

SAMARITANS MENTAL HEALTH WELLNESS SUPPORT SERVICE

Due to the coronavirus pandemic that resulted in Samaritans having to place its crisis hotline service on “temporary hold” for the first time in 37 years (for the health safety of its staff and volunteers), it was imperative that we develop alternative methods to fulfill our mission:

to alleviate suffering, prevent suicide and save lives by providing: immediate and ongoing support to those in distress; a path to healing for individuals that are survivors of suicide loss; education and training for caregivers and health providers on the approaches, tools and resources that have proved most effective when responding to those at-risk; and caring, confidential and safe alternatives to existing clinical and government-run programs and services, especially for the underserved, untreated and those impacted by stigma.

To this end, Samaritans has launched its *Mental Health Wellness Support Line*, a new service that has been developed where, *instead of people calling us, we call them*. Utilizing a different phone number from the hotline, individuals who are in distress, feeling overwhelmed, isolated, depressed or are having trouble coping with the many challenges and difficulties presented by the pandemic, can call to arrange for a ‘wellness’ call from a Samaritans Hotline Volunteer.

How it works: Anyone who is interested in receiving a Mental Health Wellness Support call, should call the request line at (212) 673-3661 and leave a message with their name and phone number and a period of time that they can be reached, no sooner than 24 hours from when they leave the message. And a member of Samaritans staff will call.

The *Mental Health Wellness Support Line* has been designed to fill the gaps and provide alternatives to the many other services available during this public health crisis. Instead of the individuals that use this service being “reactive,” as most people are when they call a suicide hotline, this service provides them with the opportunity to be *proactive*, to plan ahead and utilize this support as an element of their ongoing mental health maintenance.

The *wellness line* is available for those who are coping with anxiety, distress, depression and other mental health issues as well as those who provide them with care and support, such as parents, teachers, guidance counselors, caregivers, health providers, first responders, etc.

In fact, in addition to serving those individuals who have utilized Samaritans hotline over the past 37 years for ongoing emotional support, the *wellness line* is meant to function as a support and a confidential outlet for those who are on the front lines of the pandemic treating and taking care of other people, but are not necessarily receiving the care and support they need themselves.

Mental Health Wellness calls will be made by volunteers and staff of Samaritans 24-hour suicide prevention hotline who are trained in active listening and crisis response. Hotline staff are not clinicians, therapists or licensed mental health practitioners. Their focus on calls will be to “check-in” with a caller, explore how they are doing and provide emotional support in a limited manner. Calls will be kept in the 20-minute range. If a caller expresses that they are suicidal or considering self-harm, Samaritans will call 911.

Samaritans has placed a message describing this service, so people hear it when they call the suicide prevention hotline number and have also featured the *Mental Health Wellness Support Line* on our website (www.samaritansnyc.org which contains guidelines on helping people in crisis and countless valuable resources) and across all our social media platforms.

There are also several *wellness line* fliers describing the service inviting people to call, which we encourage schools, health organizations, non-profits and community groups to post and share with students, clients, colleagues and others. If you have questions, during this period, to get the quickest response, write: education@samaritansnyc.org and we will respond in a timely manner.

Samaritans Mental Health Wellness Support Line

(212) 673-3661