

# NAVIGATING A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

It can be a challenge to determine if a situation is a crisis. Some general indicators can be:

- The behavior puts the person at risk of harming themselves or others.
- Without crisis responding or intervention, the person is likely to have significantly reduced levels of functioning (e.g. placed in a more restrictive setting like the hospital or jail).
- The person cannot resolve a situation with the skills and resources available.

## Potential Signs of a Crisis

- Inability to cope with daily tasks
- Hygiene, eating, sleep difficulties
- Sudden changes in mood
- Increased energy or pacing
- Disorganized or delusional speech
- Suicidal thoughts or behavior
- Increased agitation
- Verbal threats
- Physical violence
- Destroys property
- Inappropriate language
- Abusive behavior
- Hurts others
- Self-injury
- Drug/Alcohol abuse

## Guidelines for De-escalation

- Ask how you can help
- Use clear language
- Use “I” statements
- Present self as a calming influence
- Use non-threatening body language
- No touching, shouting, or sudden movements
- Provide validation/acceptance
- Use active listening skills
- Paraphrase concerns
- Focus on strengths
- Build hope - resolution is possible!
- Reduce distractions (ask others to leave, turn off the TV, etc.)
- Do not personalize
- It is okay to be silent
- Speak quietly and calmly (avoid yelling)

## Behaviors & Responses to Avoid

- Challenging delusional thinking or beliefs that seem untrue or false to you
- Arguing or threatening
- Intense questioning
- Sarcasm, laughing, or humor
- Sudden or unannounced actions
- Restricting the person's movements
- Other statements or actions that you expect could increase the person's fear or aggression

**REMEMBER!**

**EVERY SITUATION IS UNIQUE AND CRISIS SITUATIONS CAN BE HARD TO PREDICT.**

## Additional Ways to Help

- Do not leave the person alone unless you are concerned about your personal safety.
- Take a break from de-escalation if needed, but try to remain in contact in some way.
- Mental health professionals always advocate seeking professional help for someone who has suicidal thoughts.
- Try to involve the person in the decision-making about what to do, who should be told, and how to seek professional help.
- Use phrases that support feelings of control and safety:  
“Would that be all right?”  
“Do I have that right?”  
“So, let me see if I got this. You are saying...”  
“Would you mind if I...”  
“I can see why you’d feel that way.”



# 24/7 INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

**988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (call or text 988, or chat 988lifeline.org)**

**Crisis Text Line  
Text "HOME"  
to 741-741**

**Trevor Project**  
suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ young people.

**Text: 'START' to 678-678  
or call 1-866-488-7386**

## CALLING 911



### Remember:

**Try and stay calm.**

**Let the operator know the person is having a mental health crisis.**

**Ask them to send someone who is trained in mental health crises.**

## Crisis Checklist

Adapted from NAMI, 2018

**It is important to prepare BEFORE a crisis occurs. Talk with the person during calm times and make a plan.**

**Keep the information below in a location that is easy to remember and access - 911 may ask you for this information when you reach out for help.**

- Person's general information
- Contact information for family
- Contact information for health care professionals
- Strategies and treatments that have worked in the past
- A list of what might make the situation worse and a list of what might help
- Current medication(s) and dosages
- Current diagnosis(es)
- Person's treatment preferences
- Contact information for nearby crisis centers or emergency rooms
- Contact information for adults the person trusts
- Safety plans



**IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT PERSONAL SAFETY AT ANY TIME, LEAVE THE LOCATION IMMEDIATELY**

**to learn more  
or find a center near you, visit:  
heads-up-pa.org**



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