Boundaries: You're Not the Whole On-Call Department

Keep this. It's the whole course in writing: the three questions, what happens in each scene, the contact plan, and where it all comes from. The test is open-handout.

Quick thing before you start. Probably a good idea to check your own agency's ethics and boundaries first. Makes sense, right?

H.E.L.P. is a fictional agency. Its sponsor rule, personal-ride limit, transportation contact, staffing process, approved contact channel and after-hours coverage are story conditions. Your actual work hours, on-call duties and response procedures are the ones that count.

How the hour is built

This handout, read through once	**15 min**
The video, four chapters with Cookie and the H.E.L.P. crew	**14 min**
Your call: three practice situations	**6 min**
The test: 15 questions, 12 to pass, open-handout	**15 min**
Course evaluation and certificate	**8 min**
Total designed time	**about 1 hour**

Designed time is the course read and done the way it's laid out. How fast you move through it is up to you.

The three questions · a thinking aid

Does it need attention now?

Can we plan it?

Who else needs to be involved?

More than one can apply. A transportation problem might need action tonight for an appointment tomorrow. A safety concern might need another responder right

now. These questions help us think. They aren't a crisis assessment.

Chapter 1 · The one everybody calls

Tyler's been at H.E.L.P. four months. People like talking to him, and somewhere along the way "you can count on me" started sounding like "you can reach me whenever." Four messages land on a Tuesday night: Ray (Marcus walked out of the house), Amber (court at eight, ride fell through), Darren (short tonight, cover eleven to seven), and Sarah, whom he's never met, having a bad night. He's said yes in his head before he's stood up.

Taco: "I thought saying yes made me dependable. Following through turned out to be a fairly important part." Cookie: "When I was receiving help, I sometimes heard 'I'll try' as 'It's handled.' Now I try to say what's actually arranged, and what we're still figuring out."

Chapter 2 · Where does it go?

Sarah's call

Sarah: "I don't think I'm safe tonight." Tyler takes it seriously. How calm or upset she sounds doesn't settle the question of safety. He uses the safety questions from his training and follows his agency's response process. The receiving responder joins and confirms they're taking over; Tyler documents what happened and makes the required notifications when the procedure calls for it.

> **Take safety concerns seriously.** Use your training and response process. **Immediate life-threatening emergency: call 911.** If safety remains uncertain, seek appropriate assistance to clarify and respond. Don't treat an unanswered question as reassurance.

The scene is short on purpose. It does not show a complete safety assessment, and it isn't crisis training.

Amber's ride

Court is at eight. Tyler starts work at eight. The ride is tomorrow's event; finding a ride is tonight's work. Tyler can't give a personal ride, so they check the program's transportation contact, which is open tonight in this story. Amber calls it herself. If it falls through, the on-call coordinator helps find the next option.

Try: "We don't have a ride confirmed yet." Say what is, and isn't, confirmed. That's how Amber knows whether to keep looking.

Darren's staffing request

Tyler isn't on call in this scene and can decline. The gap still needs attention: the shift lead needs to know now so there's time to arrange coverage. If a gap creates a safety concern, that gets the appropriate response too. Your employment arrangements may be different from Tyler's.

Ray and Marcus

Marcus went for a walk. Staff know. Last time was rough, and Ray mostly didn't want to be the only one worried. A few questions helped Tyler notice that. Leon's in the kitchen; he'd listen. New information about danger would change the response.

Taco: "A guy once asked me to sit with him while he waited for a call. I started listing people he could contact. He said, 'Could you just sit here?' Sometimes I need to ask what would help before I start supplying it."

Chapter 3 · Different roles, useful support

Amber asks Tyler to take over the sponsor part of her workbook. Tyler checks what she means first. At H.E.L.P., that's kept separate from the peer supporter role. He can still help her think about what she needs from her sponsor and how to ask for a specific time.

Clarify the request. · **Check ethics and policy.** · **Explore support within your role.**

Ohio's code of ethics for peer supporters says not to enter dual relationships or commitments that conflict with the interests of the people served (OAC 5122-29-15.1 (N)(4)(i)). It doesn't name every role combination, and finishing a shift doesn't, by itself, settle a conflict. If an additional role raises questions, talk it through with your supervisor before taking it on.

Recovery conversations, practicing skills and connecting people with other support still fit peer support. Clarifying a role doesn't mean there's nothing useful left to offer.

Darren, to Ray: "Takes two to tango." Ray: "You don't know what happened." Darren pauses: "You're right. I jumped ahead. Do you want to tell me?" Later, Val: "Asking can be the useful part." If someone describes threats or abuse, take the safety concern seriously and use the appropriate response. Don't assume both people share responsibility for the harm.

Chapter 4 · A plan that survives bedtime

Tyler's dinner is cold. He wants to be available and he's starting to dread his phone. With Val he works out what the job actually requires, then the work contact, hours and after-hours coverage. A contact card can explain a service; it can't create one. If coverage is missing, that gets addressed.

Accurate hours	Approved contact channels	Verified after-hours options	Clear next steps

With Ray, Tyler owns the confusing message he gave ("I gave you my number without explaining when I'd be available"), goes over the work contact and the after-hours route, and checks: "If you needed support after my hours, which contact would you use?" Ray doesn't have to like the change right away. The plan has to be clear enough for him to use.

Taco: "Once I've handled my responsibilities and the coverage is arranged, I can be off duty, even if a little worry comes home with me."

Understand the request. · **Respond to safety concerns.** · **Check timing and role.** · **Confirm needed handoffs.** · Then explain the plan together.

In writing · the nine points

1. **Find out what the person needs.** Before agreeing, ask enough to understand the request. Consider safety, deadlines, your responsibilities, and who else can help.
2. **Use the three questions as a thinking aid.** Does something need attention now? Can support be planned? Does another person or service need to be involved? More than one may apply. They don't replace crisis training or assessment procedures.

3. **Respond to safety concerns.** Take statements about being unsafe seriously. Use the questions from your training and follow the applicable response process. Seek appropriate assistance when safety remains uncertain. For an immediate life-threatening emergency, call 911. An off-duty message doesn't create a universal obligation to monitor every channel; clarify your actual work and response responsibilities in advance.
4. **Match the plan to the deadline.** An appointment at eight needs a transportation plan that can work before eight. Check real availability and say what is still unconfirmed.
5. **Confirm urgent handoffs.** Follow the applicable process to establish that the receiving responder has taken over. An unanswered message doesn't establish that a handoff occurred.
6. **Clarify additional roles.** Check ethics and agency policy before taking on another relationship with someone you serve. Being off duty doesn't automatically resolve a conflict. Useful recovery support may still be available within your existing role.
7. **Make contact arrangements understandable.** Explain work hours, approved communication channels, verified after-hours options, and what to do if an option fails. Invite questions and check understanding.
8. **Address workload and coverage.** Raise coverage problems with the responsible workplace lead. Personal recovery and rest matter; they can't create missing staff coverage.
9. **Protect information and record relevant actions.** Use approved systems. Follow applicable confidentiality, reporting, documentation and notification requirements, including their timing.

Where this comes from

1. Ohio Administrative Code 5122-29-15.1, Certified peer supporter, paragraph (N), the code of ethics: confidentiality, conflicting relationships, applicable reporting obligations, and maintaining one's own recovery. It does not establish H.E.L.P.'s sponsor or telephone policies. codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-5122-29-15.1
2. Ohio Administrative Code 5122-29-15, Peer support services: individualized, collaborative recovery support, skill development, service connections, and assistance with crisis interventions within the service role. codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-5122-29-15

3. SAMHSA, Advising People on Using 988 Versus 911: Practical Approaches for Healthcare Providers (2024): behavioral health crisis support versus emergency response to immediate physical danger. library.samhsa.gov

The scenes in the course (Tyler, Ray, Amber, Darren, Val, Sarah, Cookie, Taco) are fictional teaching examples at H.E.L.P., a fictional peer support agency. Cookie's and Taco's anecdotes are fictional teaching examples, not accounts of any real person. Crisis steps in this course are illustrations; follow your own agency's emergency process. References checked October 21, 2026. Course version: OPS 002 v3.