

The MIEK Helpline in the Era of Epidemics and Wars

Five years ago, in the spring of 2020, when we were placed under so-called "self-isolation," students and graduates of the International Institute of Existential Consultancy (MIEK) initiated a volunteer effort to provide support to people suddenly caught in a previously unthinkable and clearly crisis situation. The MIEK Council, chaired by Semyon Yeselson, approved this initiative and proposed that we organize, through the efforts of our students and graduates, a crisis helpline modeled after the internationally recognized volunteer helplines.

Thus, in April 2020, began the creation of the world's first and, so far, only **International Volunteer Crisis Helpline for Remote Psychological Assistance**, which would later become known as the **MIEK Crisis Line**. This article aims to introduce the MIEK Crisis Line to a wider audience and, looking back, revisit the five-year journey of our growth and development.

How Did It All Start?

In late March 2020, when we were already confined to our homes, Semyon Yeselson contacted me and proposed organizing a volunteer crisis support line using the resources of the MIEK therapeutic community. At the time, the task seemed impossible. Still, given the circumstances, I accepted the challenge.

The **first step** was to gather a team of like-minded helpers—those, like myself, who had been trained in volunteer crisis line work. Thirteen MIEK students and graduates with over 300 hours of direct experience responded. By April 4, we held our first meeting and decided to proceed with creating the MIEK Helpline.

We announced an open call for applications and began the organizational work: setting consultant qualification criteria, developing a specialized training course, and building the structure and internal protocols of the service. A

supervisory board was also formed to oversee and support future volunteer consultants.

After six weeks of preparation, we received more than 80 applications. On **May 16, 2020**, we held the first general meeting and officially launched the **MIEK International Volunteer Crisis Helpline**. The **first training course** was announced. And on **September 10, 2020**, World Suicide Prevention Day, we went live and received our first call—this day is now considered our birthday.

Call the MIEK Crisis Line if:

- You feel sad, scared, or lonely;
- You're mourning a personal loss;
- You're overwhelmed by life's challenges;
- Life seems unbearable and you're contemplating suicide;
- And you have no one to talk to—

Call us. Our trained consultants will listen to anyone in need of support or urgent psychological help.

Our Principles

We fully uphold the foundational principles of volunteer crisis helplines:

- **Accessibility:** Available daily from 12:00 to 00:00 (Moscow time), including weekends and holidays.
- **Anonymity:** We do not track or collect personal data. Callers may use a pseudonym.
- **Confidentiality:** We do not record conversations or share information with third parties without clear consent.

Who We Are

Over five years, more than **150 people** have become students, consultants, or supervisors at the Crisis Line. All are current or former students of MIEK and have passed a professional selection based on:

- Empathy and emotional sensitivity;
- Psychological stability and resilience;
- Personal and collective responsibility;
- Self-reflective capacity;
- Clear motivation for volunteer work.

Currently, **38 qualified consultants** and **9 supervisors** are active. **Nine trainees** are finishing our tenth training cohort. Our consultants operate from **56 cities across 14 countries and 8 time zones**, making MIEK the world's only international remote volunteer psychological crisis line.

Countries & Time Zones

Country	Cities	Time Zone
Austria	Klagenfurt	GMT+1
Belarus	Minsk	GMT+3
UK	Brighton, London	GMT
Germany	Andernach, Berlin	GMT+1
Georgia	Batumi	GMT+2
Israel	Be'er Sheva	GMT+2
Spain	Getafe	GMT+1
Italy	Milan	GMT+1
Kazakhstan	Almaty	GMT+5
Poland	Wrocław, Kraków	GMT+1
South Korea	Busan	GMT+9
Russia	28 cities	GMT+3 to +10
Ukraine	11 cities	GMT+2

Country	Cities	Time Zone
France	Marseille, Nice, Paris	GMT+1

A dedicated coordinator maintains schedules and ensures smooth operations across this diverse geography.

How It Works

All consultants complete an **intensive 110-hour training program**, recognized in 2021 by the MIEK Council as the entry-level of MIEK's professional training for existential therapists. The training includes four modules:

1. **Fundamentals of Remote Counseling:** Establishing contact in non-visual settings, safety protocols, and managing difficult calls.
2. **Crisis Counseling by Phone:** Core module on handling acute grief, suicide, abuse, unplanned pregnancies, and more.
3. **Basics of Psychological Counseling:** For those without a psychology degree, covering common issues like mental illness, sexual concerns, family dynamics.
4. **Practical Training:** Simulated calls and emotional processing using real (anonymized) case material. The course ends with a qualifying exam, including a live call analysis.

In exchange for free training, consultants commit to at least **300 volunteer hours**, fulfilling both our service needs and the **European clinical practice standard** for psychotherapists.

Volunteers work **two six-hour shifts monthly**, completing their 300 hours in about 2.5 years. The MIEK Council designated the line as an official platform for clinical practice under supervision.

Many consultants stay beyond their initial contracts, working fully as volunteers. Currently, our schedule allows daily service from **12:00 to 00:00 (GMT+3)**, with plans to become 24/7.

Our Tools

Initially hosted on **Skype**, the service moved to **Telegram** in summer 2022, where a custom chatbot made it more accessible—especially to younger users. As of **May 2025**, when Skype shut down, the entire service now runs through Telegram.

Supervision & Burnout Prevention

To prevent burnout and secondary PTSD, all consultants receive regular supervision from experienced crisis line professionals. Each consultant is part of a **supervision group** and is assigned a **personal supervisor**.

Three types of supervision are available:

1. **Emergency one-on-one supervision** within 48 hours of a traumatic shift;
2. **Mandatory monthly group supervision** with their direct supervisor;
3. **Optional group supervision** with a different supervisor (monthly roster).

Our Impact in Numbers

- **25,500+ hours** of volunteer hotline work over five years;
- **4,200+ calls**, including **3,068 direct crisis calls**;
- **1,500+ crisis interventions**, with **241 suicidal calls**, and **495 from abuse victims**;
- **76.46% of callers** are women; **33.8% aged 25–35**, **33.3% aged 35–50**;
- Since the Telegram bot launched, **15.26% of calls** are from **teenagers (14–18)**—the most complex cases, and growing.

Beyond the Hotline

The MIEK Crisis Line is also active in professional and academic circles, contributing to **21 events** from 2020–2025, including:

- **IX World Congress for Psychotherapy** (2020, online)
- **I Intercontinental Extraterritorial Congress** (Moscow, 2022)
- **III World Congress on Existential Therapy** (Athens, 2023)

- **II Congress of Russian-speaking Psychologists and Psychotherapists** (Moscow, 2023)
- **V & VI FETE Congresses** (Istanbul 2024, Rome 2025).

Recordings of these events are available on our official YouTube channel.

We have also developed partnerships with **Vitaru Itali**, "**We Are Near**", "**WeTogether**", and the **Russian Association of Emergency Psychological Help Lines (RATEPP)**.

In May 2023, in Athens, we connected with **Dr. William Forman (USA)**, who co-led a trauma-focused seminar with us in October 2023. We are currently discussing holding his next seminar in **Kyiv**.

Looking Ahead

We remain hopeful and committed to continuing and expanding the work of the MIEK Crisis Line. We accept applications year-round and run training courses **twice a year**. The ninth cohort is completing training, and the **tenth anniversary cohort** is now enrolling.

Since summer 2022, the MIEK Council has opened enrollment not only to MIEK students and graduates but also to the broader public on a paid basis, including those interested in MIEK's curriculum and in gaining qualifications in remote crisis counseling.