

How to manage a mental health crisis

The change in our everyday lives resulting from COVID-19 has left many of us feeling isolated, stressed and worried. For people with mental health conditions, that sense of stress and worry intensifies during times like these, potentially leading to personal mental health crises.

You don't have to feel powerless when a loved one experiences a mental health crisis. Most individuals with a serious mental health condition have a crisis/safety plan they have developed in conjunction with their healthcare provider. Be sure to ask your loved one if s/he has such a plan, and if so, to share it with you. That way you will know what to do in advance of a crisis.

If your loved one will not share their crisis/safety plan with you, you can make one on your own. Examples of information to include are as follows.

Who to contact

Be sure that you have contact information for the many professionals and/or organizations that you may need in a time of crisis.

- Phone numbers for your loved one's mental health provider as well as primary care physician
- Family members and friends who can help you
- Local crisis line number. You can find this information by contacting your NAMI affiliate. You can also search online for "mental health crisis services" and the name of your county.
- Mobile Crisis Unit phone number in the area (if your area has one)
- Addresses of walk-in crisis centers or emergency rooms
- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's Disaster Distress Helpline at 800-985-5990, a 24/7, 365 day-a-year, free national hotline that provides immediate crisis counseling. It is toll-free, multilingual and confidential.

Important background information

You need to have important information on hand and easily accessible in case you need to give it to a mental health professional or emergency first responder.

- Your address and phone number(s)
- Your loved one's diagnosis and medications
- Previous psychosis or suicide attempts
- History of drug use
- Stressors (previously referred to as triggers)
- Things that have helped to de-escalate a crisis in the past
- Determine whether community police officers have Crisis Intervention Training

Review the plan with your loved one and suggest that s/he share it with his/her mental health provider. Also, be sure to have copies of it in important places, such as on your phone, in the kitchen or bedside table, and in your wallet.

Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness

