

### Handling a Mental Health Crisis

*A mental health crisis can happen to anyone – even those people who may not have a pre-existing mental health condition or diagnosis.*

For purpose of this article, ‘mental health crisis’ refers to **thoughts or intentions** of injuring one’s self or others. Also, a crisis may refer to the individual developing a specific **plan** to take their own life or harming another person. Developing a plan means that you or your loved one have thought about **where, how, or when** you would take your own life or do harm to another person. If you or a loved one have developed such a plan – this is considered a crisis – and you should go to a local hospital emergency room or call 911.

Additionally, if you or your loved one is hesitant of seeking out professional treatment services, support and help is still available. Call or text **988** or chat **988lifeline.org** to reach the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

#### “What Does a Mental Health Crisis Look Like?”

Mental health crises look different for different people. Sometimes the signs of a crisis are noticeable to family and friends – sometimes the changes seem to come out of nowhere. One of the most common signs of a crisis are sudden and clear changes in the person’s behavior. Often, such changes occur gradually over time – but can also be abrupt.

Some of the behavioral changes to be concerned about include –

- Neglect of personal hygiene.
- Dramatic changes in sleep habits, such as sleep more often or not sleeping well.
- Not eating, resulting in significant weight loss.
- Pronounced changes in mood, such as irritability, anger, anxiety, or sadness.
- Withdrawal from routine activities and/or relationships.
- Abusive behavior to self or others, including substance misuse or self-harm behaviors.
- Voicing feelings of hopelessness.

*No emotional crisis is more urgent than suicidal thoughts and/or behavior - or threats to harm someone else. If you suspect that your loved one is considering self-harm or suicide don’t wait to intervene.*

#### “What Do I Do if I Suspect that My Loved One is Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis?”

The first step in helping another person who is struggling w/ a mental health crisis is to reach out to them – lend an ear and demonstrate your concern in a supportive, non-judgmental way. Calmly voiced questions such as “*You don’t seem yourself lately. Is there something going on?*”

are good ways to start the conversation. Remember to stay calm yourself - doing more listening than talking.

Additional suggestions when talking to someone experiencing a mental health crisis include –

- Avoid overreacting
- Express genuine support and concern
- Ask the person *HOW* you can help him or her
- Offer options instead of trying to take control of the situation
- Avoid touching the person unless you ask them for permission first
- Try to remove any potentially dangerous items, such as medications, firearms, car keys, or knives
- Be patient with the person
- Give them physical space

Remember, the key to handling a mental health crisis – either for yourself or a loved one – is to ask for help. Reaching out to family, friends, medical professionals, mental health professionals, or local emergency services is vital to handling a crisis situation. Don't be afraid to speak openly and honestly about what is going on.

#### 24 Hour Resources for Mental Health Crises

- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
  - 911
- Local Emergency Rooms in Your Community

If you would like to learn more about handling a mental health crisis, go to [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org) or read the articles listed below that were used to develop this article.

#### References

- “What to Do In a Crisis” – National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) - <https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Living-with-a-Mental-Health-Condition/What-to-Do-In-a-Crisis>
- “How to Help in an Emotional Crisis” – American Psychological Association - <https://www.apa.org/topics/mental-health/help-emotional-crisis>
- “How to Help Someone Having a Mental Health Crisis” – American Association of Suicidology - <https://suicidology.org/2023/04/10/how-to-help-someone-having-a-mental-health-crisis/>