

WORKSHOP SERIES

Workforce Wellness & Sustainability Workshop 5: Boundaries in Crisis Work

April 16, 2026



Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration



Disclaimer 1

The views expressed in written conference materials or publications and by speakers and moderators do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) or Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), nor does the mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsements by the U.S. government.



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Disclaimer 2

The SAMHSA has selected Altarum to provide training and technical assistance support to states, territories, tribal organizations, and community partners across the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and crisis continuum of care. Along with our partners, W2 Consulting Corporation and Change Matrix, LLC, who have extensive experience with crisis services and technical assistance, the Crisis Systems Response Training and Technical Assistance Center (CSR-TTAC) was formed to support the continued growth of 988 Lifeline and build a more robust crisis care system.



SAMHSA Team: Mays



Jill D. Mays, MS, LPC

Division Director of Crisis System Transformation for the 988 & Behavioral Health Crisis Coordinating Office (BHCCO)

Jill D. Mays is the Division Director for Crisis System Transformation for the 988 & Behavioral Health Crisis Coordinating Office at SAMHSA. She currently leads the evolutionary and collaborative work of pillars two (someone to respond) and three (a safe place for help) of the 988 Behavioral Health Crisis Continuum. Before coming to SAMHSA, Mrs. Mays served as Director of the Office of Behavioral Health Prevention and Federal Grants at the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), where she most recently oversaw all substance misuse prevention, suicide prevention, and mental health promotion, and served as principal investigator for the agency's multimillion dollar portfolio of federal grants, including 988 and CCBHC grants, and as planner for the mental health block grant. Additionally, as Assistant Director of the Office of Adult Mental Health at DBHDD, she was the Project Officer for Crisis Services. Mrs. Mays previously coordinated operation of SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH) Core Regional Call Center in Atlanta, serving FEMA Regions III & IV. Mrs. Mays is a Licensed Professional Counselor, with over 30 years of experience in the behavioral health field and is a person with mental health lived experience.

SAMHSA Team: Palmer



**CAPT Corey Palmer,
MS, MPH**

**Workforce Lead
Crisis System Transformation
for the 988 & BHCCO**

CAPT Corey Palmer is a Commissioned Officer in the U.S. Public Health Service with over 20 years of experience improving health outcomes and increasing access to quality healthcare. Currently, he serves as the Workforce Lead for the Behavioral Health Crisis Transformation Team in the 988 and BHCCO.

Prior to joining the SAMHSA, CAPT Palmer served in various leadership roles for the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Department of Defense (DoD), Defense Health Agency (DHA), and the District of Columbia Department of Health (DC DOH). He successfully spearheaded the redesign of three national health profession programs that focused on varying populations, coordinated the first Federal Roundtable on Workforce Pipeline Programs, and co-led the development of the Workforce Grand Rounds webinar series to increase the dissemination of evidence-based practices, innovative models, and promising approaches. CAPT Palmer provided leadership and direction in the development and implementation of policies, guidelines, regulations, and budget execution for national health professions programs, and advised other federal partners across the department on health career pathway programs. In addition, he worked with states and territories on the recruitment and placement of healthcare providers in rural and under-resourced communities for the National Health Service Corps. CAPT Palmer also managed healthcare programs, developed policies, and evaluated programs on local, state, and federal levels.

Workforce Wellness & Sustainability Team



Lidija Hurni



Jennifer Sedivy



Meagan MacGregor



Stephanie Berzkalns

Agenda



Speaker Introductions



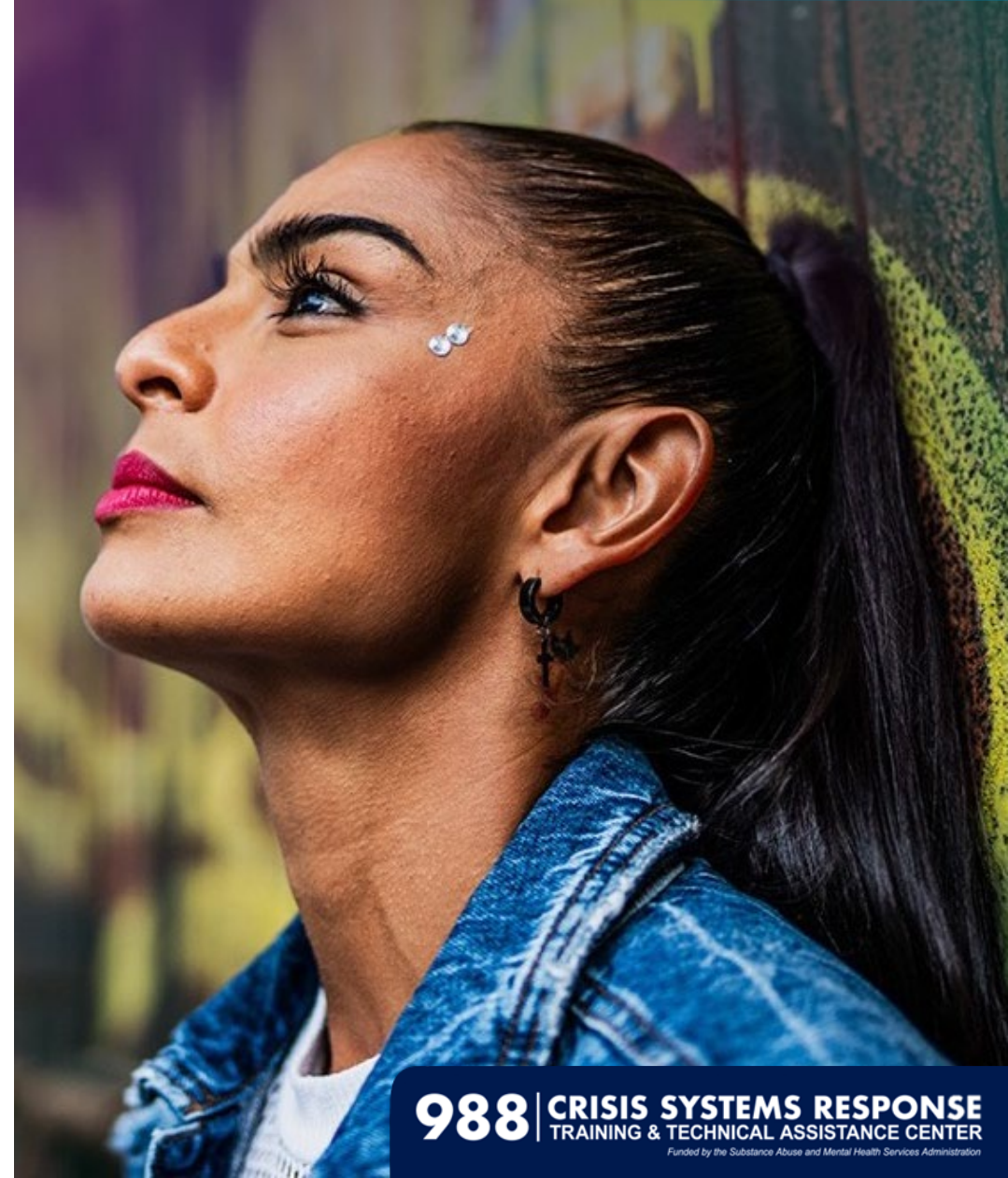
Presentation



Q&A



Wrap-Up



Guest Speaker: Castañeda-Cruz



Courtney Castañeda-Cruz is an Assistant Program Director at the Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center where she oversees the clinical operations for the 988 Lifeline, which includes the Follow up, Familiar Contacts, and Mandated Reporter Program. Courtney has spent the last 8 years with the Suicide Prevention Center, bringing strong leadership skills and a consistent focus on person-centered approaches. Her professional identity is grounded in empathy, accountability, and a deep commitment to advancing access to mental health care. Courtney holds a Masters in Social Work from Columbia University and a Bachelor of Science in Neuroscience from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

**Courtney Castañeda-
Cruz, MSW**

**Assistant Program Director,
Didi Hirsch Suicide
Prevention Center**

Guest Speaker: Vargas



Alejandra Vargas, MSW
Assistant Program Director,
Didi Hirsch Suicide
Prevention Center

Alejandra Vargas is an Assistant Program Director at the Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center where Alejandra oversees the Spanish bilingual clinical team on 988 Lifeline, 988 Lifeline Spanish Voice, and 988 Lifeline Spanish Chat/Text. Alejandra's professional experience includes suicide hotlines, nonprofit management, psychiatric urgent care, and working with immigrant populations. Alejandra's academic foundation informs a commitment to community empowerment. Alejandra earned a Masters in Social Welfare from UCLA and a Bachelors of Arts in Latin American/Latino Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz.



Boundary Setting in the Workplace

988 CSR-TTAC
April 16, 2026

Alejandra Vargas, MSW and Courtney Castañeda-Cruz, MSW

Presentation Agenda

- Learning Objectives
- About Us
- Professional Boundaries in Highly Personal Work
- Identity, Community, and Boundaries
- Connection and Nurturing Professionalism
- Encouraging Healthy Boundaries at Work

All views and opinions discussed herein represent our own work and/or the Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center, and are not meant to represent SAMHSA, HHS, or the national administration of 988.

Learning Objectives

1. Define **professional boundaries within crisis work** and explain their role in supporting emotional well-being, ethical practice, and long-term workforce sustainability.
2. Recognize **early warning signs** that professional boundaries are eroding or not being maintained in crisis response roles.
3. Identify **common challenges to establishing and maintaining professional boundaries** in crisis response settings and apply practical strategies to address those challenges.
4. Identify strategies for developing **organizational policies and leadership practices** that model professional boundaries and reinforce boundary-setting as a shared organizational norm.

About Us

Alejandra Vargas, MSW

Assistant Program Director, BL

Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center
BA, Latin American/Latinx Studies and
Literature

Masters in Social Welfare

Courtney Castañeda-Cruz, MSW

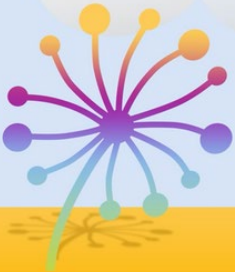
Assistant Program Director

Didi Hirsch Suicide Prevention Center
BS, Human Behavior and Genetics,
Neuroscience

Masters in Social Work

Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services was founded in 1942, by Didi Lazare Hirsch and her husband Kingdon Hirsch. They believed in support for **“the mind as well as the heart.”**

A dandelion is usually the first plant to grow and thrive



QUOTE 1

Professional boundaries in highly personal work;
personal fulfillment and professional growth

When the Professional Is Also Personal

- **A Helper Identity**
 - What does it mean to “be a helper”
 - Differentiating the person from the work
- **Clocking In and Out**
 - Literal and figurative
 - The 24/7 environment
- **Personal Connections in the Workplace**
 - Preempt and respect boundaries
 - Expect to redirect conversation

Put in the chat: What are some examples of redirection?

Learning Objective 1: Define professional boundaries within crisis work and explain their role in supporting emotional well-being, ethical practice, and long-term workforce sustainability.

Finding **Professional** Meaning

- **Personal-Professional Connections**
 - Professional and academic interests
 - Discuss burnout and compassion fatigue
- **Highlight Professional Accomplishments**
 - Name skillsets and practical applications
 - Professional growth and career opportunities
- **Clarifying Professional Boundaries**
 - Blurred boundaries are not a sign of commitment
 - Human Resources as a partner

Put in Chat: How do you nurture a professional work environment?

Learning Objective 1: Define professional boundaries within crisis work and explain their role in supporting emotional well-being, ethical practice, and long-term workforce sustainability.

Identity and Boundaries in Crisis Work

- **Lived Experience**
 - Higher risk of boundary diffusion
 - Desire for more explicit supervision
- **Appearance and Familial Background**
- **Differing Abilities and Accessibilities**
- **Organizational Role Identity**
 - Volunteers vs. paid staff
- **Intersectionality**

Learning Objective 1: Define professional boundaries within crisis work and explain their role in supporting emotional well-being, ethical practice, and long-term workforce sustainability.

Community Spotlight: Rural Communities

- Rural communities in five service areas
- Understanding the rural experience
- Agriculture and resource-based work
- Strong social, traditional, core values
- Clinical considerations
- Personal experience

Community Spotlight: 988 Spanish

- Understanding the experience of help seekers
- Spanish-speaking Veterans
- Grief and loss within Spanish-speaking communities
- Clinical considerations

QUOTE 2

In remote crisis work, boundaries do not happen automatically—they must be created with intention

Crisis Work Boundaries in Transition

- **Blurred Boundaries**
 - “Always-on” work environment
 - Physical work-to-home and home-to-work boundaries
- **Family/Pets Presence**
 - New social norms
- **New Boundary Frontier**
 - Personal priorities integrated
 - Geographic freedom

Learning Objective 3: Identify common challenges to establishing and maintaining professional boundaries in crisis response settings and apply practical strategies to address those challenges.

Kitchingman et al., 2018; Lee-Cheong et al., 2025; Mirbahaeddin & Chreim, 2023; Spafford, 2023; Willems et al., 2020; Willems et al., 2021a; Willems et al., 2021b

Impacts on Crisis Workforce

Crisis center staff, volunteers, management may observe:

- Emotional spillover
- Fatigue
- Compassion Fatigue
- Burnout
- Rise in interpersonal issues
- Defensiveness
- Pre-shift stress
- Difficulty detaching after shifts
- Disrupted sleep
- Increased call-outs

Learning Objective 2: Recognize early warning signs that professional boundaries are eroding or not being maintained in crisis response roles.

Hiding in Plain View

- **Recognizing isolation and its siblings**
 - Independence and self-reliance
 - Fear: burden, judgment, reflect their skills
 - Misunderstanding
 - Isolation
- **How to approach**
 - Different personalities and work styles
 - Self-care and professional supports
 - Role clarity and communication
 - Improved communication
 - Identify and address

Learning Objective 2: Recognize early warning signs that professional boundaries are eroding or not being maintained in crisis response roles.

QUOTE 3

Nurturing professionalism is essential to workplace and personal wellness

Learning Objective 3: Identify common challenges to establishing and maintaining professional boundaries in crisis response settings and apply practical strategies to address those challenges.

Meaningful Connections

Intentional connection can lead to:

- Safety in vulnerability
- Growth through difficult conversations
- Intentional professional growth
- Realistic skillset awareness

Put in Chat: How has intentional support contributed to your own professional growth?

QUOTE 4

“My workday may look different than your workday. Please do not feel obligated to respond outside of your normal working hours.”

Learning Objective 4:
Identify strategies for developing
organizational policies and
leadership practices that model
professional boundaries and
reinforce boundary-setting as a
shared organizational norm.

Protective Factors

- Consistent supervision/debriefs
- Peer support/community
- Training in self-compassion, boundaries, and emotional regulation
- Flexible scheduling
- Support from leadership/organization
- Intentional boundary management tactics

Kitchingman et al., 2018; Lee-Cheong et al., 2025;
Mirbahaeddin & Chreim, 2023; Willems et al., 2020;
Willems et al., 2021a; Willems et al., 2021b

Encouraging Healthy Boundaries at Work 1

Learning Objective 4:
Identify strategies for developing organizational policies and leadership practices that model professional boundaries and reinforce boundary-setting as a shared organizational norm.

- **Shift Design / Scheduling**
 - Avoid alternating overnight/daytime shift schedules
 - Guarantee protected meal breaks
 - Implement maximum interaction hours in schedules
 - Examples: shift bid, meal breaks, building trainings into schedules
- **Clear “End of Shift” Protocols**
 - Wrap up calls within schedule hours
 - Example: chat/text and call “cutoffs”
- **Remote Work Boundary Supports**
 - Encourage physical environments change
 - Limit camera-on requirement
 - Examples: “remote commute” and video-on debriefs not required

Encouraging Healthy Boundaries at Work 2

Learning Objective 4:
Identify strategies for developing organizational policies and leadership practices that model professional boundaries and reinforce boundary-setting as a shared organizational norm.

- **Supervision and Debriefing**
 - **Debriefing embedded as standard practice**
 - Example: debriefing code and on call manager debriefs
 - **Mandatory volunteer and staff supervisions**
 - Example: bi-weekly supervision
 - **Peer engagement and support**
 - Example: listen, support, connect
- **Training / Education**
 - Education on boundaries, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress
 - Normalize use of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
 - Examples: Wellness Workshop Series, weekly emails, supervision

Encouraging Healthy Boundaries at Work 3

Organizational Atmosphere and Expectations

- Establish a “right to disconnect” policy
- Model boundary-respecting behavior at leadership levels
 - Example: no organizational apps on personal phones
 - Example email signature: “My workday may look different than your workday. Please do not feel obligated to respond outside of your normal working hours.”

Frame boundary-keeping as professional practice, not selfishness.

Learning Objective 4:
Identify strategies for developing organizational policies and leadership practices that model professional boundaries and reinforce boundary-setting as a shared organizational norm.

Thank You

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References and reading recommendations
are available upon request

Questions



Upcoming 988 CSR-TTAC Events



Leveraging Local/Regional Resources and Partnerships to Address Workforce Shortages

April 30, 2026

2:00 pm EDT

[Upcoming Events,
988 Crisis Systems Help](#)

We Value Your Feedback!

Please take a minute to complete the evaluation poll on your screen.



Attendance Certificate

Available by request:
[Certificate Request Form](#)



988 CRISIS SYSTEMS RESPONSE

TRAINING &
TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE
CENTER

Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Thank you for attending!

Have additional questions? Email us!

support@988crisisttac.org

This project is supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. The Crisis Systems Response Training & Technical Assistance Center works in conjunction with the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. In 2020, Congress designated the new 988 dialing code to be operated through the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. SAMHSA sees 988 as a first step towards a transformed crisis care system in America.

Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of SAMHSA or the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

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