



# Mental Health Crisis

## Definition and Expectations

### How do I know if my child is having a crisis or mental health emergency?

There are times when a parent needs help quickly - when children can't calm down, are uncontrollable or may be in sudden danger of hurting themselves or others.

A crisis situation exists any time your child is no longer safe to himself or others or when there is a need for immediate action or intervention. It is usually a time when all of your effort is needed to care for your child.

Some signs that your child may be experiencing a mental health crisis include:

- Rapid mood swings
- Extreme energy or lack of it, sleeping all the time, or being unable to sleep
- Severe agitation, pacing
- Talking very rapidly or non-stop
- Confused thinking or irrational thoughts
- Thinking everyone is out to get them or seeming to lose touch with reality
- Experiencing hallucinations or delusions
- Making threats to others or themselves
- Isolating themselves from friends and family, not coming out of their room
- Eating all the time or not eating at all, rapid weight loss or gain
- Having suicidal thoughts and making statements such as "I want to die" or even possibly vague statements such as "I don't want to be here anymore"

The list above contains many but not all possible signs that your child may be experiencing a crisis. It is best to follow your instincts. Remember you are the expert when it comes to your child. If you feel your child is behaving much differently than normal or if the situation seems like it is getting out of control and you fear you may not be able to de-escalate it, then your child is most likely experiencing a crisis.

Once you decide that indeed your child may be having a crisis or mental health emergency, you'll want to consider the following questions:

1. Do you feel your child is in immediate danger to themselves or others?
2. Can you handle the situation yourself or do you need help?
3. If you need help, what type of help do you need and from who?

If the answer to question 1 is yes and your child's life is at risk or someone else's life is in danger you need to get help right away! If you feel your child or family is in imminent danger call 911 but keep in mind that once police enter your home, they are in charge of the situation and control what happens next including where your child may be taken.

Other emergency resources include:

- Optum Idaho Member Crisis Line 1-855-202-0973
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-208-398-4357. The Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline has an online chat feature and text communication is also available.



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## What if I am worried that my child is suicidal, but I am not sure?

It is really important that you follow your instincts in these situations. If you have a feeling that your child may be considering taking his or her own life, you need to pay attention.

### **If you are worried - ASK!**

Many parents are fearful that if they ask their child if they are considering killing themselves that it will put the idea in their head or that talking about it may cause them to attempt to take their own life, but research actually shows that talking about suicide reduces risk.

We understand that having this conversation with your child is not an easy thing to do. In fact, it can be terrifying and overwhelming, so we have listed some steps and tips below to help you start the conversation.

1. Tell your child what you have observed that is worrying. For example:

*Mitchell, I've noticed that you have been sleeping a lot, staying in your room, and are not interested in going out with your friends anymore or hanging out with us. I also saw that you wrote I don't want to be on this planet anymore all over your notebook.*

*Julie, I think I heard you say you wanted to die.*

2. Let them know you love them, and you want to help.

*I'm worried about you and want to help.*

3. Ask them as calmly and directly as possible if they have considered killing themselves or taking their own life.

*Have you thought about killing yourself?*

4. If they say anything except a strong no, ask:

*Have you thought about how you might do this? or Do you have a plan?*

**Having a plan may mean they are at a higher risk level. Not having a plan *does not mean* there is no risk.**

5. Do not leave them alone if you feel they are at immediate risk. If you feel they are in immediate danger, call your therapist or go to your local emergency room for help. If you do not feel you can safely transport your child and it is an emergency, call 911. If you are unsure what to do, it can be helpful to call the Optum Idaho Member Crisis Line at 1-855-202-0973, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or the Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-208-398-4357. They all have trained people that can help you and your child 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
6. If your child convinces you that they are not at immediate risk and you do not feel they are at immediate risk, be sure to get in contact with a therapist for an evaluation or advice about what to do next. In addition, be sure to share information with your child about suicide hotline numbers and other resources and be sure to let them know they can come to you at any time.

Other things you can say or do that might be helpful:

- Let them know that they are not alone and that you are there for them no matter what!
- Reassure them that lots of young people have suicidal thoughts and do not act on them. Sometimes just knowing that other children and teens sometimes have those thoughts can make them feel better.
- Try not to discount their feeling or convince them they shouldn't feel this way — it can feel dismissive or non-supportive.



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- Let them know that you want to help them and that you will get them connected to the help they need.

Although this may be one of the hardest things you have ever had to ask your child, asking your child directly if they have thought of suicide and talking about suicide lets your child know it's OK to come to you no matter how bad or hopeless they feel. You can be a protective factor that helps to lower your child's risk. Sometimes just having the opportunity to talk about how bad they feel can be a great relief to young people.

If you feel your child is not in immediate danger of hurting themselves or others but still needs help right away, you then have to decide if you can handle the situation yourself or if you need help to figure out what to do next.

## What if I need help during a crisis with my child?

Your child's therapist or treatment team, if they have one, may be especially helpful as they know your child and their history. You can also contact the Optum Idaho Member Crisis Line at 1-855-202-0973, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or the Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-208-398-4357.

- When you call, ask if they think your child, based on the current situation, may need to be assessed, need emergency services, or perhaps need to be hospitalized.
- They may have you bring your child in to be assessed or they may send you to the emergency room or behavioral health hospital directly.

If your child does not have a therapist or if they are unavailable, you can:

- Call the Optum Idaho Member Crisis Line at 1-855-202-0973
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Call, text, or chat online with the [Idaho Suicide Prevention Hotline](#) at 1-208-398-4357.
- Transport your child directly to the emergency room if you can do it safely. If possible, call ahead to let them know you are coming so they can be ready for your child.

Depending on the situation and who you call for help, you may:

- Have to wait for a call back
- Be advised to monitor the situation until your therapist can see your child
- Be advised to take your child to a local emergency room or behavioral health hospital

If you need to take your child somewhere, decide if you can safely transport your child. If not, do you have a support person that can help you? If you feel you cannot safely transport your child and do not have anyone to help you, let the place you are taking your child know that and ask them what they recommend you do.

- If you have to wait for someone to call you back or if you have been advised to monitor the situation until your child can be seen by a therapist, keep in mind that things may change quickly.
- If the situation or your child's behavior escalates while you are waiting, you may need to take other actions.
- If at any time you feel the situation has reached a level where you need additional help right now in order to keep your child safe, call for help!



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### How can I try to calm/control the situation while I wait for help?

The increased intensity of the situation can sometimes make it more difficult for us to hide our own fears or opinions so do your best to stay calm.

### How can I plan ahead for safety?

For some children, it is not a question of "if" but rather a question of "when" a crisis will occur, and, in those cases, some advanced planning can make a big difference in getting the care and intervention needed for your child and family. If you have a safety plan in place, it should list steps and strategies to help you. If you can plan what you will do, who you will contact and where you might go for help during a crisis, it can be incredibly helpful.

If you do not yet have a safety plan, this link will help you create one: [Youth Crisis Safety Plan](#). Your child's therapist or treatment team can also help you create one. If your child is hospitalized ask the staff working with you to create a plan before your child is discharged.

It is important to think about your child's safety and the safety of the other members of the household.

- Speak slowly and confidently with a gentle caring tone of voice.
- Do not argue or challenge your child even if they are saying what seems unreasonable or outrageous to you.
- Do not threaten.
- Do not raise your voice or talk too fast.
- Use positive words instead of negative words.
- Stay with your child but try not to restrict their movement.
- Listen actively and try to give positive support and reassurance.
- Realize you may have trouble communicating with your child.
- Ask simple questions and repeat them if necessary.
- Say, "I'm here. I care. I want to help. How can I help you?"
- Empathize with how your child is feeling.
- Try not to take your child's actions or comments personally.
- The increased intensity of the situation can sometimes make it more difficult for us to hide our own fears or opinions so do your best to stay calm.
- Don't handle the crisis alone if you have people who can support you such as family, friends, neighbors, people from your place of worship, or people from a local support group.
- Don't threaten to call 911 unless you intend to make that call. When you call 911, police and/or an ambulance are likely to come to your house. This may make your loved ones more upset, so use 911 only when you or someone else is in immediate danger.

Keep in mind that:

- Your child may be frightened by the feelings they are experiencing.
- Symptoms such as suspiciousness or distorted thinking can cause youth to be fearful and not trust other people, even you.
- It can sometimes be helpful to take a break from the conversation for a while when you are waiting to get help.



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If your child is a risk to him or herself or their siblings, they may need to be hospitalized.

A child who is struggling may not use good judgment, self-control, or even be aware of the consequences of his or her actions. They may be fueled by emotions and may not be able to think logically. For some children and youth, the "fight-or-flight" instinct often takes over during a crisis and their actions may be sudden, reckless and even dangerous.

### What are some additional preventative safety steps?

Some children and youth are at high risk and experience crisis situations on a regular basis. Some steps that other parents have taken to safeguard their child and family in case of a crisis include:

- Locking up guns, knives, and other sharp objects.
- Using the child safety locks on car doors to keep the child from jumping out of a moving vehicle.
- Removing furniture and heavy objects from the child's room that might be thrown during a rage.
- Locking up all medications and keeping hazardous substances out of reach.
- Putting a lock on the refrigerator if the child has uncontrolled eating binges.
- Having a plan and a safe place for other children to go when a crisis occurs.

### What causes a Mental Health Crisis?

There are some events/situations that could trigger a mental health crisis in any child or youth, including:

- A breakup
- Death of a loved one
- Natural or large-scale disaster
- Physical, sexual, or verbal abuse
- Loss of home
- Failing grades in school
- Ill family member or caregiver
- Divorce
- Loss of a friend, loved one or hero to suicide
- Being a witness to a violent act/accident, physical assault, or violence

It is important to keep in mind that children and youth with mental health disorders sometimes have more difficulty than others dealing with stressors and their mental health condition itself may lead to a crisis situation for no apparent reason. In addition, changes in medication or other factors may make a mental health crisis more likely. Sometimes even when we have all the right support services and treatment in place mental health crisis can still occur.

### Are there any special situations to consider, like police intervention?

Depending on the age, size and strength of your child, as well as the details of the crisis, it may be necessary to call for police assistance in either restraining your child, transporting your child to the hospital, or tracking down a runaway.

### Is there anything else I need to know?

It is important to keep in mind that even if you do everything right and follow all the steps you know how to do to the best of your ability, situations can still get out of hand and may be more than you can handle. It doesn't mean you have done anything wrong, just that you need some additional help, to help your child. Asking for help, and knowing where to get it and how, is sometimes the hardest part.

Crisis situations can be stressful, frightening, and exhausting for you, your child, and other family members too. It is important to make sure you are taking care of yourself and getting the support you need as well!