

Dealing with a mental health crisis or emergency

A mental health crisis often means that you no longer feel able to cope or be in control of your situation. You may feel great emotional distress or anxiety, can't cope with day-to-day life or work, think about suicide or self-harm, or experience hallucinations and hearing voices.

A crisis can also be the result of an underlying medical condition, such as confusion or delusions caused by an infection, overdose, illicit drugs or intoxication with alcohol. Confusion may also be associated with dementia.

Whether you experience a sudden deterioration of an existing mental health problem, or are experiencing problems for the first time, you'll need immediate expert assessment to identify the best course of action and stop you getting worse.

Where can I get help?

If you've already been given a Crisis Line number from a health professional, call it.

If you are under the care of a mental health team and have a specific care plan that states who to contact when you need urgent care, follow this plan. The charity Mind offers information about how to plan for a crisis.

The Samaritans operate a free to call service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, if you want to talk to someone in confidence. Call them on 116 123.

Contact NHS 111

You can call NHS 111 if you or someone you know requires urgent care, but it is not life-threatening. For example:

- if you have an existing mental health problem and your symptoms get worse
- if you experience a mental health problem for the first time
- if someone has self-harmed but it does not appear to be life-threatening, or is talking about wanting to self-harm
- if a person shows signs of onset dementia
- if a person is experiencing domestic violence or physical, sexual or emotional abuse

Book an emergency GP appointment

Alternatively, contact your GP practice and ask for an emergency appointment. Your practice should be able to offer you an appointment in a crisis with the first available doctor.

Visit A&E or call 999

A mental health emergency should be taken as seriously as a medical emergency.

Call 999 if you or someone you know experiences an acute life-threatening medical or mental health emergency.

You can go to A&E directly if you need immediate help and are worried about your safety. You may be close to acting on suicidal thoughts or have seriously harmed yourself.

Once at A&E the team will tend to your immediate physical and mental health needs. Many hospitals now have a liaison psychiatry team (or psychological medicine service) which is designed to bridge the gap between physical and mental healthcare..

If this service is not available, the A&E team will contact the local on-call mental health services, such as the crisis resolution and home treatment teams (CRHTs).

The team in charge of your care will assess you, decide on the best course of care, and whether you can go home or need to be admitted to hospital.

When to contact social services?

If you have urgent concerns about someone's social circumstances, such as children and young people, vulnerable adults or people with learning difficulties, it may be more appropriate to call social services. Local government services such as housing services and social care services often run out-of-hours duty provision.