

How to help someone in a mental health crisis

Nearly half of adult Americans report that COVID-19 has negatively affected their mental health. For people with existing mental health conditions, that added burden can lead to potential mental health crises. However, support from family and friends for a loved one who has a mental health condition can make a difference, particularly when that person is in crisis. A crisis does not look or feel the same to everyone. It is up to the individual and/or family to define for themselves a mental health crisis.



If a loved one is going through a crisis, first and foremost, be sure to stay with that person while they're at risk. Help them seek professional support, and in the meantime, consider the following tips to help your loved one through a crisis.

1. **Communicate clearly.** It is important for your loved one to feel heard and understood. Talk to him/her in a warm nonjudgmental way. Use body language, such as eye contact, to show that you're listening. Ask them questions about how they're feeling and don't be

afraid to be direct. For example, ask your loved one if she/he is thinking of suicide or of hurting others. Give the person time to provide a response.

2. **Keep the person safe.** If suicide or self-harm is a distinct possibility, find out if the person has developed a plan. If so, make sure there is no access to weapons. Remain with the person. If you're on the phone, stay on the phone as long as you can. If your loved one already has found a weapon, such as a gun or knife, and is actively threatening to use it against him/herself or others, call 911 immediately. At this point, physical safety becomes a priority.
3. **No man or woman is an island.** Remind the person that s/he is not alone. You and others are there to help. Life takes courage. Remind the person that s/he has more strength than s/he realizes.
4. **Reach out for help.** You may not be able to de-escalate the crisis on your own. The first person to seek help from would be your loved one's mental health professional. If s/he doesn't have one, there are organizations you can call. For example:
 - a. **911.** Call 911 if the situation becomes a life-threatening emergency. Tell the operator that you're calling about a psychiatric emergency and ask for an officer trained in crisis intervention.
 - b. **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.** Call 800-799-8255 to talk with a trained counselor.
 - c. **Crisis Text Line.** Text NAMI at 741-741 to connect with a crisis counselor via text message.
 - d. **National Domestic Violence Hotline.** Call 800-799-7233 to speak with a domestic abuse expert.
 - e. **National Sexual Assault Hotline.** Call 800-656-4673 to connect with a staff member from a sexual assault service provider.

After the crisis

Maintaining connection to people is crucial for your loved one's recovery. Help him/her to stay connected with you and others to help prevent a relapse. Also, be sure to follow up with the person regularly to let him/her know that you're thinking about him/her. A person with a mental health condition benefits tremendously from social support.

Source: *National Alliance on Mental Illness*