

What to do in an Emergency

Tips to help family members and friends

How do I know if I should call for help?

It can be very confusing and difficult to know if and when you should get emergency help for a loved one or friend with a psychiatric disorder that is experiencing severe psychotic symptoms.

Sometimes an emergency/crisis situation is clear.

CALL 9-1-1 immediately!

Sometimes the situation can be extremely emotional and difficult to know what signs to look for in a crisis.

Here is a checklist to help you determine if the situation is an emergency: ([NAMI San Francisco guidelines](#))

Call 9-1-1 immediately if your loved one or friend is:

- Inflicting or attempting to inflict serious bodily harm on another.
- Gravely disabled: unable to provide for own food, clothing, and shelter to the extent that death, bodily injury or physical debilitation might result without treatment.
- Attempting suicide or behaving as though he or she intends to follow through with verbal threats.
- Mutilating or attempting to mutilate himself or herself.
- Acutely distressed by hearing or seeing things which do not exist.
- Expressing serious thoughts about hurting themselves or someone else
- Experiencing uncontrollable anxiety or anger
- Having a severe reaction to psychiatric medication.

It is an emergency! What do I do now?

Control Yourself – don't shout into the phone or at arriving officers or medical professionals. They can't understand you if you shout.

On the phone: Be ready to give concrete examples of the dangerous behaviors and to support your contention that the person is mentally ill. For example, say, "My daughter pulled a knife" as opposed to "My daughter wants to kill me."

State over the phone the following information and be ready to repeat it to arriving police officers and/or medical professionals:

- Your name.
- Your address.
- Family member's name.
- Your relationship.
- That the person is mentally ill and give the diagnosis.
- State whether medications are being used, whether it was stopped and when was the last time the meds were taken.
- Describe what your family member is doing now.
- Say whether you feel threatened.
- Say whether your family member is hearing voices or fears someone.
- Say whether a weapon is in the house --- to minimize further agitation, remove any guns from the house before the police arrive
- Say where inside the house is your family member
- Say whether there is a history of violence

Until professionals arrive, you must STAY CALM and:

- Be polite, respectful, reassuring, low-key and direct with your family member.
- Maintain on-going communication directly with the person and do not include others in side conversations.
- Do not try to trick or deceive your family member.
- Avoid immediately moving in close or touching the person unless necessary.
- Remove all objects with which a person may do harm to self or others.

When professionals arrive:

- Have all the lights on inside the house.
- Identify yourself.
- Carry nothing in your hands especially coming outside to meet them, in which case walk, don't run to meet them.
- Don't ramble.
- Be prepared to repeat the information you gave over the phone.
- State whether there is a history of suicide attempts.
- State whether your family member is violent or delusional.
- Have treating psychiatrist's phone number handy.