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## Feeling depressed? Send a text

By Jennifer Bahney Assistant Editor Sep 30, 2016

State officials are hoping that a simple text might help prevent future suicides. The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) is now offering a texting service through a company called Crisis Text Line to help people who are in any sort of emotional turmoil. That could include depression, grief, bullying, extreme stress, or suicidal thoughts.

By texting the keyword “4hope” to 741 741 anywhere in Ohio, a person will receive an answer from a trained crisis counselor within five minutes. Crisis Text Line says that an algorithm reviews the text language that comes in to the crisis center for “severity” and alerts counselors to answer those texts first that are from people at “imminent risk.”

According to a statement, the counselors are volunteers who are supervised by full-time paid staffers who have degrees in social work, psychology, or a related field. As of July, there were 1,541 crisis counselors responding to 50,000 texters per month.

OhioMHAS says that the text line is meant to “get a person through an intense or emotional period of time, but is not there to serve as counseling or therapy. It is a human response during a time of need.”

The state says that the texts are kept confidential, anonymous and secure, and that all data is auto-scrubbed for personally identifiable information. However, aggregated data is collected in order to keep track of trends, and research institutions will be able to access “a limited subset of data” for general mental health studies.

Anyone outside of Ohio can text the word “HELLO” to 741 741 to be connected to a Crisis Text Line counselor in any state. Data usage while using the Crisis Text Line is free.

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