

Network Rail joins Samaritans to remind public small talk is no small thing

February 22, 2024



Network Rail has joined Samaritans, British Transport Police and the wider rail industry to remind the public that small talk can be lifesaving as part of Samaritans' *Small Talk Saves Lives* campaign.

New findings released by Samaritans reveal nearly half of British adults (49%) 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 small talk is no small thing 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.

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 station hosting the 'Small Talk Salon'.

We know two in five of us (40%) use small talk when at the hairdressers and the 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 technicians 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.

Bessie Matthews knows how powerful small talk can be. Whilst working as a train guard she spotted someone in need of help.

Bessie 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’ve 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 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.”

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

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](https://www.samaritans.org/smalltalksaveslives) or join the conversation on social media using #SmallTalkSavesLives