

IN A CRISIS

General Guidelines

Your goal in a mental health emergency is to stabilize the situation and get the person 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 hotline.
- 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 call 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.