

# SIMmersion Provides Practice Conversations for 988 Lifeline Crisis Counselors

*The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, administered by Vibrant Emotional Health, asked SIMmersion to develop a series of simulations for counselor training.*

COLUMBIA, MD, UNITED STATES,  
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The Suicide Prevention Challenge

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 49,476 people died from suicide in 2022 and research estimates another 1,600,000 suicide attempts were made that same year.



Figure 1 - Counselor Training with a Virtual Role-Player

To ensure individuals who are struggling with thoughts of suicide can always get help from trained professionals, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is available via phone, text, and chat 24 hours a day 7 days a week to help those in need. According to [SAMHSA](#), in the month of August 2024 alone, they were

contacted 616,249 times. The crisis counselors responding to these contacts are well trained to listen, provide support, and connect callers to appropriate resources, and as a result, they are saving lives.

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If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, please contact the 988 Lifeline today. SIMmersion is proud to help their counselors build lasting skills.”

*Dale Olsen, Ph.D.*

## Counselor Training

Training and preparing 988 Lifeline crisis counselors to provide support is a critical mission for [Vibrant Emotional Health](#), the company that administers the 988 Lifeline. Allowing crisis counselors the opportunity to practice

critical conversations is an important part of their curriculum. To develop these virtual role-player simulations, 988 Lifeline experts contracted [SIMmersion](#) to use our PeopleSim technology. Together, SIMmersion and 988 Lifeline have developed five simulations that help prepare crisis

counselors for different types of suicide and crisis conversations. And just like each real-world conversation is unique based on the individual's circumstances, support systems, and suicidal thoughts, the practice conversations change each time they are used. To help crisis counselors build skills and gain experience, and on-screen coach provides real-time feedback.

### Practice Talking to a Caller Who May Be Thinking About Suicide

To provide crisis counselors with experience assisting someone who is currently thinking about suicide, learners can talk to a virtual role-player named Ray Scott. Like with real people who contact 988 Lifeline, Ray is in crisis, and the trainee needs to build a connection with him, learn about his current situation, identify if he is safe, and create a plan to help him stay safe, which may mean creating a realistic plan using his existing support system or helping him get emergency care. Whatever his situation, Ray seems real to learners because he has realistic complex emotions, he doesn't always answer questions directly, and the things he talks about are based on real calls.

### Practice Talking to a Caller Who Has Called on Several Occasions

It is common for someone in crisis to need ongoing support, and as part of their safety plan, they may call the 988 Lifeline multiple times. To provide crisis counselors practice and experience with individuals who previously contacted the 988 Suicide &



Figure 2 Virtual Role-Player Ray Scott who is currently thinking about suicide



Figure 3 - Virtual Role-Player Sheila Harris, a Familiar Caller

Crisis Lifeline, learners can talk with role-player Sheila Harris who has called on several occasions.

Like the call with Ray, learners must identify why Sheila called and assess her safety. If they identify that she is safe, learners should review her safety plan and help her make adjustments to ensure she remains safe. As with all the practice conversations, when learners finish their call with Sheila, they can review the transcript of their conversation and use the feedback to help them identify areas for improvement.

### Multiple Training Options

There are two versions of each of the practice simulations: one version includes the video of the caller and one that is audio only. While on a real call, learners would not be able to see the caller, the version with video is included to allow learners the opportunity to experience how physical stress and non-verbal behaviors can impact a caller's voice.

Learners are encouraged to practice talking with each role-player multiple times as for each conversation, the role-player's story, mood, and safety can change, allowing learners to gain experience talking to callers with different backgrounds and needs.

### Concluding Remarks

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline's vital mission demands that crisis counselors get the best training possible, and that includes role-play simulations offering rich and realistic experiences. SIMmersion is proud to be able to complement the Crisis Center's in-house excellent curriculum with realistic role-player practice, providing experiences that help counselors to build lasting skills.

After building role-player simulations for over 22 years, SIMmersion can meet the requirement to provide high-quality, realistic experiences talking to a variety of callers.

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