

## **MRC Psychosocial Support Helpline**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

**Created on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

#### **Q. Who can call MRC helpline?**

Anybody experiencing anxiety or worry, or feeling sad and helpless, or frustrated and angry and needing to talk to someone can call us. We offer a safe space for anyone in distress to talk through their difficulties and offer Psychological First Aid (PFA).

PFA is a basic psychological support provided to reduce immediate distress and promote coping among callers. We offer compassionate active listening and provide information about different ways of coping. We collaborate with callers to explore the best ways of coping with callers' immediate challenges. If required, we also provide information about other mental health services available.

In cases of severe difficulties and suicidality we also help link to professional mental health services.

#### **Q. What is the difference between PFA, and professional mental health services provided by licensed/registered counsellors/therapists/psychologists?**

PFA is an approach used to provide immediate psychological support to people who are distressed. It can be provided by anyone with the knowledge and skills. PFA focuses on immediate concerns and challenges and help to manage acute reactions to stress. This is short-term and can be a one-time contact.

Professional mental health services (e.g. counselling and psychotherapies) are provided by registered/licensed professionals with education and training in their field, who work with individuals on resolving issues. It is long-term and involves repeated sessions to bring about lasting changes in their lives.

Calling our helpline can be a good first step in getting the support you need, if you are experiencing difficulties related to your mental health. You can call our helpline if you are unsure about what to do or how to go about seeking help – we can help explore different options and services and determine how to move forward. If there is an identified need for professional mental health services, you can be assured that we will provide you with this information and help you access these services.

#### **Q. I am worried about someone else who is going through tough times, can I call?**

Yes, you can. We are happy to provide support to caregivers and loved ones of people going through mental health issues. Unfortunately, we cannot call the person in need of support directly, but we can provide information about how to help the person in need of support, what kind of emotional support can be effective, and professional mental health services available. We are also here to support caregivers and loved ones as it can be a worrying time for them as well.

#### **Q. Who provides services at MRC helpline?**

We have trained Psychosocial Support volunteers registered with MRC and staff who work as helpers in our helpline. Helpers are trained in Psychological First Aid and supportive communication. They also take part in continuous development via sessions on suicide prevention, sexual and gender-based violence, etc.

**Q. What happens when I call?**

When you call 1425, you will hear a recording of an introduction message that prompts you to press #2 for Psychosocial Support. When you press #2, you will hear another recorded message about the confidentiality of service at 1425. After this you will be placed in a queue until a helper picks up the call.

The psychosocial helper will introduce the service and offer their name. Then they will ask for your name which you can share if you want to. Next, they will ask you about your current concerns and needs. They will ask questions to gather relevant information about your situation and how you are feeling about it. As the call continues, helpers will provide you with emotional support and try to focus on what steps you can take to reduce your stress and how you can cope.

If you are at risk of harm, helpers will ask additional questions to assess the level of risk you may be at and take necessary steps to help you stay safe. This might include sharing information about your situation with other agencies e.g. Centre for Mental Health or Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services. In such cases, we will be discussing this with you further before sharing any information.

**Q. Will you tell anyone I called?**

No, we do not provide confirmation of contact or release any records for adults and youth unless in situations where there is a risk of direct imminent harm. In these circumstances, we only provide information to the relevant organization/agency after informing you. We do not share the whole conversation with referral agencies – only information that is relevant and necessary to provide the required support and assistance.

In other circumstances, we may exchange information with other agencies and organizations working in areas relevant to your needs, but this is only with your permission.

**Q. Do you record calls?**

No, we do not record audio of any calls. However, we do take brief notes and record available demographic information for evaluation and monitoring purposes.

**Q. Do you take notes?**

We do take brief notes in calls for monitoring and evaluation purposes. These records are maintained confidentially. Our helpers also have received training on maintaining confidentiality of all communications between callers and helpers.

**Q. Do you record my phone number?**

Your phone number will be documented in our database. However, we do not share this information with anyone else unless in situations where there is an imminent danger to yourself or others and in situations where you may have given permission to do so.

**Q. Do I have to give demographic information such as age, location?**

The helper may ask about your age, location, and quarantine status relevant to the COVID19 situation, however you may decline to provide this information if you would prefer not to. Helpers are trained not to press for identifying and demographic information.

**Emergency services****Q. What happens if I call to seek help for my suicidal thoughts?**

A helper will try to understand your situation and ask questions to gather information about your suicidal thoughts. The helper will then help you make a plan to stay safe – discuss what can help you manage these feelings and thoughts. If the helper deems that you are at a high level of risk, they will encourage you to go to the nearest hospital and ask you to provide information about someone who can help you stay safe so that helpers can initiate a call to them with your consent. They will also ask for information required to link you with the Centre for Mental Health.

**Q. Will you call the police on me?**

Calling the police is a rare last resort that is discouraged as common protocol. We will only call the police if a caller describes an intent to commit suicide with a lethal plan, they have access to within the next 24 hours, and after unsuccessful efforts to help them be calmer and de-escalate the situation.

**Q. Will you report cases of domestic violence or sexual violence?**

We are mandated by the law to report cases of domestic violence and child abuse if qualifying information is disclosed during the call. Helpers will provide you with support and encourage you to report such cases yourself and we will share this information with relevant agencies (Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services, and the police). Helpers will let you know when a report is required regarding such cases.

**Calling on behalf of someone else****Q. Someone I know is really distressed and needs professional support. Can you given them a call to check in?**

Unfortunately, we are unable to make calls out to people based on third party information. This is to respect everyone's privacy and autonomy, and to adhere to best practices and guidelines in the field regarding this matter. We encourage you to have the distressed individual call to us directly if possible.

**Q. Someone I know is planning to commit suicide - can you call them or send in the police?**

We can provide you with guidance and information on how to help the person with suicidal thoughts and behaviors. We can offer information about how and where to seek help in such situations. We cannot make calls to the police based on third-party information. In extenuating circumstances, we may also collaborate with you to provide them with support – for example by making a conference call with you and the person in need of support.

### **Outbound calls specific to COVID19 situation**

MRC has been providing Psychosocial Support to people affected by the COVID19 pandemic. We are working with other stakeholders as part of the National Emergency Operations Center (NEOC). We accept referrals from the NEOC regarding individuals who may need Psychosocial Support. In these cases, we make outbound calls to referrals received from the NEOC to provide Psychosocial Support.

However, these calls are specific to the COVID19 situation. We do not accept referrals from other sources and persons. We encourage all stakeholders and the general community to encourage those who require help, to call us directly. We are also keen to provide caregivers and loved ones with support needed as well.