

What is a mental health crisis?

A crisis is any situation in which a person's behaviors puts them at risk of hurting themselves or others and/or when they are not able to resolve the situation with the skills and resources available. **If anyone is at risk of harm, call 911 immediately and request a mental health officer or Crisis Intervention Team member.**

What can trigger a mental health crisis?

Home or environmental changes

- Changes in family structure
- Changes in relationship with boyfriend, girlfriend, partner, spouse
- Loss of any kind: pet, family member or friend due to death or relocation
- Strained relationships with roommates, loved ones
- Changes in friendships
- Fights or arguments with loved ones or friends
- Trauma/violence
- Poverty

School/work triggers

- Worrying about upcoming projects or tasks
- Feeling singled out by co-workers/

peers; feelings of loneliness

- Mounting pressures, anxiety about deadlines
- Lack of understanding from peers, co-workers, teachers, who may not understand that behaviors are symptoms of mental illnesses
- Real or perceived discrimination

Other triggers

- Stops taking medication or misses doses
- Starts new medication or new dosage of current medication; medication stops working
- Use or abuse of drugs or alcohol
- Pending court dates
- Being in crowds, large groups of people
- Community trauma/violence

What are the warning signs of a mental health crisis?

Inability to cope with daily tasks

- Doesn't bathe, brush teeth, comb/brush hair
- Refuses to eat or eats too much
- Sleeps all day, refuses to get out of bed
- Can't sleep/ sleeps very short periods of time

Rapid mood swings

- Increased energy level
- Unable to stay still, pacing
- Suddenly depressed, withdrawn
- Suddenly happy/calm after period of depression

Increased agitation

- Makes verbal threats
- Violent, out of control behavior
- Destroys property
- Culturally inappropriate language

Displays abusive behavior

- Hurts others
- Cutting, burning or other self- injurious behavior
- Abuses alcohol or drugs

Loses touch with reality (psychosis)

- Unable to recognize family or friends
- Has increasingly strange ideas
- Is confused or disorganized
- Thinks they are someone they are not
- Does not understand what people are saying
- Hears voices
- Sees things that are not there

Isolation from school, work, family, friends

- Decreased interest in usual recreational activities
- Changes in friendships
- Stops going to school or work

Unexplained physical symptoms

- Facial expressions look different
- Increase in headaches, stomach aches
- Complains they don't feel well

What can you do before a crisis happens?

Reflect on the following questions before a crisis occurs:

- What situations have led to a crisis in the past?
- What stress reduction strategies have worked before?
- How can conflict be avoided?
- What steps can be taken to keep everyone safe and calm?
- Who can be called for support in a crisis?
- Have all available resources been utilized?

Create a Crisis Plan:

- Identify people willing to help
- List the phone numbers of mental health providers and the mental health crisis team
- Include a list of current medications and their dosages
- List treatments that have been used in the past (CBT, DBT)
- Identify key words or calming techniques that have worked in the past
- Identify your loved one's preferred treatment facilities
- Contact your local police department and provide them with a copy of the crisis plan.
- Create a safe environment by removing all weapons and sharp objects
- Lock up all medications, both over-the-counter and prescription
- Talk with others in the household about how to stay safe during a crisis
- Post the phone number of the mental health crisis team around the house
- Include a copy of their **Psychiatric Advance Directive** (if available)

It is important to include your loved one in the creation of the crisis plan. The plan should be distributed to family, friends, and professionals with permission from your loved ones.

Develop a Psychiatric Advance Directive:

Psychiatric advance directives (PADs) are relatively new legal instruments that may be used to document a competent person's specific instructions or preferences regarding future mental health treatment, in preparation for the possibility that the person may lose capacity to give or withhold informed consent to treatment during acute episodes of psychiatric illness.

**For more information and PAD forms specific to Texas:
National Resource Center on Psychiatric Advance Directives - www.nrc-pad.org**

Prepare a Crisis Kit

A crisis kit should include the crisis plan, medical information, snacks, music, books, a change of clothes, and basic hygiene supplies. This kit should be kept in an easily accessible place.

For more information and resources on this and other mental health topics, contact:



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