

PART 2: Callers' issues: How Lifeline Shanghai can help

It is helpful to consider what a caller is looking for when they call Lifeline Shanghai. They might just want information or a place to vent or perhaps it may even sound like they are looking for someone (you!) to solve their problem for them. We need to be clear about the limits of our service.

Limits of a helpline

- We can't solve callers' emotional problems. Certainly not in one call or chat.
- We can't offer a wide range of resources which are often available in the home country.
- We can't always advise about services available in other parts of China.
- We can't do a quick fix. We are not therapists.
- We can't go deeply into problems and have any kind of continuity.
- We can't phone the police or a third party on behalf of the caller.
- We can't give medical advice.
- We can't call anyone back. They have to call us.
- We can't give advice!

At Lifeline Shanghai, we recognise that we are only ever given a small piece of the puzzle that makes up the caller's life story. We do not know all the experiences and life events that have led them here, we do not know how these impacted them in the past and how these will influence their future. We cannot pretend to understand them and what they need based on a single conversation. Hence, we can't give advice.



At best, we can only help and support our callers to tell their story, to develop insight, to clarify what they need or want and to take action. We can empower our callers to make their own decisions and choices as they, and only they, are the experts on their life.

How we can help with Physical Health Issues

- Give information and make referrals to international medical facilities - Parkway, Shanghai United Family Hospital, Shanghai East International Medical Center, Global Health Center
- Give information about local facilities^[1]_[SEP] e.g. Chinese hospitals with VIP clinics - Huashan Hospital
- Refer to the Shanghai Call Center, a government run 24 hour service to help foreigners in Shanghai and they have lists of resources
- Inform about and refer to organizations such as Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous Shanghai
- In an Emergency situation - a caller should be encouraged to go to the nearest hospital preferably by taxi as it is usually quicker than calling an ambulance. The Shanghai Call Center will translate in emergency situations. A caller could also be given Shanghai Family United Emergency number for guidance.

Good to know:

- *Abortions are not generally performed in foreign clinics. There is a list of maternity and other hospitals that do perform them.*
- *Regulation of vaccines are constantly changing and it would be best to refer to a medical practitioner or The Shanghai International Travel Centre Healthcare Center.*
- *Home visits are offered by very few facilities. Premier and Global Health Center offer home visits in certain locations and situations.*



How we can help with Mental Health Issues

- Offer emotional support to callers looking for a therapist; offer optional guidance through the SIMHA (www.s-imha.com) or the Community Center (www.communitycenter.cn) websites ^[1]_[SEP]
- Give referrals to psychiatrists (e.g. at Parkway and Shanghai Family United) ^[1]_[SEP]
- Refer Chinese callers to the appropriate helplines and support
- Be willing to listen to more information about callers' situation which helps us find referrals better suited to their needs.
- Possibly refer to the Shanghai Mental Health Centre depending on the situation.

Contact details for all the above and some other health practitioners such as dentists, are on our database and some are also on the wall in the office

How we can help with Financial Issues

- Actively listen, emotionally support and discuss different options
- For callers without medical insurance and concerns about cost, we can refer to the cheaper options of VIP clinics in Chinese hospitals or indeed any Chinese hospital, but the latter may require an interpreter to accompany them. ^[1]_[SEP]
- If local help does not seem to be available for a caller (cost, location), suggest going home for medical treatment
- Callers could also be directed to lawyers or consulates (depending on the situation)



How we can help with Work Issues

- Active listening (especially if a caller just wants to vent)
- Reflecting
- Exploring their choices
- Giving referrals for a therapist, doctor or life coach, if necessary.
- Callers could also be directed to lawyers or consulates (depending on the situation)

How we can help with Cultural Issues

- Offer a listening ear so the caller is able to vent and release their frustration.
- Empathize; it may be a relief just to pour out their feelings to an anonymous person who is ready to listen.
- Reassure the caller it's often quite normal to feel like this from time to time.
- For lonely callers, actively listen, offer emotional support, clarify what the caller says, reflect back, gently get caller to think about options.
- If caller says they don't know anyone, we can ask about what they have tried in the past to make friends
- Referral can be offered to useful websites (meetup.com and internationals.org).
- Offer practical information to callers to help them settle in and find their way around if needed websites for local magazines e.g. www.timeoutshanghai.com or www.cityweekend.com.cn
- Give contact information for The Shanghai Call Centre on, a 24 hour service for foreigners, providing information in English and other languages about life in Shanghai (transportation, events) that could be useful in helping a caller find their way about.

How we can help with relationship issues

- Active listening [L] [SEP]
- Asking questions [L] [SEP]
- Offering emotional support [L] [SEP]
- Empowering the caller [L] [SEP]
- Making referrals where possible (e.g. to therapists; to CODA –Co Dependents Anonymous to help with healthy relationships) [L] [SEP]
- Asking callers to think about their options [L] [SEP]
- Making a plan [L] [SEP]
- Encouraging them to reach out to friends/family [L] [SEP]
- Explore communication patterns used with their partner (if this is appropriate and abuse is not involved) [L] [SEP]
- Offer to role play on the phone to practice how the caller could improve communication skills [L] [SEP]

The Lifeline Shanghai database contain an extensive list of people, organisations or groups that we can refer to. Some are also on the wall in the office for easy access.

Remember that Lifeline Shanghai operates on the premise that “talking helps”, there is no expectation that we are able to or should solve any problems or fix anyone’s life. We are here to provide emotional support to our callers while they work out what they need and want and to share the resources that are available to help them.

