

HOW WILL YOU KNOW THIS CONVERSATION HAS BEEN HELPFUL? (Constructing a context of change)

Telephone counsellor: This is Lifeline. How may we help you?

Caller: Well ... I guess I just want to ... I just want to talk to someone.

TC: Okay ... that's good to hear ... so how are you hoping that talking to me tonight will be helpful?

Caller: Oh, I don't know ... I just got to that place again where I knew I had to talk to someone.

TC: Mmmm. You sound very sad.

Caller: Yeah. It's all hopeless.

TC: Hmm. ... so I'm wondering how you will know that talking to me has been helpful?

Caller: What do you mean?

TC: Well ... when we finish this call ... what will be different for you that will tell you that making this call was helpful for you? How do you think it might make a difference?

Caller: Oh ... you know ... it just helps to talk to someone.

TC: Okay [*gently*] ... so if talking to me tonight helps ... how do you think you'll know? What will be different when you hang up that will tell you that this call has been helpful for you?

Caller: Well ... I guess I'll just feel like someone has actually heard what it's been like for me.

TC: Okay ... so you'll feel like someone has really listened to what it's like for you?

Caller: Yes.

TC: Hmmm ... and how will that make a difference for you?

Caller: What do you mean?

TC: Well ... when you hang up the phone feeling like someone has really understood what it's been like for you, how will that make a difference?

Caller: Umm ... well ... I guess that ... maybe I won't feel like I'm cracking up.

TC: Oh, okay ... so you won't feel like you're going to pieces?

Caller: Yeah ... I guess.

TC: Okay ... so when you don't feel like you're cracking up, what WILL you feel instead?

Caller: Um ... well ... maybe I'll feel like I'm kinda handling things.

TC: Oh, okay ... so you'll feel like you're handling things ... being on top of things a bit more.

Caller: Yeah.

TC: Okay [*gently*] ... so how do you think that will make a difference to you? When you feel like maybe you're handling things okay ... how will that make a difference?

Caller: Well ... I won't feel like things are completely fucked ... maybe I'll feel like I can actually do some stuff.

TC: Really? You'll feel like maybe you can do some stuff ... you mean some stuff to move forward?

Caller: Yeah ... I guess.

TC: So ... what kind of stuff do you think you might be able to do?

FUTURE-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

- Caller: I just feel like crap. I just feel like everything is too much ... you know, it's just all too much to deal with. My husband doesn't understand ... and he's getting really annoyed with me, but I'm trying to hold it all together ... for him and for the kids, you know. But the kids ... they don't respect me ... they just complain and keep on wanting everything to be just their way ... they think they should have everything they want, but we just can't afford it ... you know? ... and I know I'm going to lose my job ... then, if that happens, we'll lose the house ... I don't know what to do. I just don't know how I can handle all this shit.
- TC: Hmm ... so it's all too overwhelming for you?
- Caller: Yes.
- TC: It's really stressing you out?
- Caller: Yeah ... it is ... I don't even know where to start.
- TC: Okay ... so tell me ... what will be happening when you DON'T feel like this any more?
- Caller: Huh?
- TC: Well ... I'm wondering ... when you're not feeling like it's all too much, what do you think you will be feeling instead?
- Caller: Oh ... ummm ... well ... maybe, I'll be feeling like there is SOME hope.
- TC: Okay, feeling like there's some hope ... so, what do you think you'll be doing when you feel like there is some hope?
- Caller: What will I be doing?
- TC: Yes, when you get to the point when you feel like there is some hope ... what will you be doing?
- Caller: Oh ... I don't know. I can't think of that.
- TC: Okay ... so it's hard even to imagine that? Okay. *[Gently]* So ... when you get to the point of feeling that there is some hope, what do you think people around you would notice?
- Caller: Like who? What do you mean?
- TC: What about your kids? When you get to the point of feeling that there is some hope, what do you think they will see that is different about you?
- Caller: Oh ... maybe they would see that I get up in the morning.
- TC: That you'd get up in the morning?
- Caller: Yeah ... at the moment, I just can't get up most mornings ... I'm either too hung over or I just can't face it.
- TC: Okay ... but they would notice that you got up?
- Caller: Yeah ... I guess.
- TC: So, what would you do when you got up?
- Caller: Well ... maybe I'd make breakfast for them.
- TC: Really?
- Caller: Yeah, you know ... I feel awful that they have to go off to school without me making breakfast for them. I mean ... what sort of a feeble mother am I? You see ... I'm just hopeless. There's no point.
- TC: Okay ... but you'd make breakfast for them. What would you make?

Caller: Oh ... I don't know ... maybe Weetbix or some toast.

TC: Uhuh ... so you'd make Weetbix or maybe toast instead of them having to look after themselves?

Caller: Yeah.

TC: And how do you think that would make a difference?

Caller: Well, I wouldn't feel so hopeless.

TC: Really?

Caller: Yeah ... I wouldn't feel like I'm the worst mother in the world.

TC: Hmmm ... so you wouldn't feel you were the worst mum in the world?

Caller: No.

TC: Okay ... so what might you feel instead?

Caller: Oh ... umm ... well ... maybe I'd feel like I'm okay as a Mum.

TC: Okay as a Mum?

Caller: Yeah.

TC: So ... when you're feeling okay as a Mum ... how will that make a difference?

Caller: Well ... I'll feel better about myself.

TC: Really? Okay ... so what do you think you'll be doing when you feel better about yourself?

Caller: Well ... they'd be going to get the bus to school and I wouldn't be feeling like I'd screwed stuff up for them.

TC: Yeah? What do you think you WOULD be feeling?

Caller: I'd be feeling like I did what I'm supposed to do as a Mum.

SCALING QUESTIONS

TC: So you've talked with me about how hard it is to meet someone and how lonely you feel living on your own. But you've also started thinking about maybe starting a conversation with your neighbour who waves at you in the mornings and you might take a closer look at the RSVP website ... they seem like some good ideas ... so let me ask you this ... on a scale of 0 to 10 ... where zero is "there's no point to it all" ... and from what you've told me, it sounds like you've been pretty close to that point ... and 10 is "hey, I can get on with things" ... where do you think you are between zero and ten?

Caller: Oh ... umm ... I don't know ... maybe 2.

TC: Two?

Caller: Yeah ... I guess.

TC: Hmmm ... so what tells you, you are at 2 and not lower?

Caller: Well, it's not like it's ALL bad.

TC: Really? My guess is that it sometimes feels like it is all bad?

Caller: Yeah ... sure.

TC: But ... somehow ... you're at 2 on that scale and not at zero.

Caller: Yeah ... I guess.

TC: How come?

TC: What do you mean?

Caller: Well ... I guess I haven't actually killed myself.

TC: Okay ... so how have you been hanging in there?

TC: So, even though things have been awful you've managed to get yourself to 2 on that scale?

Caller: I suppose.

TC: So ... tell me ... what will be happening when you get to 3?

Caller: Well ... I don't know ... maybe I'll be feeling a bit more positive.

TC: Okay ... and when you get to 3 on that scale, what will you be DOING that shows you are feeling a bit more positive?