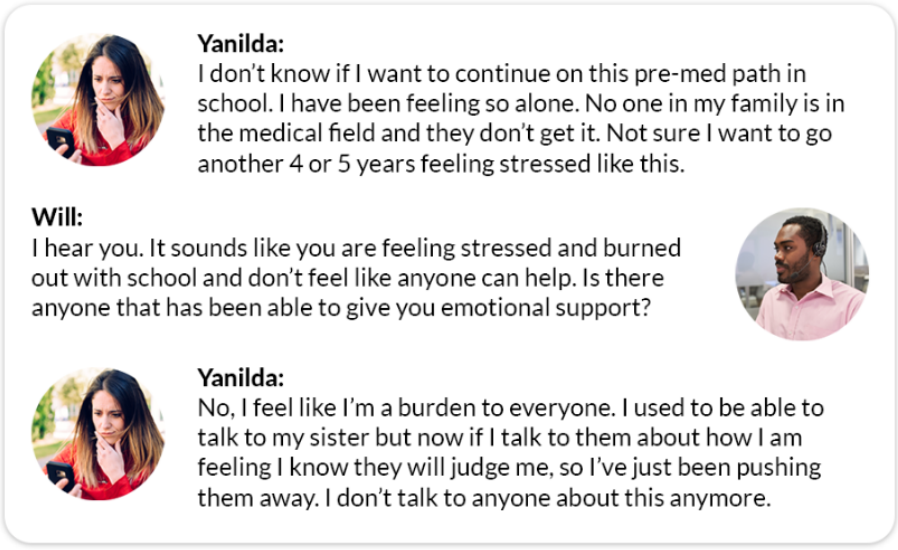




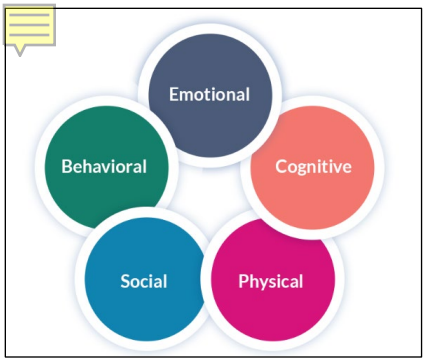
The course includes many realistic scenarios. The first module highlights how similar situations can be experienced differently by individuals and the impact on their mental health.



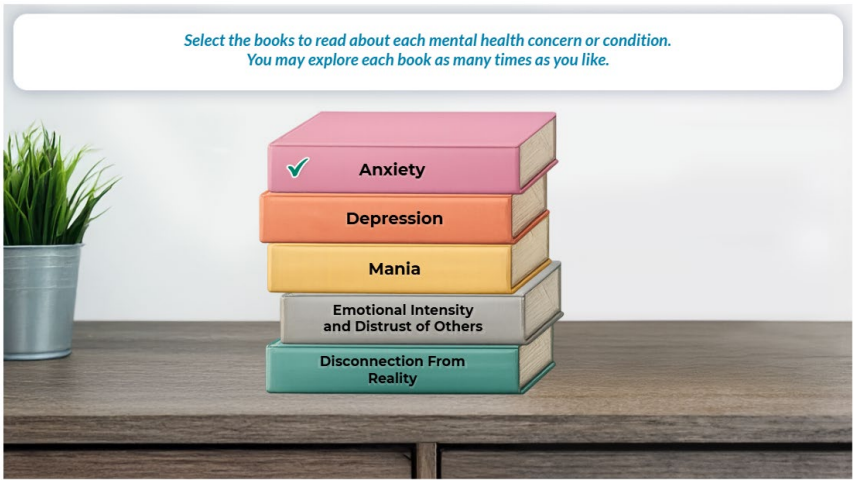
This module also presents different types of scenarios related to mental health that crisis counselors might encounter on the 988 Lifeline with examples of how to respond empathetically.

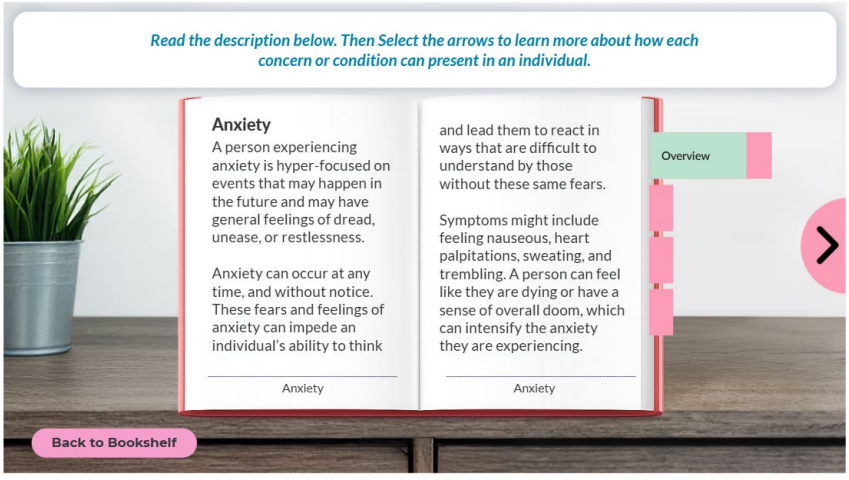


Mental health concerns can affect an individual in various ways: emotionally, cognitively, physically, socially, and behaviorally. Crisis counselors will learn about different types of experiences that people may have in each of these areas.

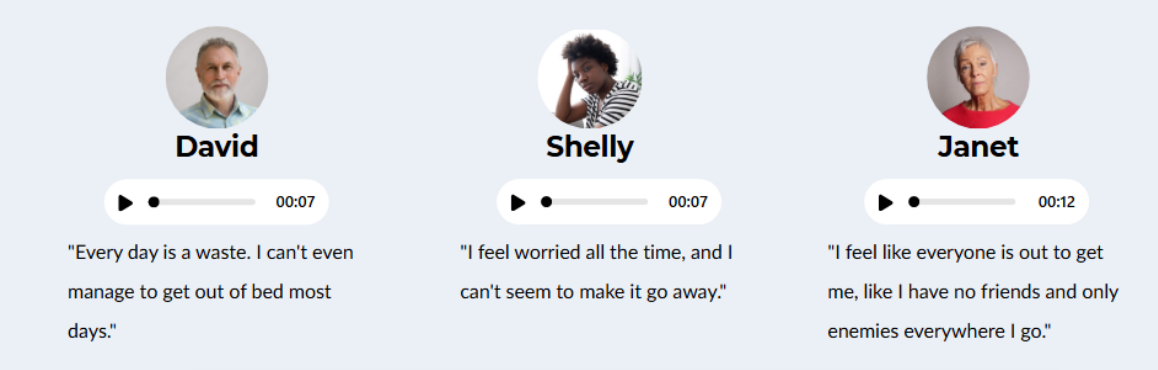


The module incorporates interactive functionality to introduce basic information about common mental health conditions. This information can help crisis counselors tailor their support to meet the needs of individuals who might mention their diagnosis or describe associated symptoms they are experiencing, such as anxiety.

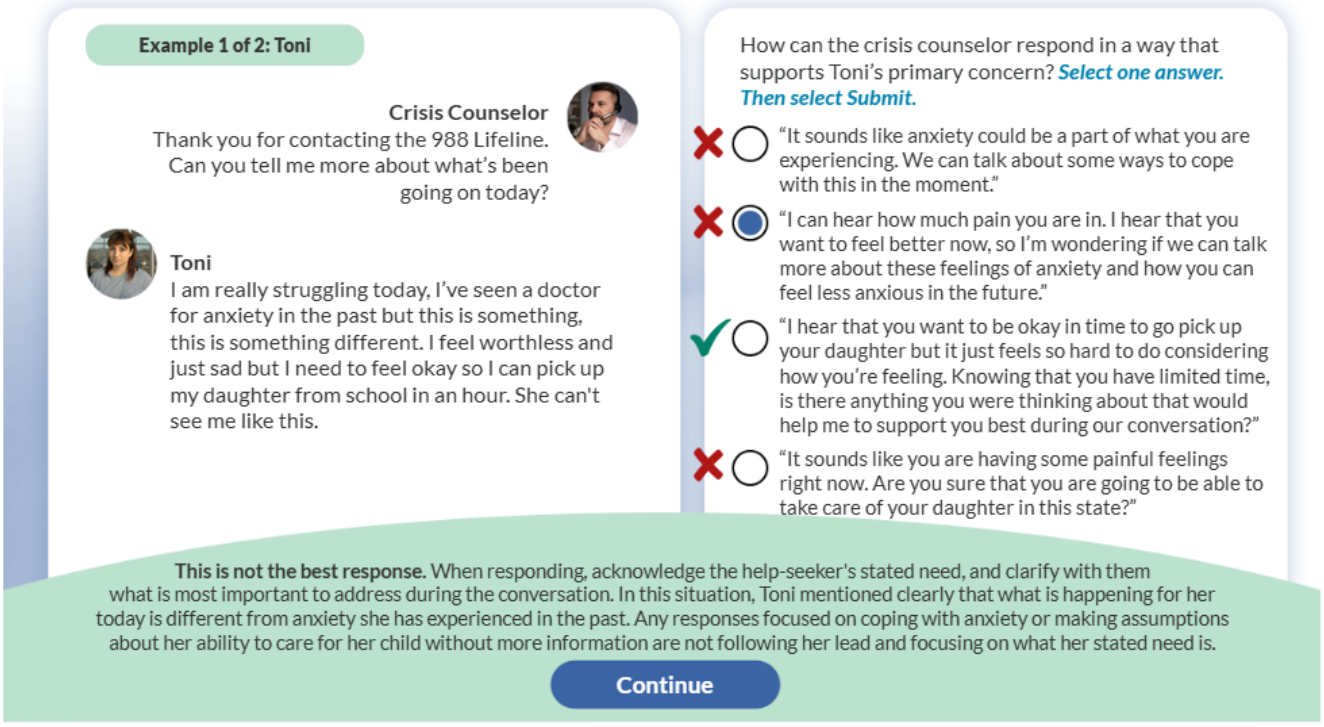




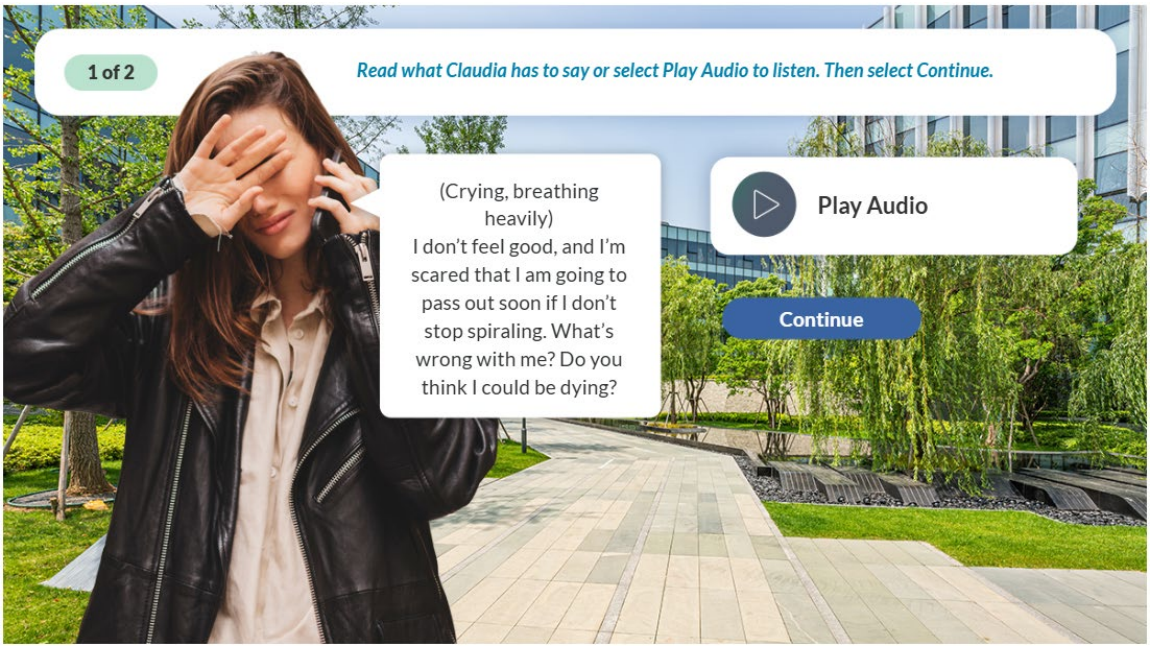
Module 2 further explores how crisis counselors can effectively support help-seekers who mention specific mental health concerns. Both text and audio examples are provided to realistically illustrate what an individual might share during a crisis conversation.



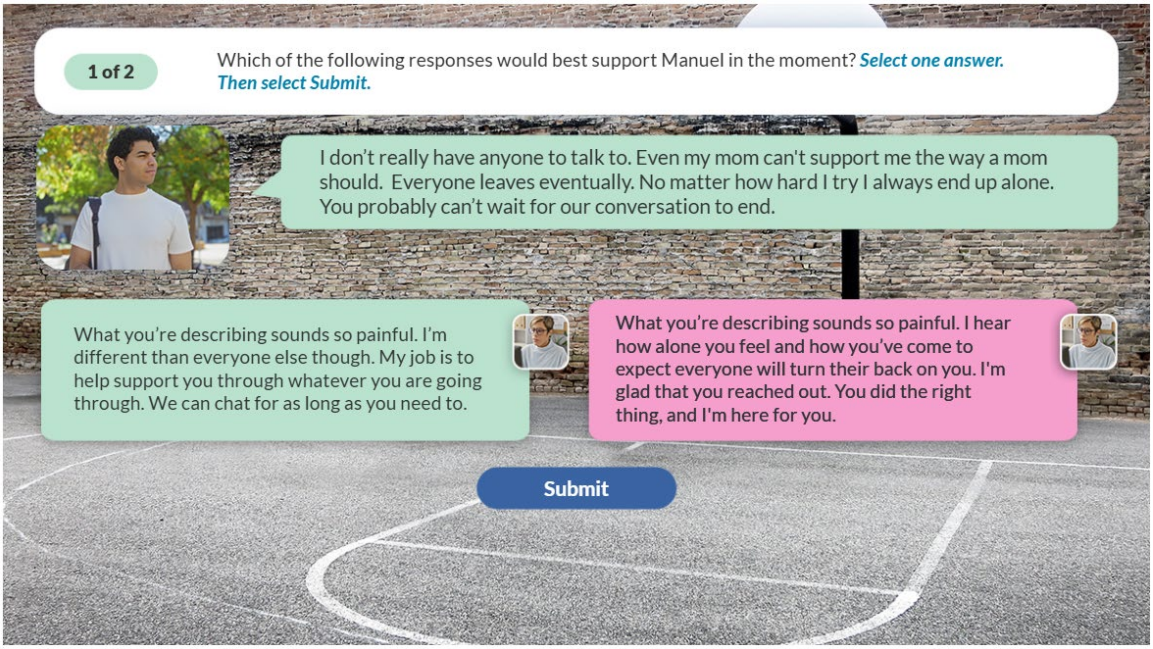
The emphasis is on exploring a help-seeker's experiences and concerns while providing empathetic support. Scenarios and multiple-choice questions prompt learners to figure out the most supportive way to respond to individuals with mental health concerns.



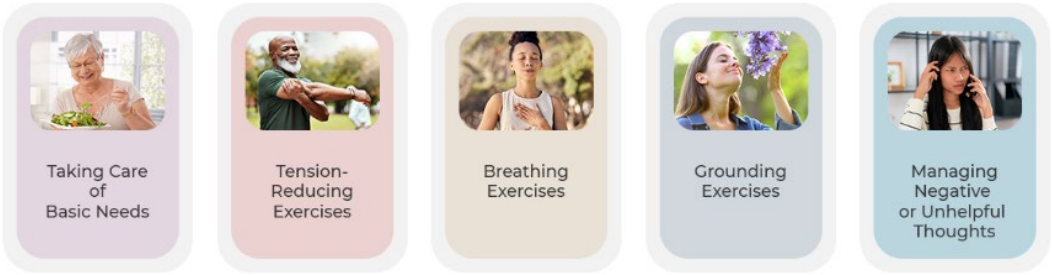
Crisis counselors learn how to navigate conversations in which a person's mental health makes it challenging for the help-seeker to communicate or explore their experience. Case studies are used to illustrate some common mental health concerns which can impact how a help-seeker communicates during a crisis conversation, such as when they are having a panic attack.



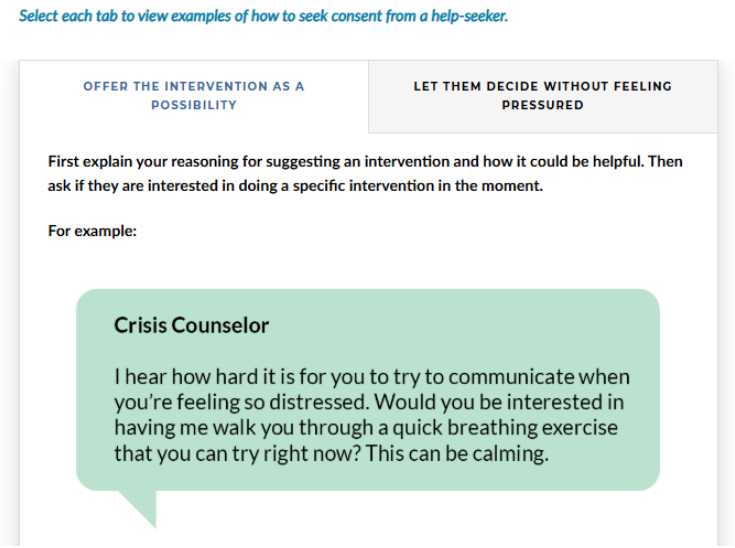
The following case study illustrates how an individual might communicate if their emotions are intense and they think that they can't trust anyone. Interpersonal instability challenges like this can also play out during the crisis conversation.



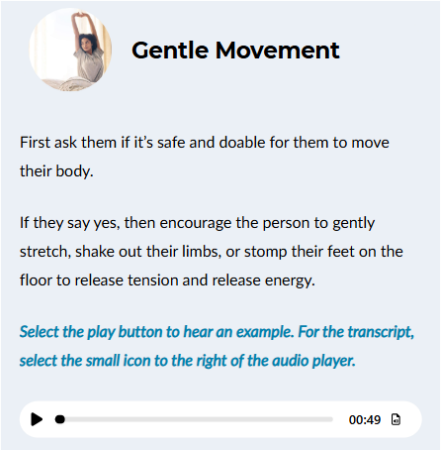
When a person's mental health makes it challenging for them to communicate or engage in the conversation, there are interventions crisis counselors can offer that may help the individual feel calmer, more emotionally regulated, and better able to move forward in the conversation.



Guidance is provided on how to effectively offer these interventions.



Learners can also hear or read examples of what to say.



The module also provides information on different types of mental health support that may be helpful to explore when developing a safety plan with people experiencing mental health concerns.



Primary Care Physician

When a person is having experiences related to their mental health that are new, it's important that they consider there may be a physical cause.

The person's primary care physician can be an effective, lower-cost option for evaluating mental health concerns and referring to other professionals when necessary. Additionally, they may feel comfortable talking with a professional they already know and trust.

At the end of the training are key takeaways.

Take a look at these final tips to help you apply what you learned in this training. *Select each tab to learn more.*

Focus on how a person feels and their individual experiences. +

Explore with the person what would be most helpful to them. +

Let the person lead the way toward their safety. –

Mental health challenges can come with a variety of safety concerns. As a crisis counselor, you do not need to know all the answers. You can collaborate with the individual, working with them to figure out the ways that they can stay safe.