ACT PUBLIC SERVICE

PROTOCOL FOR RESPONDING TO PEOPLE THREATENING SUICIDE OR SELF HARM – EMPLOYEES AND CONTRACTORS

1. PURPOSE

To provide practical guidance on responding to, and managing, people threatening suicide or self harm.

2. APPLICATION

This protocol applies to all ACT Government employees and contractors who may be engaged in contact roles.

3. BACKGROUND

You may on occasion be confronted by a distressed person threatening suicide or self harm, either in person, on the telephone or in writing. Such situations can be difficult to handle, especially when the majority of employees are not trained or qualified to assist the person with such related issues.

There are numerous factors which may have influenced or led a person to the point of making such a threat. You must take the threat seriously and you have a duty of care to the distressed individual to, as far as possible and practicable, provide them with the support they need to obtain the professional care and assistance that they need.

The ACT Government takes the health and safety of its employees very seriously. This document provides:

• guidance on the procedures to be followed to ensure the person making the threat receives support; and
• guidance on the support services available to employees who have received the threat.
4. RESPONDING TO A PERSON THREATENING SELF HARM OR SUICIDE

- Take the person and the threat seriously.

- Advise the person that threats of suicide or self harm are taken seriously and that you may need to refer them to someone who is more appropriately trained or qualified to provide assistance.

- Inform the person that you have a duty of care to ensure that they are safe and have appropriate support.

- Seek details of the person making the threat, i.e. name, address, telephone number, treating doctor details and the person’s current location (if threat made by telephone).

- Encourage the person to seek immediate support from a friend, partner, General Practitioner or an appropriately qualified health worker and supply them with telephone numbers such as:
  - Mental Health ACT Triage and Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team (provides a 24-hour, seven day a week, triage service to assess and co-ordinate the necessary referral for treatment of individuals with mental health issues) - 1800 629 354 (24 hour service) or (02) 6205 1065; or
  - Lifeline 131 114.

- If the person refuses to seek such support, wherever possible seek their agreement to contact a support person or service on their behalf.

- Advise the person that you will be contacting and providing their details to the Mental Health ACT Triage and Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team, the police or their local hospital to ensure that they have someone to come and assess them as the case may be.

- For immediate life threatening or dangerous situations call 000 for emergency services.

- Do not attempt to counsel the person or make a judgement about whether you think the person will carry out the threat of suicide or self harm - refer the matter to appropriately qualified personnel at the earliest possible opportunity.

- Notify your manager immediately and outline the course of action you have taken.
5. **SUPPORT FOR THE PERSON WHO RECEIVED THE THREAT**

The person who was the recipient of the threat should be encouraged to utilise free confidential support and counselling through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP is a service that provides employees with confidential and professional counselling and related services to assist them in resolving issues that may be work related or of a personal nature.

Employees are encouraged to access the EAP service as early as possible.

6. **REVIEW**

This Policy Statement will be reviewed after three (3) years unless earlier review is required.

7. **APPROVAL AUTHORITY**

Andrew Kefferd  
Commissioner for Public Administration  
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