



ARAFMI

Mental Health Carers  
ARAFMI NSW Inc  
Hunter Region

# What to Do in Emergency or Crisis



Health  
Hunter New England  
Local Health District

## Navigators Guide

# 2

For many people with a mental illness and their families, crisis situations can be common. In a crisis it is often difficult to make decisions, even what appear to be relatively simple actions, like who to contact and how and when, can be overwhelming. It may not be clear where to get support, information and advice, and such advice can at times be conflicting and confusing. This adds to already high levels of family and carer stress and distress.

Depending on the type of emergency or crisis, there are a number of different things you can do. It is important to get the right support at the time; some situations require immediate attention because someone may be in imminent danger or at risk. Situations can escalate or deteriorate and both carers and family members, particularly the person with a mental illness may be vulnerable. The most important thing for you as a carer is to remain calm, consider your immediate options, and if in doubt at all, call the 24 hour Mental Health Telephone Access Line.

**24 Hour Mental Health Line  
Mental Health Contact Centre  
Ph: 1800 011 511**

An emergency arises if you, another family member or someone else is in immediate risk or danger and there are concerns for safety including a person with a mental illness. Who you call will depend on the type of emergency or crisis situation, where and when it occurs.

### ***What if the person is an immediate threat to themselves?***

If someone requires **emergency medical attention** then contact the Ambulance Service directly. This includes situations where the person has caused physical harm to them self or taken an overdose.

**If there is an immediate risk to the physical health of your family member or another person:**

**Call: 000 and ask for ambulance**

See Below for 000 Information Ready

If you or another person including a person with a mental illness is in **immediate threat or danger** then contact the Police directly. If you are able, then contact the 24 hour Mental Health Line who may be able to liaise with and assist the police.

**If there is an immediate threat to you, your family member or someone else:**

**Call: 000 and ask for police**

See Below for 000 Information Ready

### **Adult Services (Aged 18 yrs +) and Children and Young People Services (Aged 18 and under)**

If you or another person is in crisis and someone is in need of urgent assessment due to a mental illness or an acute mental health problem, and there is no immediate medical risk or threat as above contact:

**After Hours Call  
24 Hour Mental Health Line  
Mental Health Contact Centre  
Ph: 1800 011 511**

### **During Normal Business Hours:**

If the person you care for is a current client of your local Community Mental Health Service or CAMHS (Child and Mental Health Service) – please call the Health Service in your local area. All community teams are linked to each of the inpatient units in your region (see Navigators Guide fact sheet for more information and contact numbers for this service).<sup>1</sup> **If in doubt call the 24 Hour Mental Health Line.**

### ***Can I visit my GP?***

Yes, you can visit your GP, if no-one is in immediate medical danger or threat. In some areas there is an after hours GP Access Service if it can't wait until the following morning. Your GP can decide what the best course of action might be and which service to access.

### ***What if my family member is already under the care of a mental health service and/or a mental health professional is already involved?***

During normal hours you can contact the mental health service or health care professional involved, providing no-one is in immediate medical danger or threat. Community Mental Health Services are able to respond to crises and it may be particularly helpful for your family member and you to visit or see someone who is already involved and familiar. Some services do have extended hours, however if you are unable to contact them after normal business hours follow one of the above options, whichever is most appropriate.

<sup>1</sup> Community Mental Health Services NG3



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### *What if my family member does not want to attend or see someone?*

This can be very difficult and stressful for family members, especially when someone is in need of treatment and care and obviously experiencing distressing symptoms themselves. But if there is an emergency or an immediate threat of any kind the services mentioned above do need to be contacted. We recommend you seek advice yourself on what to do by contacting the 24 Hour Mental Health Line. There are also other services listed on this page that you may find useful.

### Tips in Crisis

- Stay calm and centered
- Ensure your own safety and others
- Don't take unnecessary risks
- Assess the situation
- Identify key risks and priority
- Contact the most appropriate support service for help
- Ask someone else for assistance
- Keep instructions clear and simple to others, especially when communicating with the family member involved
- Call/use your personal supports

### 000 Information Ready

When contacting 000 be prepared to provide the following information when asked:

- Type of emergency/service - Ambulance or police?
- Your name and phone contact
- Name, age and relationship of person you are concerned about
- Are they breathing or conscious?
- Your location, eg, street name and number and/or name of closest intersecting street.

### Tips to Prevent Crisis

If you feel that the person in your family with a mental illness is heading for a crisis, it is important to discuss this with your family member's Care Coordinator or another staff member of the Community Mental Health Service. They can discuss with you the early warning signs that could indicate when a person is becoming unwell.

In most cases they may be able to help avert the crisis. They can help plan for how the crisis may be managed, while minimising the negative impact on the person, including you and the family.

- Inform yourself about every aspect of the illness.
- Formulate a plan of action before the crisis happens - wherever possible, involve the person who has a mental health problem in this plan.
- Be aware of emergency services offered by your local mental health service and contact details. Ask for this information in case you need it.
- Have the necessary phone numbers and other information on hand so you can be confident, decisive and feel secure and also prepared. Knowledge and preparation will give you strength.
- Make sure some of your physical, social and emotional needs are met. This is so you can cope with the added stress carers experience in an emergency or over longer periods of time.
- Do regular exercise and eat nutritious food – These are keys to a healthy lifestyle and to strengthen resilience.
- Involve yourself in a hobby, interest or other activity that you find personally satisfying and rewarding.
- Maintain a social life outside work and/or home, however limited it may be. Above all, don't allow yourself to become a victim or slave to an illness. You have your own life to manage.

### Other useful contacts in emergencies

**Drug and Alcohol Triage and Referral Service - Ph 1300 660 059**

**Lifeline – Ph 13 11 14**