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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**SMALL TALK IS NO SMALL THING**

**Samaritans’ *Small Talk Saves Lives* campaign launches as half of us admit to swerving someone we** **don’t know to avoid small talk.**

**A Pop-up ‘Small Talk Salon’ will give London King’s Cross passengers a chance to practice their small talk with a trim and a chat**

New findings released today by Samaritans reveal nearly half of British adults avoid engaging with someone they don’t know to avoid small talk – whilst more than one in five (22%) are worried they would say the wrong thing when engaging with someone.

But suicide prevention charity Samaritans knows small talk can save lives and we are all better at it than we think. Although 94% of people say they don’t have a go-to question to start small talk, 80% have used small talk in their personal lives over the past month, and over half (52%) often or always use small talk in their professional lives too.

Delivered in partnership with Network Rail, British Transport Police, and the wider rail industry, *Small Talk Saves Lives* empowers the public to trust their instincts and start a conversation if they think someone needs help in railway stations and other public settings. The campaign reassures the public that a little small talk like ‘do you know where I can grab a cuppa?’ can be all it takes to interrupt someone’s suicidal thoughts and could help set them on the journey to recovery.

People might worry that they will say the wrong thing, but saying something is better than saying nothing.

Today (22 February 2024) Samaritans will be at London King’s Cross railway station hosting the ‘Small Talk Salon’. We know two in five of us (40%) use small talk when at the hairdressers, and our salon with a twist - running for one day only - invites guests to drop in for a quick treatment and a chat. By bringing hairdressers, barbers, and nail techs to the station, the charity is giving people the opportunity to practise their small talk with the masters of small talk themselves. Hopefully, they will leave feeling better than before and more confident about their conversation starting skills.

With one in three (34%) confessing to not knowing what to say to initiate conversation through small talk, Samaritans is calling on people across the UK to give it a go, as a simple comment about the weather could be all it takes to save someone's life.

Bessie knows how powerful small talk can be. Whilst working as a train guard, she spotted someone in need of help. She said: “Just that one little bit of positive small talk can go so far. They caught my eye because it was a lot of, flitting around, looking around, looking at their phone. Deep down, you have got all that adrenaline going and you're thinking, ‘what should I say?’ I had found something about what they were wearing, and it was a case of just going over and saying, "Oh, my goodness, I absolutely love what you're wearing. Where have you got that from?" It was just a short, sharp answer of "I don't know." That's when you can kind of edge your way in to say, "Are you okay?". Just that one little bit of positive small talk and it can go so far. It was a positive outcome. Take that chance because it is the most important and pivotal thing you could do.”

**Samaritans CEO Julie Bentley said,** "Every day, there are people across Great Britain who are in distress and need support. Our *Small Talk Saves Lives* campaign empowers people to trust their instincts and have the confidence to act in a way that could save a life. To mark the start of the four-week campaign, we are launching our Small Talk Salon at London’s King’s Cross railway station today, seeing our remarkable volunteers raise awareness of the campaign, whilst encouraging commuters to pluck up the courage to use small talk, to support those in need of help."

**Andrew Haines, Network Rail chief executive, said:** “The *Small Talk Saves Lives* campaign has shown us how we each have the skills to genuinely help someone in distress. I am ever so proud of our relationship with Samaritans and British Transport Police and hope this next stage of the campaign continues to help educate and inform people that small talk can be lifesaving.”

**British Transport Police Assistant Chief Constable, Paul Furnell said:** “We remain committed to protecting vulnerable people across the network. Our experience tells us that engaging in conversation at the right time can make all the difference. This campaign continues to encourage us all to try a little small talk, but if you don’t feel comfortable or safe to intervene, tell a member of rail staff or a police officer. You can text British Transport Police on 61016 or call 999.”

For more information and tips, visit [Samaritans.org/smalltalksaveslives](http://www.samaritans.org/smalltalksaveslives) or join the conversation on social media using #SmallTalkSavesLives

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**Notes to Editors**

**About the research:**

The research was conducted by YouGov from 25-26 January 2024 with a total sample size of 2,000 GB adults (18+).

**Samaritans and *Small Talk Saves* Lives:**

* Over the next few weeks Samaritans volunteers will also be hosting engagement events at local stations across the network and in the communities, speaking to people about the importance of small talk.
* Launched in 2017, *Small Talk Saves Lives* was developed after research from Middlesex University showed the positive part the public could play in suicide prevention. The campaign is supported by suicide prevention expert Dr Lisa Marzano from Middlesex University.
* Due to the proven link between certain types of media reporting of suicide and increases in suicide rates, please be mindful of Samaritans’ [*Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicid*e](https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/media-guidelines/guidance-reporting-rail-suicides/) and [*Rail Suicide*](https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Media_guidelines_-_Rail_suicides_factsheet_UK_Final.pdf).
* In partnership with Network Rail, Samaritans has trained over 28,000 rail staff and British Transport Police in suicide prevention, enabling them to identify and support vulnerable people to safety. This is part of the charity’s long-standing partnership with the rail industry to reduce suicides and support those affected by them.
* Anyone can contact Samaritans FREE any time from any phone on 116 123, even a mobile without credit. This number won’t show up on your phone bill. Or you can visit [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org/)