I’d like to introduce you to a critical response model that I believe will help you throw a lifeline in a non-threatening manner. It is based on the need to be able to communicate with a person in distress or crisis in a manner which does not humiliate or disrespect them.

It is a model I developed through years of experience & training touching those who are in pivotal points in their lives, reaching out for hope, empathy, and connectedness with other human beings without being judged. The model is called RELEASE.

The RELEASE Model

Recognize
Engage
Listen
Empathy
Accept
Support
Encourage

The RELEASE model is not “clinically” proven to be effective – but it worked for me when I was working as a California Highway Patrol Officer and responding to crisis incidents.

The key points to focus on are providing the person a “way out,” a way to communicate without fear of being judged or scrutinized.

Up to the point of your intervention, they may feel no one understands or cares about them. They may be embarrassed or frightened to speak out or ask for help. Using the RELEASE model will help you allow the person in distress to release bottled up emotions and feelings that otherwise may not have ever have been voiced and prevent them from living their life to the fullest. You may just save a life!
RECOGNIZE
Recognize the signs that an individual, or yourself may need help:

* Hopelessness: Believing that things are terrible and not going to get better
* Helplessness: Believing there is nothing you can do about it.
* Burdensomeness: Feelings/Perception of being a burden
* Depression – sadness, social isolation, perception of being a burden
* Risk-taking behavior
* Giving away belongings
* Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) or and/or prior suicide attempt
* Increased (or starting) drug or alcohol use
* Not able to communicate any future plans
* Increased or decreased amount of sleep
* Financial stressors
* For young adults, additional stressors may include living on their own for the first time, pressure to achieve goals in school and sports, pressure to try alcohol/drugs, bullying.

These are just a few of the signs to look for. If your life or that of another is affected in a negative manner by these signs/symptoms, or if you or someone else just doesn’t seem like their old self anymore, have a conversation with them. Your conversation may not even include the topic of suicide – but what if it does?

ENGAGE
Engage the individual in a conversation, not an inquisition. Time and time again we hear others say, “I knew he had some issues, but I didn’t think he’d take his own life. Were things really that bad?”

YOU can be the barrier between hopelessness and suicide. The individual may feel alone, or that they are the only one feeling the way they do. Normalize their feelings and emotions, as others in like circumstances might be feeling the same way.

Don’t be afraid to ask the question “Have you been having thoughts of killing yourself?” Think about how you would react if they say “Yes.” Don’t panic; get as much information from the individual as you can. Here are a few more questions you might wish to ask following questions:
* How long have you had these thoughts?
* Do you have a plan?
* Have you attempted suicide before, and if so, what stopped you from completing it?

LISTEN
Listen with the intent to understand. When the individual is speaking, do not interrupt. Use a quiet voice with minimal encouraging phrases. “Wow”, “Oh yeah?” “Really?” “Is that so?” demonstrate to the person you are listening and interested in what they are saying. If there is something you don’t understand or needs clarification, follow up by paraphrasing or restating what was said. For many people in distress, someone listening to them, without judgment or ridicule, is all they need to get them through that emotional and tumultuous pivotal point.

It is best to have this conversation between just the two of you so the individual will feel less overwhelmed or pressured. Others standing around may be detrimental to your connection with the person. Turn off your cell phone and other electronic distractions. Have this conversation in a place comfortable for them, where you will have no interferences. Remember, we are our brother’s keeper. Leave any ego behind.

EMPATHY
Empathy that is genuine will be accepted and go further in allowing the individual to open up and reveal what the true issues are. Put yourself in their shoes and genuinely try and understand what is going on in their life. Don’t voluntarily compare a similar experience to what they are going through at the moment, unless asked. If asked, provide a positive experience. Don’t make promises or suggestions you know and they know you cannot keep.

ACCEPT
Accept the person for who they are and what they tell you. Getting angry, arguing, or giving false hope is detrimental to your goal. The person may be baring their soul to you and they do not need to see or feel your surprise, disgust, feel they are being judged, or feel their issues are insignificant. Do not be sworn to secrecy. Keep the conversation moving forward in a positive direction.

SUPPORT
Support is crucial. Be ready to accompany the individual to an emergency room or other healthcare facility or professional if needed. Don’t be apprehensive about calling the police. Many officers now have training in mental illness and are a valuable asset. Have a local or national Help Line/Suicide Prevention phone number with you before you engage the person. Support in a positive manner such as going to the movies, festivals or gathering friends for a
BBQ. Taking the individual out all night on a drinking binge is not the support they need.

24/7 phone numbers: USA ONLY

* National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255
* Red Nacional de Prevencion del Suicidio 1-888-628-9454
* Military Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255, Press 1

ENCOURAGE
Encourage the individual to seek help if immediate intervention is not required. Offer to assist them in finding professional help, and follow up to be sure appointments are made/kept. Let the person know that you really do care and are there for them. Personal visits, phone calls, and email or text messages are great, but don’t be too pushy. Put yourself in their shoes. It sure is great to have someone in your corner. Someone who really listens and cares. But you also don’t want that person to become a nag, calling or texting every couple of hours. You want to check on them, not hover over them. Do not offer clinical advice – leave this to professionals.

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I developed what I refer to as my Quality of Life Triad. This was originally for my own self-care but sharing it I have found many people have found it has helped them. also. On the top of the triangle is “Self-Care.” There’s a reason it is on top. It’s up to me to recognize how I am feeling and it’s up to me to take action for my own quality of life. Along with self-care is self-compassion. Realizing that not everything is going to go my way, and at times I will fail. This is part of life. Failing also brings you closer to success, as each time you fail you grow and realize what you need to do the next time.

On the lower left of the triangle is “Professional Care.” These are professionals who know me, my history, and can assist with my quality of with their guidance and evaluations of my overall health.

On the lower right is my “Support.” My right hand so to speak. These are people, many of which I can rely on day to day for support. Some of these people I can call day or night and speak with. They are always there for me and are willing to take the time and listen.

These three elements make up the Quality of Life Triad. All three are crucial for success and quality of life.
Elements of the **Quality of Life Triad**

**Self-Care:** It all begins with self. Your Self Worth, Self-Compassion, Nutrition, Fitness, Self-Diagnosis of Feelings, Journal of My Feelings and How I Coped (for future use), etc.

**Support:** Family, Friends, Peers, Colleagues, Mentor, Clubs, Social Media, Audiences, Belief System, etc.

**Professional Care:** Behavioral and Physical Health Clinicians and other professionals who assist with your wellbeing such as Life Coach, Gym and Yoga Instructors, Nutritionist, etc.