

# Considering safeTALK Evaluation and Research?

*LivingWorks believes that evaluation and research play a vital role in the ongoing development and improvement of its programs and in building empirical support for their effectiveness. The independence of this work is essential to its integrity. Our commitment is to ensure that those conducting evaluation and research have access to documents that clearly articulate the purpose, scope, and rationale for our programs. This paper on safeTALK is part of a series that provides this background on each program. It includes a Program Logic framework that describes the program's formative influences, learning processes, intended outcomes, and anticipated impacts.*

## Program Overview

### Description

*safeTALK* is a half-day training program designed to fill a risk-recognition and safety-connection gap common in most communities. It aims to increase participants' willingness and ability to recognize when a person might have thoughts of suicide, engage them in direct and open talk about suicide, and move quickly to connect them with someone able to provide a suicide first-aid intervention. The program illustrates ways people often miss, dismiss, and avoid suicide. The *TALK* acronym (Tell, Ask, Listen, and KeepSafe) is then introduced as a series of steps that initiate open conversations about suicide and facilitate safe connections.

*safeTALK* aims to protect participants' lives as well as the lives of others. *TALK* invites people to consider whom they would "Tell" if they had thoughts of suicide, and what might help or hinder others from disclosing these thoughts. The program actively works to create a safe learning environment.

The program's subtitle (Suicide Alertness for Everyone) affirms that suicide safety is a responsibility shared by the whole community. *safeTALK* offers accessible training to a wide range of potential participants, helping them increase their alertness to suicide in everyday relationships and facilitate safe connections. Some will find that *safeTALK* stimulates their interest in further training beyond the contained, yet vitally important, connecting role.

### Rationale

The fundamental rationale for *safeTALK* is that community vigilance about suicide, and universal alertness to people who may be considering suicide, are essential foundations for suicide-safer communities. Help-seeking and opportunities to provide help often present first within informal relationships among peers, within families, in social settings such as places of study, recreation, and work, or in the aftermath of impactful events. Accordingly, *safeTALK* is positioned within the gatekeeper training tradition as a community-based suicide intervention program, focused particularly on engaging informal helpers. These helpers learn how to be more alert to communications inviting help and to facilitate open and honest conversations about suicide. They also learn how to identify and access connections to people and suicide first-aid services that can help them KeepSafe and get further assistance. The defining construct for the program is suicide safety. A paper<sup>1</sup> on the literature supporting the rationale for *safeTALK* and its key concepts is available on LivingWorks' website, [www.livingworks.net](http://www.livingworks.net).

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# Mapping Evaluation and Research

## Theory of Change

The rationale for *safeTALK* and the program itself are grounded in a theory of change.<sup>2</sup> The working assumption is that *safeTALK* training will enhance participants' alertness to the presence of suicide thoughts in others and increase their ability to facilitate safe connections to suicide first-aid resources. The key practical learning outcome is that participants will be willing and able to apply the *TALK* steps and that those they reach out to will be connected to suicide first-aid resources.

A significant challenge for evaluation and research is that the people whom the training is ultimately designed to benefit are not themselves in the training. Accordingly, factors influencing the program's ultimate impact on persons with thoughts of suicide are identified and described so they can be accurately measured or explored. The relationship between or among these factors is also of research and evaluation interest.

Since Program Logic<sup>3</sup> is a widely accepted way of mapping these influences and relationships, LivingWorks has developed a logic framework for *safeTALK*. We have identified the development process, the personal and material resources, the learning experience, the learning outcomes, participants' performance in applying learning, and the impact on those receiving help as key domains of interest.

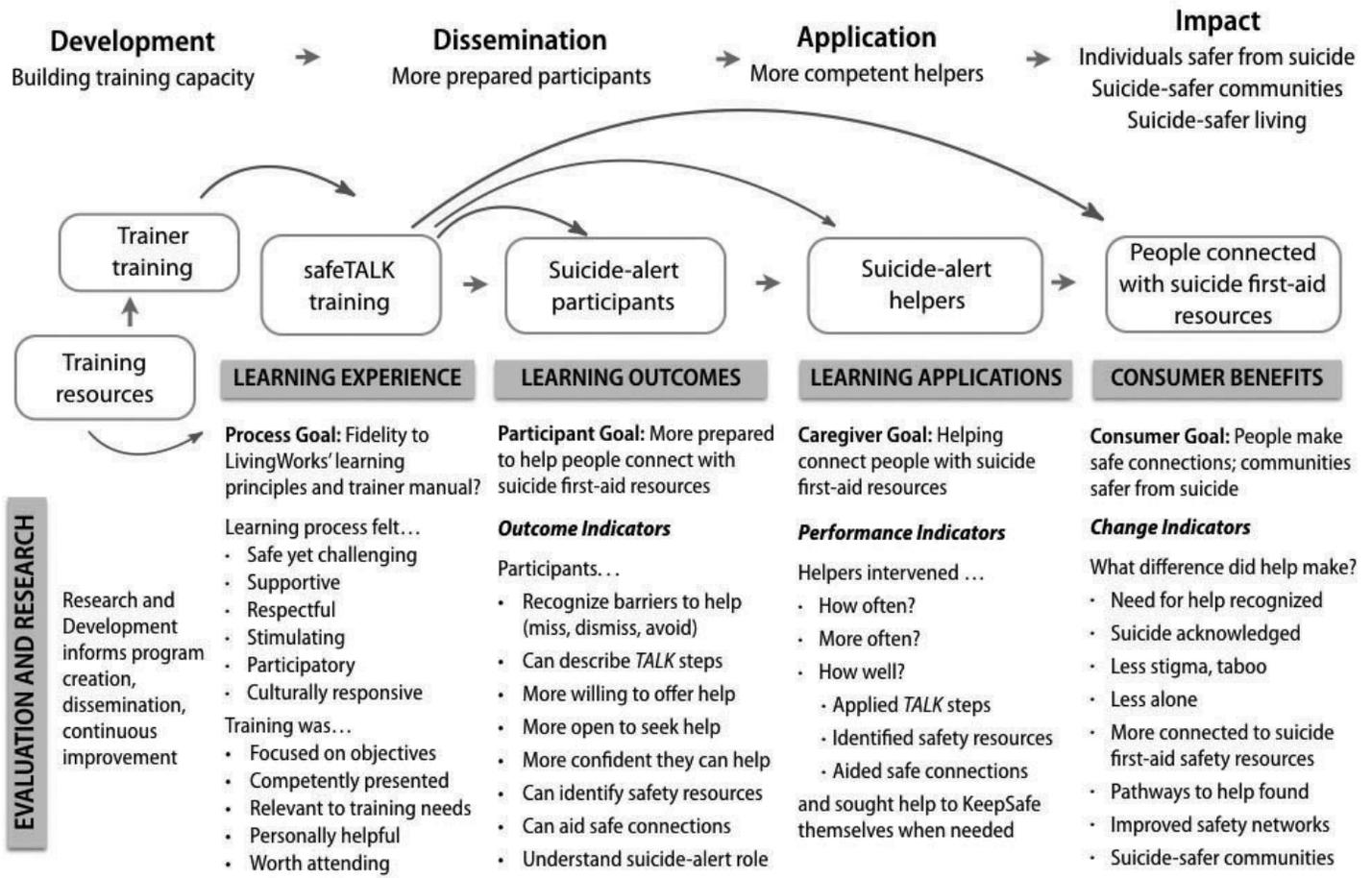
## safeTALK Program Logic

Key elements of the *safeTALK* Program Logic are described below and mapped into the graphic that follows.

- **Inputs** such as training materials and trainers' training are designed to provide a consistent, quality learning experience aligned with the program's values and objectives. The *safeTALK* literature review<sup>1</sup> outlines conceptual inputs informing program development. Rothman's<sup>4</sup> research and development framework has guided the development of all LivingWorks training programs.
- **The learning experience** reflects the quality and safety of the workshop environment. Evaluations elicit feedback on whether the training was competently facilitated, reflected adult learning principles, resulted in a clear understanding of core concepts, was perceived as worthwhile, and helped develop a working knowledge of the *TALK* steps.
- **Learning outcomes** focus on what participants learned and whether the program's learning objectives were met. The overarching goal of *safeTALK* is to help participants to be more alert to signs that someone may be considering suicide and increase their willingness, confidence, and ability to follow the *TALK* steps to keep that person safe.
- **Learning applications** explore how participants applied program learning. It is helpful to know what difference *safeTALK* made to their willingness to approach and help someone who may be thinking of suicide, and the frequency of their involvement. Suicide-alert helpers could be invited to share their experiences of using the *TALK* framework and their observations about how it informed and aided their ability to help. Investigations into fidelity in applying these steps might also be considered as a post-workshop quality assurance measure.
- **The impact** of these interventions (and indirectly the training) is what matters most. Provider, consumer and observer perspectives all contribute to understanding impact. Two levels of impact are anticipated: Did these interventions initiate open conversations about suicide with individuals that resulted in safe connections with suicide first-aid resources? And did training contribute to suicide-safer organizations and communities?

The *safeTALK* Program Logic graphic proposes some indicators for each of the domains of interest that are aligned with design intentions. We invite feedback from evaluators and researchers on how the potential range of these indicators can be expanded. Training follow-up may also affect outcomes, such as whether organizations hosting training provide subsequent support for *safeTALK*-trained helpers through their intervention policies and practices. The graphic aims to illustrate the range of possible areas for research and evaluation focus, as discussed above, rather than limit or conclusively define them.

## LivingWorks *safeTALK* - Program Logic Evaluation Framework



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## The Contributions of Evaluation and Research

There will be overlap between evaluation and research. However, we anticipate that evaluations will focus more on program effectiveness and improvements—assessing whether, and to what extent, *safeTALK* offers value and benefits consistent with its objectives. Results will help improve program quality, fidelity, and effectiveness. Value for money and social return on investment may also feature along with comparing the unique contributions of *safeTALK* with alternative training programs. We expect research to investigate the working assumptions, concepts, and predicted consumer impacts of *safeTALK* and examine factors affecting implementation fidelity following workshop attendance. Research will determine the level of empirical support for the program's theory of change and its intended benefits. It will also contribute to knowledge about what works in suicide intervention training and which factors are most strongly associated with good outcomes and impacts.

# Diverse Methodologies

LivingWorks encourages a diverse range of methodologies in conducting evaluation and research on its programs. Quantitative methodologies will build a growing body of research evidence that collectively supports robust findings about whether and how effectively the training supports outcomes and impacts consistent with its objectives. We hope these investigations will be complemented by phenomenological qualitative inquiries, such as case studies, that illustrate how training is experienced and applied and provide a nuanced understanding of the impact of *safeTALK* interventions on those who provide and receive them. Mixed methods strategies will be able to tap into the potential of both approaches. A paper on LivingWorks' website outlines some of our aspirations for developing a broad view of evidence featuring quantitative and qualitative approaches.<sup>5</sup> A document<sup>6</sup> on LivingWorks' core beliefs summarizes our guiding values.

The *safeTALK* Program Logic aims to provide a sufficiently broad framework within which evaluators and researchers can identify their specific contributions and compare their findings with those of others. We also hope that it stimulates ideas about additional avenues of research and evaluation inquiry. Hopefully, it creates a forum for dialogue about what works, what the critical success factors are, how training can be improved, and which areas require further investigation. Our best guidance will come from those who participate in our training programs, and ultimately from the persons with thoughts of suicide whom they seek to help.

While assembling repertoire of well-validated existing measures relevant to the program, we also intend to develop, trial, and validate research measures specifically aligned with the program's concepts, model, processes, and objectives.

We encourage anyone researching or evaluating any of our training programs to contact us at [research@livingworks.net](mailto:research@livingworks.net). We can provide relevant background on our values and programs, share information about work already done, offer thoughts on work yet to be done and, where possible, connect people with others who are evaluating or researching our programs. Beyond this collaborative role, we believe it is important to respect the independence of the work being done and the reporting of key findings.

## References

1. LivingWorks. (2018). *safeTALK Literature: An overview of its rationale, concepts, and research foundations*. Manuscript in preparation.
2. The rationale and methodology for this approach have been articulated in many settings. See, for example, Rogers, P. (2014). *Theory of change: Methodological briefs - Impact evaluation no. 2*. Florence, Italy: UNICEF Office of Research.
3. Many variations of Program Logic frameworks are available. For one such comprehensive guide, see: <https://www.wkkf.org/resource-directory/resource/2006/02/wk-kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide>
4. Rothman, J. (1980). *Social R&D: Research and development in human services*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
5. LivingWorks. (2018). *LivingWorks' perspectives on evaluation and research of suicide intervention training* Manuscript in preparation.
6. LivingWorks. (2018). *LivingWorks' core beliefs: A suicide-safer world*. Manuscript in preparation.