

IN A CRISIS

General Guidelines

Your goal in a mental health emergency is to stabilize the situation and get the person to professional help as quickly as possible.

- Do not try to manage the situation alone – Sometimes just having another party present or on the phone with your loved one will defuse a situation.
- Start at the top of your Emergency Contacts list and work your way down – If it is an evening or weekend and you cannot reach providers or agencies, call the most appropriate hot-line.
- Speak to your loved one in a calm, quiet voice – If it seems he/she isn't listening or can't hear you, it is possible that auditory hallucinations ("voices") may be interfering. Don't shout; raising your voice won't help and may escalate tensions.
- Keep instructions and explanations simple and clear – Say, "We're going to the car now," not, "After we get in the car, we'll drive to your doctor's office so she can examine you."
- Respond to delusions by talking about the person's feelings, not about the delusions – Say, "This must be frightening," not "You shouldn't be frightened – nobody's going to hurt you."
- Don't stare – Direct eye contact may be perceived as confrontational or threatening.
- Don't touch unless absolutely necessary – Touch may be perceived as a threat and trigger a violent reaction.
- Don't stand over the person – If the person is seated, seat yourself to avoid being perceived as trying to control or intimidate.
- Don't give multiple choices or ask multi-part questions – Choices will increase confusion. Say, "Would you like me to call your psychiatrist?" not "Would you rather I called your psychiatrist or your therapist?"
- Don't threaten or criticize – Acute mental illness is a medical emergency. Suggesting that the person has chosen to be in this condition won't help and may escalate tension.
- Don't argue with others on the scene – Conduct all discussion of the situation with third parties quietly and out of the person's hearing.
- Don't whisper, joke or laugh – This may increase agitation and/or trigger paranoia.

Print a copy of this list to keep with your list of essential telephone numbers.

