

Silent Calls Policy

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Related documents:	<i>Suicide policy</i> <i>Panic attack policy</i>		

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Guidance

Defining Policy, Process and Procedure

	Definition	Purpose
Policy	An overall approach or principle of action in relation to a specific issue	Describes <i>why</i> this document is required
Process	Provides a high-level view of how the policy is implemented	Outlines <i>what</i> tasks should be performed, <i>when</i> , and <i>by whom</i>
Procedure	Detailed step-by-step instructions on how to do parts of that process or specific tasks	Details <i>how</i> the steps of each task need to be performed

Background

Silent calls occur when a caller does not engage with the nightline. This can occur at the beginning of the call or in the middle of the call. There are various reasons for users to become silent such as feeling anxious, having difficulty processing emotions during the conversation, falling asleep or talking to someone else whilst they are on the call. This document covers what to do in the event of a silent call.

Resources and Research

Durham Long Silence Policy.

Good Practice Guidelines

The Good Practice Guidelines version 4 (GPG v4) has a section on this policy and procedure that you should read before creating your own policy. You can obtain the full document from the GPG Team (gpg@nightline.ac.uk).

The latest version of the GPGs state that:

GPGs relating to policy	
<u>Nightlines must:</u>	
• Have a policy for silent calls and hang ups.	
<u>Nightlines should:</u>	
• Have a policy if no initial text has been entered by the caller. • Amend online instant messaging to deal with callers who have accidentally “requested a chat” or who have ended the chat without closing the chat window. • Have a policy for helping callers who initially start talking but then become silent.	

Definitions

Term	Definition
Silent call	When a user of the service contacts the Nightline via phone call or IM and does not engage with the service. This can occur at the beginning of the call or in the middle.

Purpose

This guidance informs the Nightline volunteer what to do in the event of a silent call.

Scope

All silent calls which can be via a phone call or instant messaging service (IM).

Policy Considerations

When creating this policy how long the volunteers should keep the line for a silent user must be considered. Whilst we set out below recommendations, Nightlines can adjust the timings as they see fit and the volunteer can choose to end the call later if they believe it is necessary.

Roles and Responsibilities

The co-ordinator and additional member of the committee should be allocated to review this policy at least every two to three years.

Contact

Query	NLA Contact	E-Mail Address
Any questions relating to this policy	Policy Team	policy@nightline.ac.uk
Stakeholder issues	Sustainability Team	sustainability@nightline.ac.uk
Service Level Agreement (SLA) advice	SLA Sub-Team	sla@nightline.ac.uk
IT questions and issues	IT Department	it@nightline.ac.uk
Welfare support	Welfare Team	welfare@nightline.ac.uk
Training advice	Training Team	training@nightline.ac.uk
Research carried out for this policy	Impact Team	impact@nightline.ac.uk

Silence Policy

Policy approved	Month YYYY <i>[add details of relevant committee members, etc. if required]</i>
Policy review due	Month YYYY
Any other info?	

Definitions

Summarise definitions used, or use the table below:

Term	Definition
Silent call	When a user of the service contacts the Nightline via phone call or IM and does not engage with the service. This can occur at the beginning of the call or in the middle.
Initial silence	When a user of the service is silent from the beginning of the contact with Nightline.
Mid call silence	When a user of the service becomes silent having interacted with the Nightline volunteer previously in the contact.

Purpose

This guidance informs the volunteers of [X] Nightline what to do in the event of a silent call.

Scope

All silent calls which can be via a phone call or instant messaging service (IM).

Policy statement

[X] Nightline acknowledges that some callers may find it difficult to speak to interact with Nightline volunteers and therefore may be silent at the beginning or during a call. [X] Nightline is committed to supporting all callers and so will provide positive support, offering callers the opportunity to share if they feel comfortable doing so. [X] Nightline also recognises that silent calls may also be due to other reasons, such as a mistaken call or failed attempt to end the call. Therefore [X] Nightline will clarify the presence of callers where in question, and will end calls where appropriate to allow volunteers to answer other calls.

Roles and Responsibilities

Position	Responsibility
Coordinator	Updates policy by reviewing it at least once every three academic years and ensuring that it is still relevant and useful to volunteers in the Nightline.
Deputy coordinator/second coordinator	Reads through the policy as well, makes suggestions and with the co-ordinator considers if any amendments should be made.
Listening volunteer	Use the policy and procedure as outlined. If they feel amendments should be made they should escalate this to a member of the committee.

Reviews and amendments

List any changes to this policy that need to be recorded for historical purposes.

E.g. May 2021: changed wording on ____, updated definitions

Silent calls Procedure

Procedural Steps

Silence at the beginning of a call

Phone call

When a user contacts the Nightline via a phone call and no sound can be heard or there is some background noise then prompts must be used at **10 seconds, 1 minute, 2 minutes, 5 minutes, and 8 minutes** to encourage the user to speak.

If the caller has not spoken or indicated that they are on the call after 10 minutes, the volunteer may ask the caller to tap the phone to show that they are there and want to remain on the phone.

"I believe there is no one on the end of this call so I will hang up in a couple of minutes. If you would like to stay on the line please tap the phone to let me know, you don't need to speak if you don't want to"

If the caller does not do this, the volunteer will end the call using the phrasing suggested below.

"I'm sorry I will have to end the call now, if you would like to contact us again you are more than welcome."

If the caller does tap the phone, the volunteer will reset their support from the 2 minute mark of the call, so prompts should be used for 8 more minutes, and if there is no communication repeat the tap the phone step at the 10 minute mark.

If there is noise that suggests that the user is there, such as a person crying, then the volunteer may use their discretion around the timings of prompts. [X] Nightline holds that it is up to the discretion of the volunteer to decide if they would like to keep the call going beyond the 10 minute period.

If the silence persists, the call can be ended using the phrasing above.

Instant messaging

If there is silence at the beginning of an IM call then the volunteer must use prompts at the **1, 3, 5, 8, 11 and 15 minute marks** to provide support to the caller at set times. This will continue for 15 minutes.

If the caller has not responded the volunteer will ask the caller to type in their message box in lieu of tapping the phone.

"I believe there is no one on the end of this call so I will hang up in a couple of minutes. If you would like to stay on the line please type something in your message box, you don't have to send a message."

If the user types anything and the typing is seen, even if a message is not sent, then this resets it to the 7 minute time so prompts should be used for 8 more minutes.

If the silence persists, the following message can be sent to end the conversation:

"I'm sorry I will have to end the call now, if you would like to contact us again you are more than welcome."

[X] Nightline has agreed that the maximum time a volunteer will stay on a silent IM, regardless of if the caller has typed in the message box is **25 minutes**. If the caller has not sent a message in this time, even if they have typed in the box, the volunteer will send the same message:

"I'm sorry I will have to end the call now, if you would like to contact us again you are more than welcome."

Silence in the middle of a call

Phone call

If the user was engaging on a phone call and then stops talking then prompts should be used to encourage conversation at **30 seconds, 2 minutes, 5 minutes and 8 minutes**.

After 10 minutes, the volunteer may ask the caller to tap the phone to show that they are there and want to remain on the phone.

"I believe there is no one on the end of this call so I will hang up in a couple of minutes. If you would like to stay on the line please tap the phone to let me know, you don't need to speak if you don't want to"

If the caller does not do this, the volunteer will end the call.

"I'm sorry I will have to end the call now, if you would like to contact us again you are more than welcome."

If the caller does tap the phone, the volunteer will reset their support from the 2 minute mark of the call, and if there is no communication repeat the tap the phone step at the 10 minute mark.

If there is noise that suggests that the user is there, such as a person crying, then the volunteer may use their discretion around the timings of prompts. [X] Nightline holds that it is up to the discretion of the volunteer to decide if they would like to keep the call going beyond the 10 minute period.

For phone calls, repeat an encouraging phrase every 30 seconds. in cases where silence is prolonged but the caller appears engaged (e.g., through breathing or background noises), extending the interval to 45 seconds or 1 minute. Conversely, for highly distressed users, shorter intervals may provide additional comfort.

If you believe the user is having a panic attack please use the panic attack policy.

If the silence persists, the call can be ended. To end a silent phone call the following phrase can be used:

"I believe there is no one on the end of this call so I will hang up in a couple of minutes. If you would like to stay on the line please tap the phone to let me know, you don't need to speak if you don't want to"

The final phrase to end the silent call:

"I'm sorry I will have to end the call now, if you would like to contact us again you are more than welcome."

Instant messaging

If the user was engaging on an IM and then stopped talking for 15 minutes then the volunteer will ask the caller to type in their message box in lieu of tapping the phone.

"I believe there is no one on the end of this call so I will hang up in a couple of minutes. If you would like to stay on the line please type something in your message box, you don't have to send a message."

If the user types anything and the typing is seen, even if a message is not sent, then this resets it to the 7 minute time so prompts should be used for 8 more minutes.

For IMs, repeat an encouraging message every 2 minutes. If the silence feels intentional then longer intervals are allowed for example to use prompts every 4 minutes.

If the silence persists, the following message can be sent to end the conversation:

"I'm sorry I will have to end the call now, if you would like to contact us again you are more than welcome."

Limits on silences despite engagement

If the user becomes silent in the middle of the call and then re-engages in the call but without continuing the conversation, such as by tapping on the phone or sending a full stop on IM, then the conversation may be ended after the [second] time the silence policy has been used i.e. [two] 10 minute silent periods on the phone or [two] 15 minute silent periods on IM. However, the volunteer may choose to extend this and not end the call if they deem it fit to do so.

If there is a silence that may be related to self-harm or suicide then the suicide policy must be followed.

Ending a silent call

To end a silent phone call the following phrase can be used:

"I believe there is no one on the end of this call so I will hang up in a couple of minutes. If you would like to stay on the line please tap the phone to let me know, you don't need to speak if you don't want to"

To end a silent IM conversation the following phrase can be used:

"I believe there is no one on the end of this call so I will hang up in a couple of minutes. If you would like to stay on the line please type something in your message box, you don't have to send a message."

The final phrase to end the silent call:

"I'm sorry I will have to end the call now, if you would like to contact us again you are more than welcome."

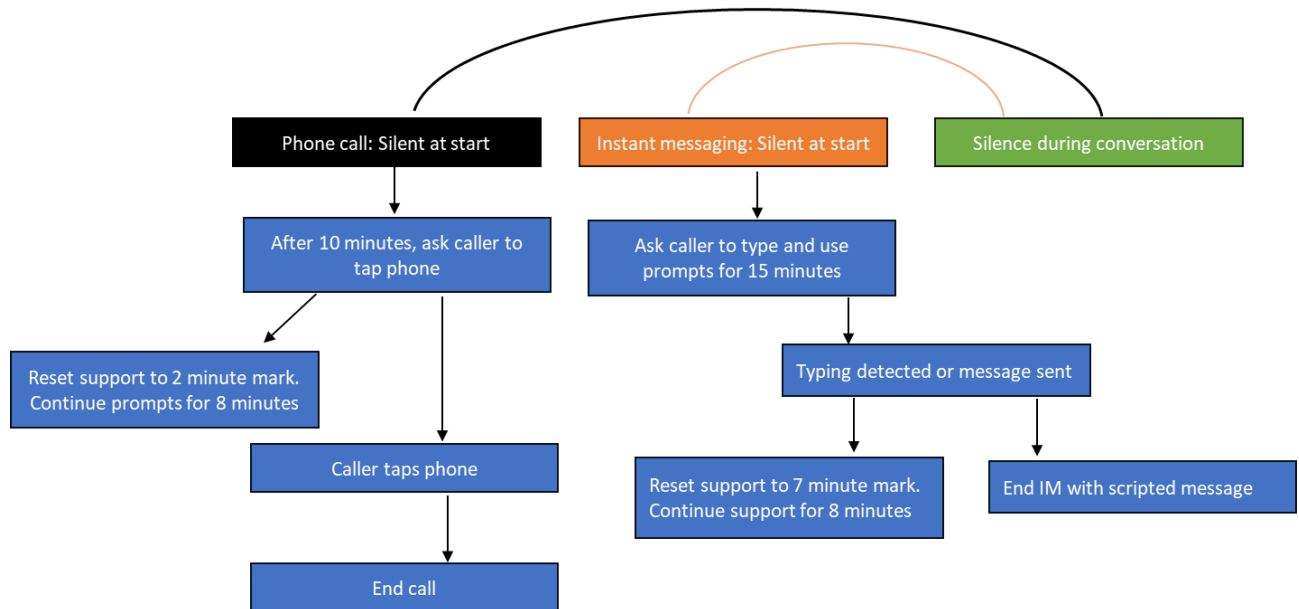
End the call once you send the above message or say the above phrase on the phone.

Phrases that can be used during silent calls

1. How are you?
2. Are you okay?
3. Would you prefer to speak to someone else? Tap the phone if yes.
4. Take your time.
5. I'm here to listen if you want to talk.
6. I'm not going anywhere.
7. I'm still here.
8. I will stay here with you.
9. I'm here if you want to talk.
10. You can talk to me about anything.
11. I understand it can be very hard to talk sometimes.
12. If you would like, we can talk about something else.
13. Nightline is a non-judgmental service, take your time before you say anything.
14. If you find it easier, you can also contact us via our instant messaging service or via email.
15. It's okay if you need a moment to gather your thoughts.
16. Take your time; there's no rush to say anything.
17. You don't have to speak if you're not ready, I'll stay on the line.
18. If you feel like sharing, I'm here to support you.
19. I understand that it might be hard to speak right now, and that's okay.
20. Silence is okay, I'll stay with you for as long as you need.

21. If there's something on your mind but it's hard to put into words, that's perfectly fine.
22. You're not alone, and it's okay to reach out however you feel comfortable.

Process



Appendix 1

Add further information here as necessary.