

Crisis Escalation Flowchart

Print it. Pin it where leaders can see it without asking.

Print this. Put it where your leaders can see it without asking for it. The most common failure is not a leader who escalates wrongly — it is a leader who did not know they were allowed to.

REMEMBER THIS

You do not need to be sure. You are not deciding what is true. You are deciding who else needs to know — and that decision has a low bar on purpose.

Is anyone in immediate danger — to themselves or someone else?

IF NO



IF YES · TODAY

Do not leave them alone. Call 911. In the US you can also call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) together, with them, now. Then your care leader — same day, not tomorrow.

Is this a disclosure of abuse — of a child, an elder, or a vulnerable adult?

IF NO



IF YES · TODAY

Escalate to your designated safeguarding lead today. Do not investigate. Do not promise secrecy. Reporting duties vary by state and may apply to you personally — know yours before you are standing in it.

Is this beyond what a group should carry — addiction, a marriage coming apart, grief that is not moving?

IF NO



IF YES

Referral conversation within the week. Care leader plus a vetted counselling partner. Make the introduction — do not hand over a phone number and call it care.

Are you carrying it home? Sleeping badly? Thinking about it on Tuesday?

IF NO



IF YES

That is escalation-worthy on its own. Tell your care leader you are struggling to put it down. This is what they are for, and saying it early is the job.

None of the above — the group can hold this.



IF YES

Hold it. Follow up personally within 48 hours. Tell your care leader anyway, briefly — so that if it grows, someone already knows the shape of it.

FOUR RULES THAT HOLD AT EVERY RUNG

Tell them you are escalating. Escalation done behind someone's back re-enacts exactly the powerlessness that wounded them. Say it plainly: "This is bigger than me, and I care about you too much to hold it alone. Here is who I am calling."

Do not promise secrecy you cannot keep. Name the limit before anything is disclosed, not after. A promise broken at the worst possible moment costs more than the promise was ever worth.

Do not investigate. You are not gathering evidence. Questions asked in good faith can contaminate an account and make a person harder to protect later.

CRISIS ESCALATION FLOWCHART

Write down what was said, in their words, today. Not your interpretation. Date it. Give it to your safeguarding lead. Memory is the least reliable record you own.

WHAT TO ACTUALLY SAY

Knowing you should escalate is the easy half. These are words you can use when your own have gone.

WHAT PEOPLE HEAR	WHAT IS ACTUALLY CLAIMED
Instead of “I promise this stays between us”	“Before you tell me — if anyone is in danger I have to bring someone in. Everything else stays with me. Is that okay?” Said first. Always first.
Instead of “Have you thought about hurting yourself?” said sideways	Ask it plainly: “Are you thinking about killing yourself?” The direct question does not plant the idea. It is very often a relief.
Instead of “I need to report this”	“This is bigger than me, and I care about you too much to hold it alone. I am going to call [name]. I wanted you to hear it from me first.”
Instead of filling the silence	“I don’t know what to say. I’m glad you told me.” That is a complete and often sufficient response. Then stop talking.

FILL THIS IN BEFORE YOU HAND IT TO ANYONE

A flowchart with blank names is a poster. A flowchart with names is a system.

Care leader — name and number

Safeguarding lead — name and number

Counselling partner

Emergency — 911 / 988 (US)

COMMON MISTAKE

Adopting this without a lawyer reading it. Mandatory reporting duties differ by state and by role, and this page is not legal advice. Have counsel confirm it against your jurisdiction and your policy before it goes on a wall.