

**CRISIS INTERVENTION AND
COUNSELING BY TELEPHONE**

Second Edition

**CRISIS INTERVENTION
AND COUNSELING
BY TELEPHONE**

Edited by

DAVID LESTER

The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey



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This book is dedicated to Gene Brockopp, friend and mentor.

PREFACE

In 1973, Gene W. Brockopp (who was Executive Director of the Suicide Prevention and Crisis Intervention Service in Buffalo, New York) and I (who was Director of Research and Evaluation there) edited a book on the use of the telephone for crisis intervention and counseling, with a particular focus on suicide prevention.

Although the growth of telephone counseling services could be traced back to the 1950s, most of the interest in these services focused on their use for suicide prevention, and most of the scholarly literature focused on the suicidal individual. Although the growth of knowledge in the suicidal individual was widely disseminated, the information and experience gained using the telephone as a treatment modality was not codified, published, or disseminated. Our edited book sought to remedy this, as we wrote down the results of our experience with telephone counseling in our suicide prevention center and recruited others to contribute their experience. The book was well received, widely used, and a Japanese translation undertaken.

In the ensuing three decades, no comparable book has appeared, and I have found that telephone counseling centers still make use of the 1973 book. However, parts of the book are outdated, for much has been learned since then about crisis intervention in general and telephone counseling in particular. There was, therefore, a need for a second edition of the book, and the present volume is the result.

Many of the chapters in the first edition remain relevant and useful today, and they have been retained, particularly in Parts II, III and V, albeit with editing on occasions and several additions. However, Parts I, IV and VI have been changed drastically. Most of the chapters in those Parts in the first edition have been replaced in this second edition. As before, the content of the chapters sometimes overlaps, but this overlap has not been eliminated in order that each chapter can stand alone as a complete essay.

I hope that this book will further stimulate interest and discussion of the telephone as a mode of treatment, and I hope that it will prove useful for those setting up telephone counseling services and those in charge of centers

already operating, especially in training and supervising those on the front lines, the crisis interveners.

I should like to thank all of the many people at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey who have assisted me in preparing this book (and other books in the past): the secretaries who type my manuscripts—Christie Picardi, Patricia Pruitt, Patti Williamson and Theresa Steinke; the staff of interlibrary loan—Barbara Jones and Susan Bucikowski; the reference librarians—Hoong Chang-Fitzgibbon, Carolyn Gutierrez, and Mary Ann Trail; Richard Colby who has diligently kept me updated on the literature in the field; and all of the staff in the Computer Center.

D. L.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Preface</i> .....	.ix

Part I THE VARIETIES OF TELEPHONE SERVICE

Chapter

1. Counseling by Telephone: An Overview— <i>David Lester</i> .....	.5
2. A Survey of Telephone Counseling Services— <i>David Lester</i> .....	.22
3. An Emergency Telephone Service: The Development of a Presence— <i>Gene W. Brockopp</i> .....	.32
4. Community Youth Line: A Hotline Program for Troubled Adolescents— <i>H.S. Roth, Charles Palmer and Arthur J. Schut</i> .....	.42

Part II CRISIS INTERVENTION AND COUNSELING BY TELEPHONE

5. The Unique Contribution of Telephone Therapy— <i>Tim Williams</i> and <i>John Douds</i> .....	.57
6. Crisis Intervention and Counseling by Telephone: An Update— <i>John Kalafat</i> .....	.64
7. Telephone Therapy: Some Common Errors and Fallacies— <i>Charles W. Lamb</i> .....	.83
8. The Telephone Call: Conversation or Therapy— <i>Gene W. Brockopp</i> .....	.88
9. Active Listening— <i>David Lester</i> .....	.92
10. Cognitive Therapy Approaches to Crisis Intervention— <i>David Lester</i> .....	.99
11. Transactional Analysis and Learned Helplessness Approaches to Crisis Counseling— <i>David Lester</i> .....	.109

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
12. Gestalt Therapy Approaches to Crisis Intervention with Suicidal Clients— <i>Lin Young and David Lester</i>	118
 Part III PROBLEM CALLERS 	
13. The Obscene Caller— <i>Gene W. Brockopp and David Lester</i>	133
14. The Chronic Caller— <i>Gene W. Brockopp, David Lester and Diane Blum</i>	154
15. The Covert Cry for Help— <i>Gene W. Brockopp</i>	171
16. The Silent Caller— <i>Vanda Scott, David Lester and Gene W. Brockopp</i> .	176
17. The Nuisance Caller— <i>Gene W. Brockopp</i>	187
18. The “One Counselor” Caller— <i>Gene W. Brockopp</i>	191
 Part IV BEYOND THE TELEPHONE CONTACT 	
19. Beyond the Telephone Contact— <i>Lee Ann Hoff</i>	199
20. Crisis Intervention by E-mail— <i>Geraldine Wilson and David Lester</i> .	212
21. Counseling the Client in Crisis by Letter— <i>Dmitri Schustov and David Lester</i>	220
 Part V THE TELEPHONE COUNSELOR 	
22. Ascending to “Lower” Levels: The Case for Nonprofessional Crisis Workers— <i>Richard K. McGee and Bruce Jennings</i>	231
23. The Use of the Professional in Telephone Counseling— <i>Ann S. McColskey</i>	242
24. Selecting the Telephone Counselor— <i>Gene W. Brockopp</i>	252
25. Trained Telephone Counselors— <i>John Kalafat</i>	260
 Part IV EVALUATING TELEPHONE COUNSELING SERVICES 	
26. The Effectiveness of Suicide Prevention and Crisis Intervention Services— <i>David Lester</i>	289
<i>Name Index</i>	299
<i>Subject Index</i>	304

**CRISIS INTERVENTION AND
COUNSELING BY TELEPHONE**

Part I

**THE VARIETIES OF
TELEPHONE SERVICE**

Chapter 1

COUNSELING BY TELEPHONE: AN OVERVIEW¹

DAVID LESTER

Telephone counseling was first used widely in the 1960s by suicide prevention and crisis intervention services as a means of providing immediate and inexpensive access to crisis intervention for those in distress. Since then, the telephone has been utilized for a variety of purposes by psychotherapists and by mental health clinics. In this chapter, I will review these uses and then discuss the unique qualities of counseling by telephone, together with the advantages and drawbacks of this medium for counseling.

The Use of Telephone in Counseling

The telephone has been used as a means for counseling in a variety of services (Lester, 1977; Lester & Brockopp, 1973), including suicide prevention centers, crisis intervention centers, teen hotlines, rape crisis counseling, rumor control hotlines, drug hotlines (Schmitz & Mickelson, 1972), parent hotlines (Newcomb, Chenkin, Card & Ialongo, 1984), poison control centers (Broadhead, 1986), career counseling (Roach, Reardon, Alexander & Cloudman, 1983), sex information and counseling (Anon, 1972), sexual abuse (Pierce & Pierce, 1985), health care problems for elderly adults (Moreland & Grier, 1986), AIDS (Benedetti, Zaccarelli, Giuliani & di Fabio, 1989), and all kinds of “Dial-A-Need” hotlines (Goud, 1985). There has even been a nationally broadcast radio call-in show which, following ethical guidelines from the American Psychiatric Association, gave advice and made referrals but abstained from diagnosis and treatment (Ruben, 1986).

¹ This chapter is based on Lester (1995).