# Guided Tour
# Vibrant Emotional Health's 988 Trainings:
# Using a Conversational Approach When Assessing the Suicide Risk of Teenagers in Crisis

## Introduction

This is a guided tour of Vibrant Emotional Health's eLearning trainings for crisis counselors on the national 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. This tour explores two trainings that provide guidance for crisis counselors. The first self-paced online training, *A Conversational Approach to Assessing Safety*, teaches crisis counselors how to become more comfortable assessing suicide risk while using an empathetic, conversational style, instead of a checklist. The second training, *Supporting Teenagers in Crisis*, adapts these foundational crisis counseling skills to the unique needs and experiences of teenagers. No login is necessary to access these eLearning modules.

**A Conversational Approach to Assessing Safety**
https://tinyurl.com/y5e7bc95

**Supporting Teenagers in Crisis**

- Module 1 – Crisis Counseling With Teenagers
  https://tinyurl.com/9sx7awz4

- Module 2 – Safety Considerations With Teenagers
  https://tinyurl.com/zzbwwvnh

This guided tour includes background on the organization and highlights of these trainings.

## Organization

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a national network of 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 and territories.

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 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. The trainings are developed by a team with extensive experience 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.

This guided tour highlights the rich media content in two related trainings. *A Conversational Approach to Assessing Safety* explores specific skills a crisis counselor can use while assessing a person's safety and suicide risk that are more effective and empathetic than using a checklist approach. These skills can be applied to specific population groups who contact the 988 Lifeline.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among people ages 10-24. The online training, *Supporting Teenagers in Crisis,* provides guidance for adapting foundational crisis counseling skills in assessing suicide risk to the unique needs of teenage youth so they feel heard and supported during a vulnerable time.

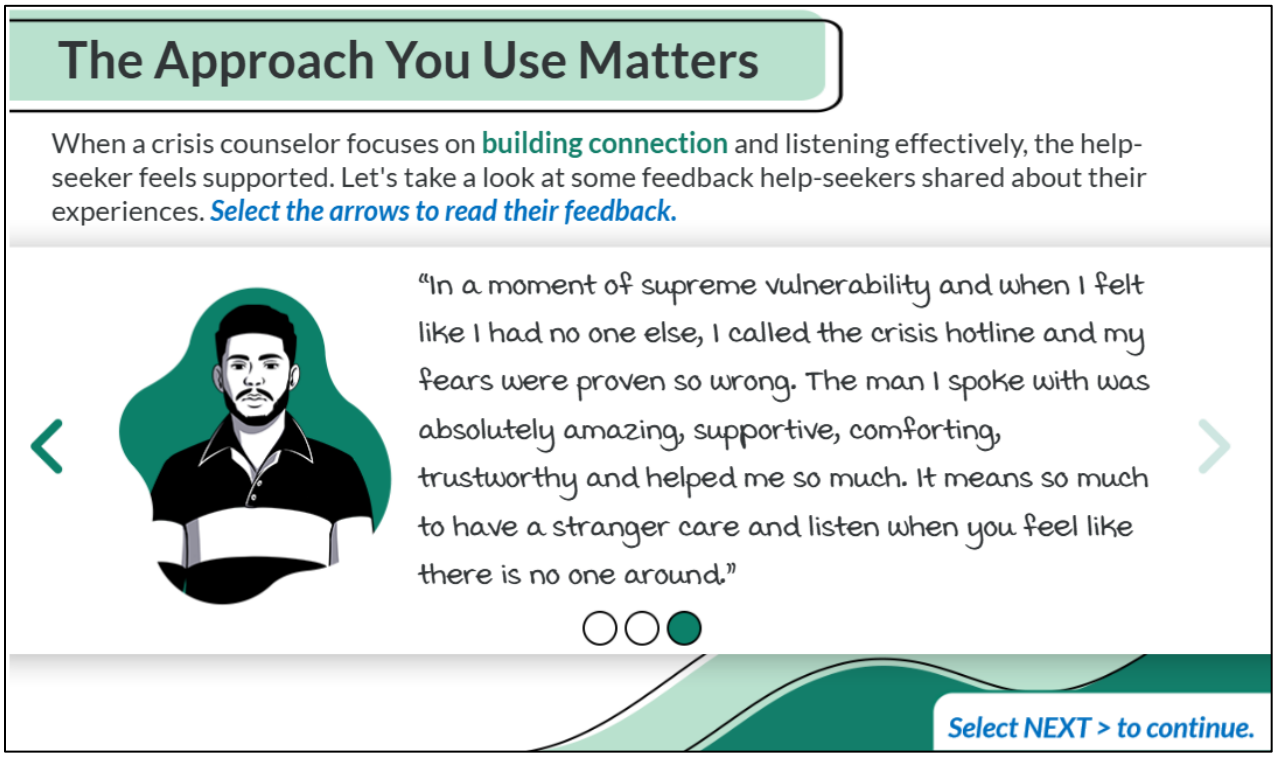
Both trainings incorporate a variety of engaging animation, video, audio, and elements of graphic and instructional design that teach and reinforce concepts. Ultimately, these forms of media help crisis counselors remember and apply their skills during real-life calls, texts, and chats with individuals who contact the 988 Lifeline.

## A Conversational Approach to Assessing Safety

A conversational approach emphasizes a two-way conversation—a natural, fluid dialogue between crisis counselor and help-seeker. Using this approach is the most effective and empathetic way for crisis counselors to gather information about a person's safety. When a crisis counselor uses a conversational approach, rather than a checklist, as they assess suicide risk, help-seekers are more likely to feel supported.

### Authentic Help-Seeker Feedback

This training incorporates real feedback from help-seekers who have contacted the 988 Lifeline. The goal is to show crisis counselors how using a conversational approach with help-seekers is more likely to lead to better connections with individuals and positive outcomes.




### Pacing

The pace of information is intentionally controlled in the training so that learners are not overwhelmed with too much information at once.



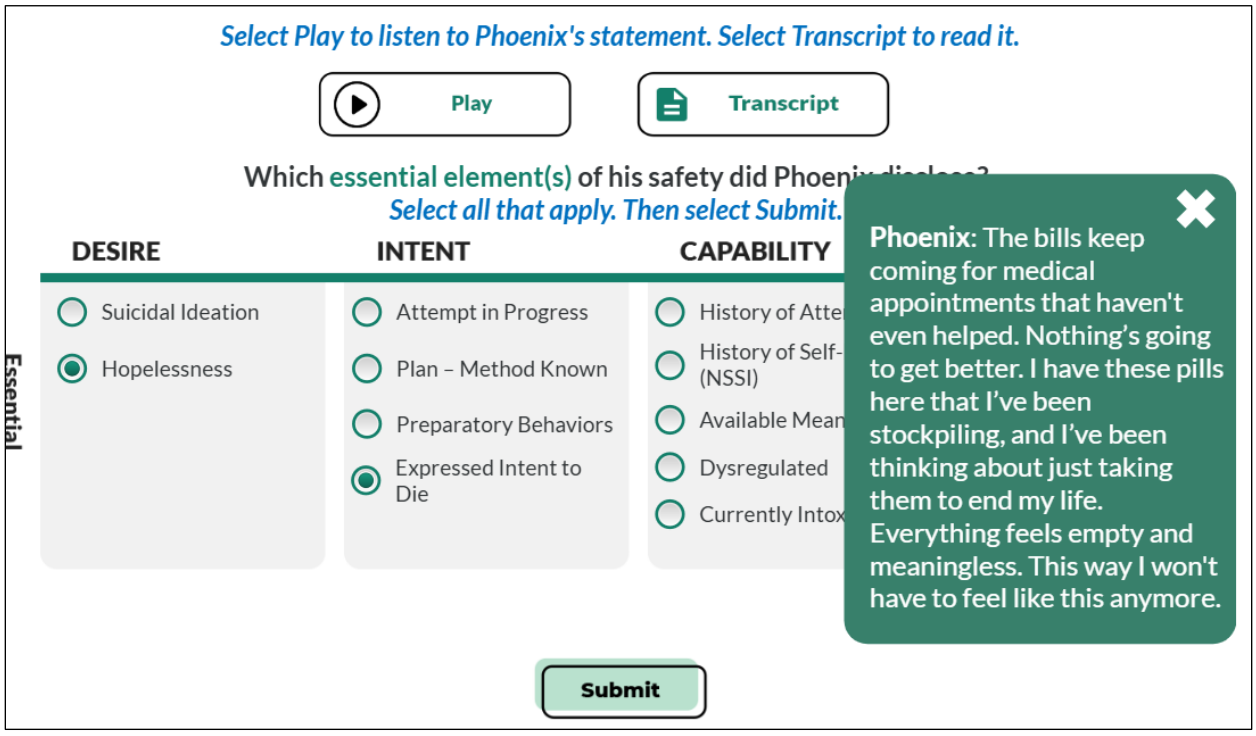

In the example above, learners can select speech bubbles to reveal concerns that crisis counselors may have regarding a conversation approach to normalize the experience. Showing only part of the concerns can elicit curiosity and engage learners. Giving them the opportunity to select each speech bubble as they choose allows them to reflect on the information at their own pace.




**Mixed Media**

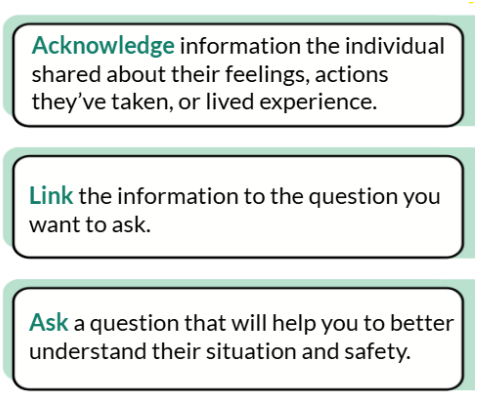
The training incorporates interactive features that simulate real crisis conversations. This activity encourages learners to practice their listening skills while simultaneously

assessing a person's safety and suicide risk. A transcript is also available to reflect a chat or text conversation.

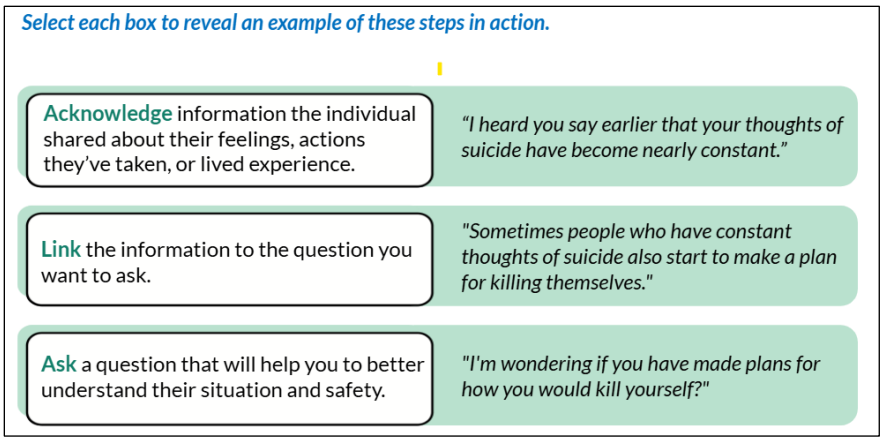



## Connecting Guidance With Examples

An easy 3-step process is provided for formulating questions in a natural, conversational way that crisis counselors want to ask to obtain additional necessary information.



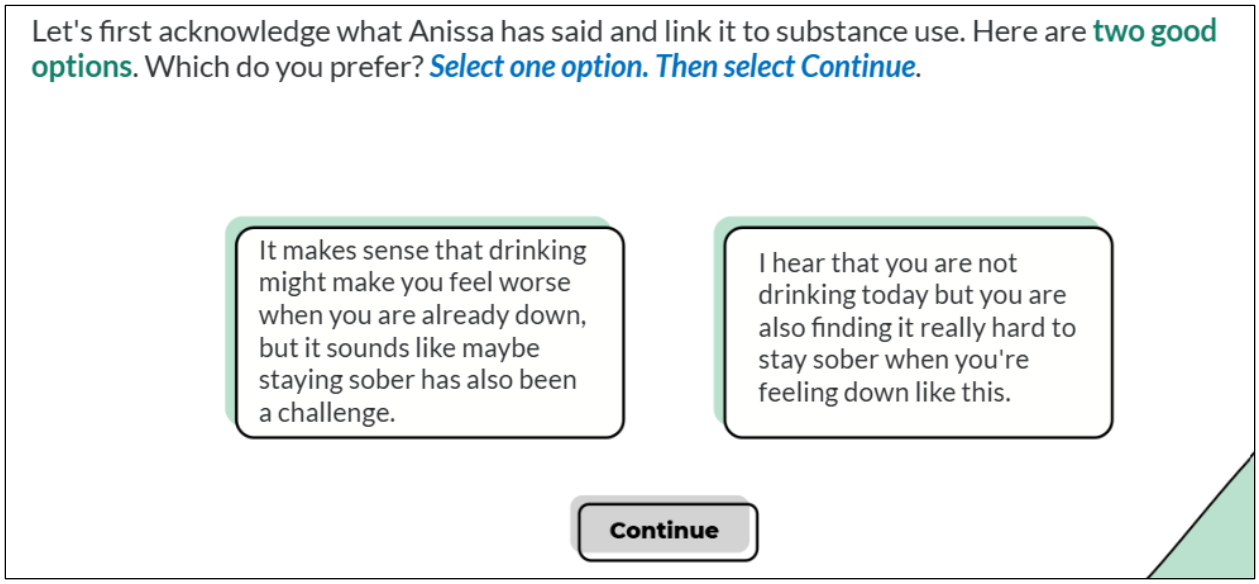

Learners can click on the guidance for each step to reveal examples of how a crisis counselor might say it in conversation. Clicking to reveal the examples is a way for learners to slow down and reflect on the content.




## Personalized Sentence Building

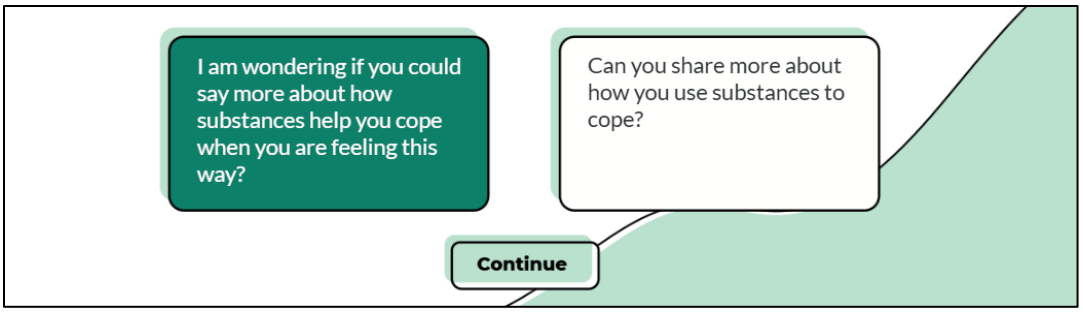
In the final section of the training, learners are given a case study and the opportunity to build their own questions using the 3-step process. First, they select their preferred response from different options that are provided to acknowledge the information that was shared in the case study.

### Step 1



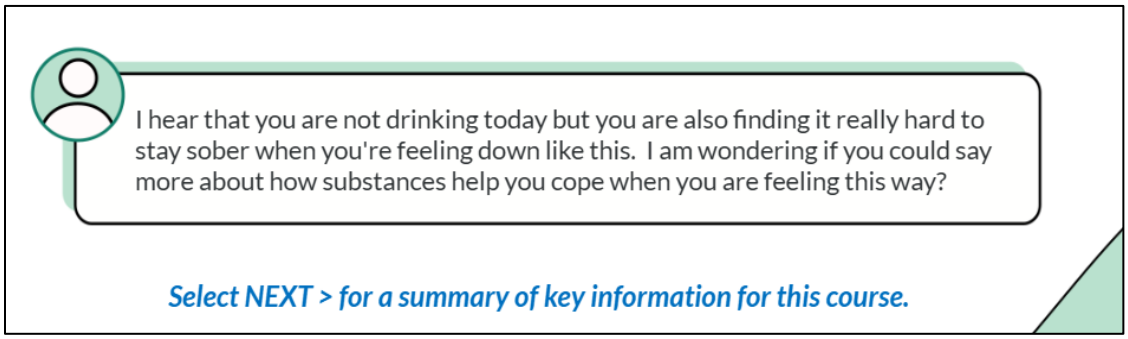

Next, the learner selects an option that will link the information provided to the question they want to ask.

### Step 2




The last step puts it all together: acknowledgement, link, and question. The learner now sees how to asks questions in a supportive and effective way.

**Step 3**



## Supporting Teenagers in Crisis

Crisis counselors play an important role in helping teenagers who may be at risk of suicide. This training explores the unique experiences and needs of teenagers, and how to effectively assess their suicide risk and provide support. Crisis counselors also learn how to respond when teenagers share information related to self-harm or child maltreatment.

### Visual design

Visual design elements are used to engage learners and provide information such as statistics or examples of language to use in conversation with help-seekers. The color theme intentionally represents a vibrant and youthful look.










### Multimedia

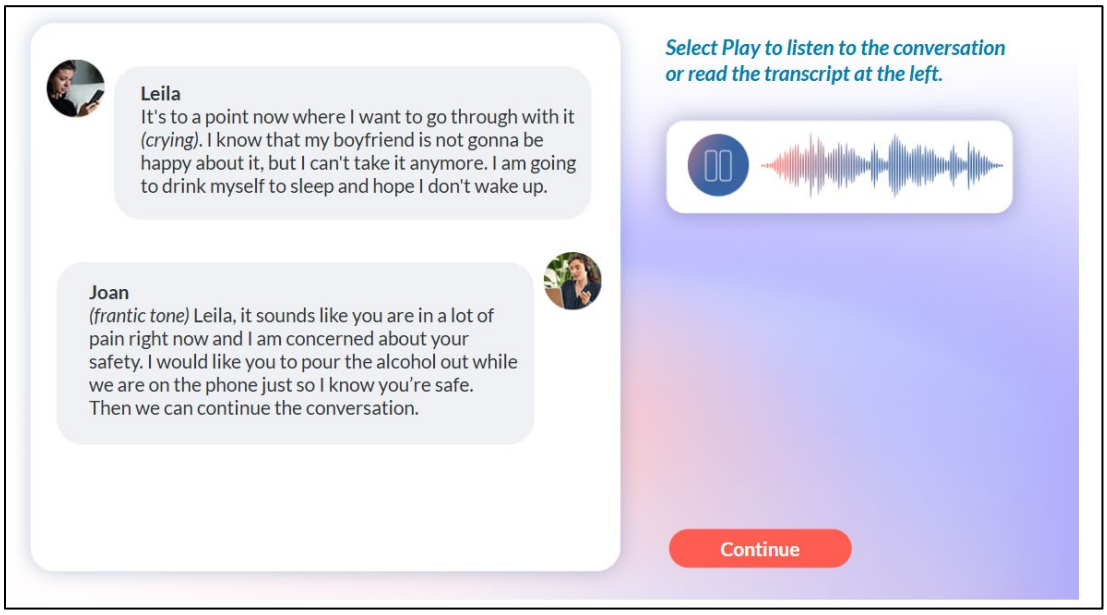
Throughout the module are short video clips of interviews with real teenagers who share their personal experiences and insights about what works well and what's ineffective when providing support to a teen. Hearing directly from teenagers is engaging and also helps crisis counselors better understand the teen's perspective.



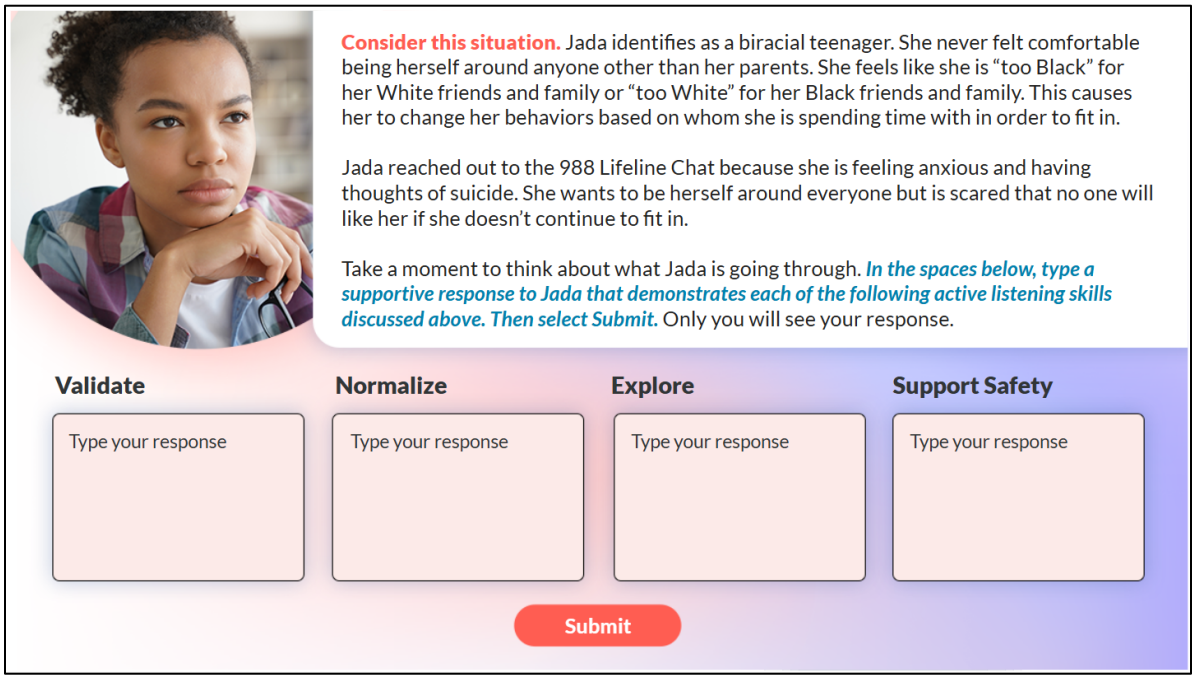



## Realistic Scenarios

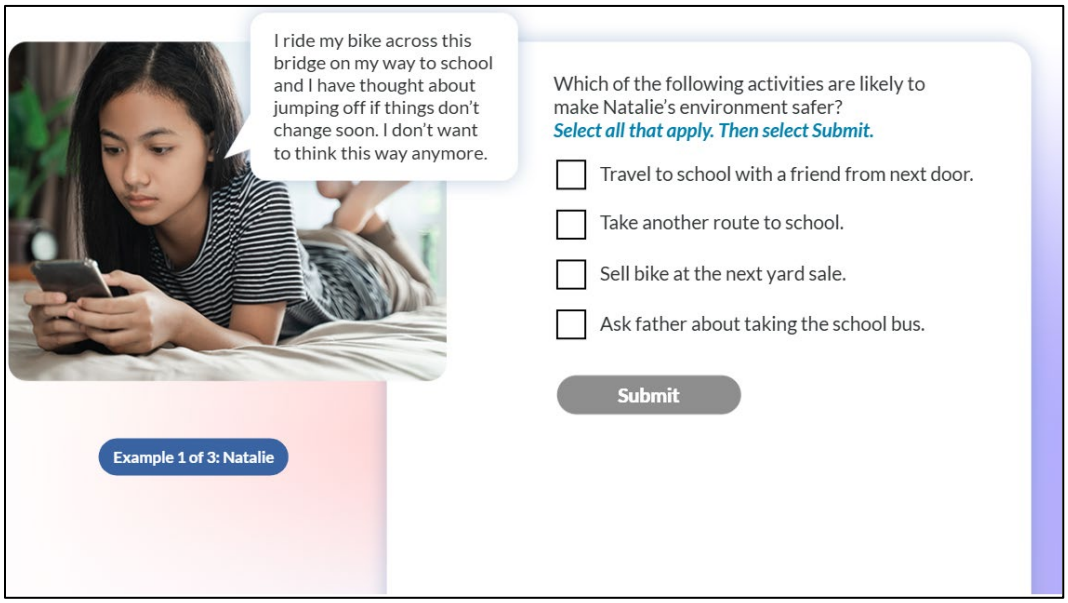
Scenarios based on realistic situations illustrate the types of conversations and experiences crisis counselors may encounter. Scenarios that reflect phone conversations include audio.




Learners also have opportunities to reflect on scenarios and type their own response.

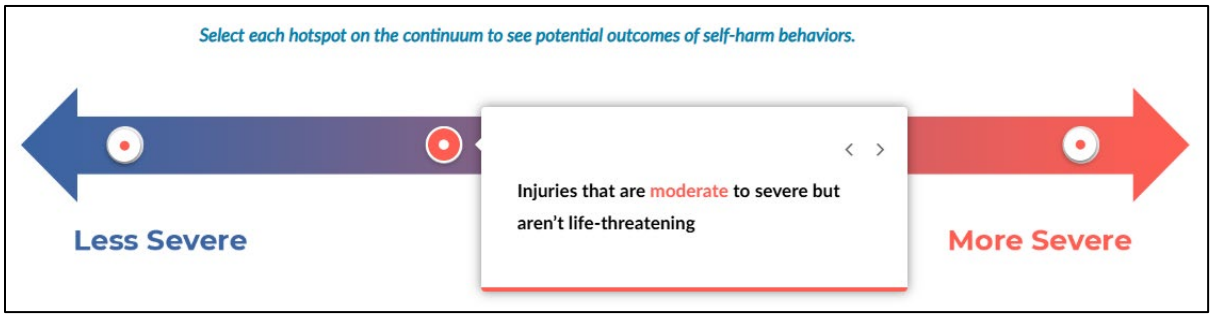


Learners can engage with the scenarios through knowledge checks. These checks for understanding provide opportunities for the crisis counselor to think critically about the concepts presented in the course.




**Information Reveal**

Activities with interactive hotspots or buttons enable the learner to engage with more information and reveal it at their own pace. This allows for a more individualized learning experience.




The example above shows how hot spots reveal more information along a continuum.

The following example incorporates images with buttons to reveal additional information on specific topics.




Teens are at a developmental stage in which they experience intense emotions. They may react to these emotions in ways that mirror the intensity of these emotions.[4] For example, a bad grade or failure to get into college can feel devastating, as if their life is over. For them, these feelings are valid. Additionally, teens may move into a crisis state faster than someone who is older. They also may be able to de-escalate more quickly, especially when a crisis counselor provides validation.

**Self-Reflection**

Learners also have the opportunity to reflect on their own language and tone when communicating with teenagers.

