Supporting Lifeline Callers/Chat Visitors Concerned about Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Overview
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is responding to an outbreak of respiratory disease caused by a novel (new) coronavirus. The disease has been named "coronavirus disease 2019" ("COVID-19"). As this is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation, please stay up-to-date on the newest information and updated guidance offered by the CDC: **Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Summary**

About COVID-19
- The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet)
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs
- It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads
- People are thought to be most contagious when they are most symptomatic (the sickest)
- Some spread might be possible before people show symptoms; there have been reports of this occurring with this new coronavirus, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads
- For confirmed COVID-19 cases, reported illnesses have ranged from mild symptoms to severe illness and death. Symptoms can include: Fever, Cough, Shortness of breath

(Source: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/index.html)

Guidelines for Crisis Counselors
Lifeline crisis centers are not expected to be experts on COVID-19, its symptoms, nor outbreak response. Callers and chat visitors should be referred directly to the CDC and/or their healthcare providers for access to accurate, frequently updated information. See the list of resources below for more information. Crisis counselors can provide support for with emotional distress callers/chat visitors may be experiencing related to COVID-19.

Risk for Emotional Distress
- Feeling anxious, confused, overwhelmed, powerless, or other symptoms of distress is common during an infectious disease outbreak, especially in the face of a virus or other public health emergency for which the general public may be unfamiliar
- Those at heightened risk for distress include:
    - The limited number of people in the U.S. who have been identified as having contracted COVID-19
    - Medical/other public health responders engaged in the preparation and response to the outbreak
    - Individuals from other countries with active outbreaks living in the U.S. who may have loved ones there
    - People in higher risk demographics (elderly and with underlying health conditions) and their caregivers
    - People with existing mental health conditions
    - Members of racial and ethnic groups unfairly targeted for bias, discrimination, harassment, and other forms of abuse during the outbreak as a result of misinformation, profiling, etc.
- Intense news coverage of COVID-19 can increase feelings of distress

- Fear and anxiety may be stoked by information from internet-based resources that aren't vetted or from trusted sources, as they often contain inflammatory and incorrect information

Interventions
- **Engage** with warm support and a compassionate presence; establish rapport using: active listening, validation, normalization
  - Assist callers/chat visitors with sitting with the anxiety, uncertainty, anger, etc. that may arise from being in a situation they have limited control over. Educate on distress tolerance skills
  - Keep in mind that efforts to control the spread of the virus such as social distancing and cancellations of events may be more difficult for those who are already feeling alone
- **Explore** coping skills and social supports; assess for crisis/suicide as needed
  - Suggest callers/chat visitors take a media break if they are overwhelmed
  - Callers/chat visitors experiencing anxiety may benefit from Vibrant's safe space: vibrant.org/safespace/
- **Connect** to appropriate local and state resources (see suggestions below)
- **Conclude** by summarizing any referrals, plans made for next steps
  - Consider discussing virtual means of connection when developing a safety plan with the caller/chat visitor, such as Skype, Facetime, Google Hangouts, social media

Referrals and Resources
Directing people to resources and information from vetted and trusted sources is critical to mitigating the spread of misinformation:
- **CDC Hotline: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)** (English & Spanish)
  - **TTY 888-232-6348**
  - **Website: https://www.cdc.gov/cdc-info/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcdc-info%2Fabout.html**
  - Live agents available by phone and email to help individuals find the latest, reliable, and science-based health information
- **Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990**
  - **Text: "TalkWithUs" to 66746**
  - **TTY: 1-800-846-8517**
  - **Website: http://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov**
  - 24 hour access to trained disaster crisis counselors providing supportive counseling, including information on common stress reactions and healthy coping
- **Local Healthcare Provider:** Direct callers and chat visitors to their healthcare providers for information about diagnosing illnesses, receiving medical treatment, or accessing medications
- **Local Health Department Websites:** Many cities have their own websites informing individuals of local efforts, with location-specific information and resources, including multi-lingual resources
- **211:** Direct callers and chat visitors to their local 211 for information about healthcare services available in their area
- **CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 Website: cdc.gov/covid19**
  - The most up-to-date information on the coronavirus and the CDC's response
  - Tip sheets on the website are available in English, Spanish, and Simplified Chinese
- **SAMHSA Tip Sheet: Coping with Stress During Infectious Disease Outbreaks**
- **SAMHSA Tip Sheet: Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health – Tips for Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation**