



Georgia
Department of
Behavioral Health
& Developmental
Disabilities

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

my GCAL Text/Chat Information for School Counselors

What is GCAL?

The Georgia Crisis & Access Line (GCAL) is a free crisis and access line funded by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities that has been operating since 2006. Until now, GCAL has exclusively responded to the needs of Georgians via phone. This is the first time the GCAL service has been available via text and chat.

What is the my GCAL app?

The app is simply a connection to the Georgia Crisis & Access Line. It allows young people in Georgia to choose how they want to reach out to us either through text, chat, or phone call.

How does my student use Text/Chat?

Your student may download the **My GCAL** app through Google Play for Android systems or the App Store for iOS systems.

Can GCAL be accessed without the app?

GCAL is always available by phone without using the app.



Who will be texting or chatting with my student when they use the app?

A trained GCAL staff member will text or chat with your student when they use **My GCAL** to help them with many things that youth and adolescents have to deal with in their lives. **My GCAL** was created to provide a warm and supportive outlet for youth and adolescents to talk or to reach out in the event of a behavioral health crisis. No topic is too big or too small. Our team consists of trained care consultants and licensed clinicians 24/7.

What information is needed from my student when they use the app?

Your student will be asked to tell the GCAL staff member what they want to talk about. They will also be asked to provide their name, phone number, school name, and home zip code. But, if the student does not want to provide that information, it is okay. We ask for that information because it helps us better identify how to support them when we are texting or chatting, but we don't require it because it could be a barrier that prevents some individuals from reaching out.

Will anyone automatically contact me about my student's text and chat?

No. Any information related to the student may be requested and released to the parent/guardian. However, if we become aware that a student is in crisis and is currently at school, we may need to contact the school for assistance in getting help to the student immediately.

What if my student is thinking about harming him/herself or acting on suicidal thoughts?

As a licensed educator in the state of Georgia, you must follow the Jason Flatt Act of Georgia (May 2015). Your area Board of Education has guidelines that you must adhere to when a student reports suicidal ideations or suicide attempts. **My GCAL** does not replace any of those policies or procedures, however it does give another avenue to offer support to young people in need.

Can I use Text/Chat for concerns about my student?

My GCAL was created for your young Georgians to have a simple way to contact a behavioral health professional for support on their own. If you have concerns about a student, please follow the guidelines set by your Board of Education to ensure that parents/guardians and the appropriate authorities are contacted to bring awareness to your concerns. You are always welcome to call GCAL if you need our professional assistance at **1-800-715-4225**. We are always a resource for you. We need to keep the text and chat lines open for those in crisis.

What about parental consent?

Crisis lines are designed to provide immediate assistance in the event of a behavioral health emergency and sometimes information for individuals who may just have a

question about a behavioral health challenge. Crisis lines do not provide active treatment, so consent is not necessary. Though the professional intervening will attempt to gain identifying information if at all possible, text, chats and phone calls are often handled anonymously. This is sometimes the only way individuals who are too fearful about reaching out for help feel comfortable starting the conversation. This is a confidential service except in situations where we believe safety is compromised.

What if the student needs help but doesn't want help?

Our team is highly trained to work with individuals on active engagement and collaborative problem-solving, which often results in connection to care even for individuals who may begin the conversation unwilling to give any information at all.

If the GCAL professional answering texts and chats believes that a connection to treatment is necessary, we will work in conjunction with the young person and parents/guardians to facilitate the connection to care.

Will you intervene if there is concern about safety?

Absolutely! If our clinical staff believes there is imminent risk to anyone using our services or those around them, we work diligently to get rescue care to them 24/7/365. Our goal is to work collaboratively with the individual and those who care for them to resolve crises or intervene before there is a crisis. If there is a need for immediate crisis intervention, our team is trained to do everything possible to intervene.

Suggestions for best use and distribution of the my GCAL app

You may want to show students you are concerned about the app, so they can download it and have it available in the event that they need to seek behavioral health crisis care. It may also be effective to share the app in small groups that you engage with.

Students should understand that those responding to texts and chats are real people. We do not use artificial intelligence or "virtual agents." It is also important that large groups of students don't initiate texts, chats, or calls through **My GCAL** all at once just to check it out. This could result in unintentionally flooding the system with test contacts and may interfere with those actually in crisis getting the quickest response possible. Please keep this in mind when educating students about the app and its function.

How do I get more information?

If you are not needing immediate crisis assistance but have questions specifically about how the app functions or would like promotional materials, please call our business line at **404-420-3202**, and someone will get back to you as soon as possible.