



Suicide Prevention  
Centre of Montreal

**Sentinels**

**Focus on Connexion  
not Perfection**

# Focus on Connection not Perfection

Trust is essential in a supportive relationship. Here are some examples of approaches you can sometimes take, along with simple techniques that may prove useful. They are designed to help build trust between a gatekeeper and someone experiencing psychological distress, so that both parties feel more at ease during the interaction.

## The authenticity of caring support

Many people who are struggling try not to give the impression that they are a burden to others.

When we ask them ;  
« *How are you?* »

The answer is likely to be ;  
« I'm good. »

A simple, generic question often elicits a similarly generic response. It is therefore particularly important to avoid this type of question when someone seems to be going through a difficult time.



Whenever the gatekeeper notices that someone is in psychological distress, it is best to adopt a warm and reassuring approach. It is important to foster a genuine, human connection rather than a mechanical or overly structured “checklist” approach. The bond of trust established in this way encourages the person in distress to open up.

# Building a connection

A caring connection can begin by assessing the person's ability to care for themselves, while expressing empathy, validating their experiences, and highlighting their strengths.

*"Good morning, I'm glad to see you. How did you sleep last night?" » - Gatekeeper*

*"I haven't slept in days. I'm way too anxious. "*  
- Co-worker

*"I find it impressive that you showed up for work despite the fact that you didn't sleep last night. It can't be easy. Have you ever talked about your anxiety to anyone?" » - Gatekeeper*

You know, you are a very important person for all of us. I notice you don't seem like yourself today. What's going on?

I can't go on anymore! I have no energy! It's so bad!



## Connection opens doors

*"I see it in your face and I hear it in your voice that things are difficult at the moment. I'm really happy that you confided in me. Is it getting so difficult that you are thinking about suicide?" » - Gatekeeper*

*"Yes... I've been thinking about it all week..." - Co-worker*

*I've completed the Gatekeeper training program, and I'm going to connect you with a resource that can help you. You're not alone. Our designated support worker is located in an office nearby. We can go see them together. There are also confidential resources, like 1-866-APPELLE. We can call them if you'd prefer. " - Gatekeeper*

**Gentle guidance is often essential in helping a person in distress.**

# The power of empathy and validation

“I can't take it anymore. I've tried everything. I just want to die.” - Co-worker

“It's important for you that things change. I believe you when you tell me you want to die. I admire the fact that you've found the strength to share how you're feeling with me.” - Gatekeeper



Responding to a person in psychological distress with “I understand” might come across as distant or overly general, just as the question “How are you?” can seem mechanical or unengaging.

To strengthen the connection and build trust, you might try a phrase like: “I understand that you're at the end of your rope. You're going through some difficult times. Is it so hard that you're thinking about taking your own life?”

**Avoid simply telling the person that you understand them; Instead, show them that you understand through active listening, empathy and validation.**

As a gatekeeper, it is essential to understand your role and its limitations.

Your mission is not to intervene directly, but to:

- Emphasize the importance of seeking help;
- Introduce and explain available support services;
- Encourage the person to contact the designated worker themselves;
- Understand the person's resistance.

Remember that it is important to guide the person toward the designated support worker.

**If the person in distress shows significant resistance, do not insist; instead, consult your designated support worker and/or the MSPC.**

**1-866-APPELLE**



PHONE  
**1-866-277-3553**



CHAT  
**SUICIDE.CA**



SMS  
**535353**