



What To Do In A Crisis

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When you care for someone in a crisis, it can bring a range of overwhelming feelings.

This is completely normal and understandable. The chances are you are reading this because you are having a tough time with the young person you are

caring for. However, you might find it hard to take in the information you are about to look at because you are feeling anxious, distressed or emotional. It might be useful just to take one minute – and, yes, that's all it takes – to do the ABC of coping with a crisis before you look at anything.

This exercise comes highly recommended by a parent with crisis experience. She says, 'Believe me – it really works.'

Step A: Whatever you are feeling right now, accept it. Suppose you feel you can't cope. Say this to yourself: "I feel I can't cope right now but that's okay".

Step B: Believe that you can help. Say to yourself: "I feel really distressed but that's okay".

Step C: You can cope with this. Take one big breath in and as you breathe out, say to yourself: "I can do this".

Now you repeat the ABC exercise a few times until you feel a little calmer, then start looking for the information you need.

You are not alone

No matter how hard things seem at the moment you are not alone.

It is important to know many other parents have gone through what you are going through.

MindEd provides a wealth of information including much parent experience to help support you.

Common Crisis Situations

Listed here are some of the most common crisis situations. Each one is explained using a traffic light system which matches the pathways to follow in a crisis:

Stay alert.

This indicates the crisis situation may not need immediate attention but you need to stay alert. In some cases you might get professional help from your child's teacher/counsellor or from your GP and/or the CAMHS team if you are already seeing them. Please follow the advice shown for each crisis situation.

Take steps to find help and support

This indicates things may be difficult and although you may not need to take immediate emergency action, it is time to get some additional support as soon as possible and within 24 hours. This support might be from your GP and / or A&E or your CAMHS team if you are already seeing them. Please follow the advice shown for each crisis situation.

What should I do in an emergency?

This indicates you or your family member may be at risk of serious harm and you need to take immediate, emergency action. This might include calling 999, going to A&E, taking life saving actions. Please follow the advice shown for each crisis situation.

What we provide here is a general set of pathways and ways for you to act. You may find that local arrangements for dealing with crises in your part of the country are different in some way.



01. Self-harm

Staying alert

I have noticed marks on my child's arms and I think they are hurting themselves.

What should I do?

- You have noticed the marks and simply ask your child how they are feeling? Would they like to talk ?
- Would they like a GP appointment?
- Don't force them to talk about it, but be available when they do
- Offer online information, this will show your child you care and are willing to support (See Where next? for details)
- Don't be surprised if your child appears defensive – this is a normal reaction

Take steps to find help and support

I have noticed my child's cutting is getting worse-there are lots of fresh wounds.

What should I do?

- Talk to them and listen
- Suggest seeking help
- Make contact with the GP and ask for a referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) – see MIND website
- If your child is reluctant to attend, make an appointment yourself

- If involved with CAMHS or support services refer to care plan (if they have one) or remind the child about the strategies they have learnt from list of self-harm alternatives
- Try suggesting some of the alternatives to self harm strategies suggested in further information

What should I do immediately?

My child has a really big cut on her arm, the bleeding has stopped but I think they might need stitches.

- Take your child to A&E
- If your child refuses to go ring 111

2. Strangling

Staying alert

My child is threatening to tie something around their neck.

What should I do?

- Tying something around their neck can be a form of self-harm as well as an attempt to die
- Your child is trying to communicate how distressed they are
- Tell your child you are there for them and want to try and understand.
- Listen to what your child is saying, offer help and support

🟡 Take steps to find help and support

My child has tied something around their neck.

Tying something around their neck can be really scary. Always try and keep calm and remove the tie:

What should I do?

- Your child's distress levels are really high
- If possible ask your child to remove what they have put around their neck and say that you will stay with them to offer support
- If they won't, you need to try and remove it to keep your child safe. (untie or cut whatever your child has used)
- Ring 111 for advice or your local mental health services if your child is already accessing support

🔴 What should I do immediately?

My child has tied something around their neck and attached it to the wall/ceiling.

- Is anyone else with you? If so, ask them to help you or phone 999.
- Act quickly
- Try and remove the child from danger/ the tie from around the child's neck immediately. Important note: Not if it puts you or others at risk
- Call 999 (ambulance service)

3. Overdose

🟢 Staying alert

You've found a stash of tablets in your child's room.

What should I do?

- Calmly ask your child if they have been thinking of taking the tablets
- Ask how they are feeling. Ask if they would like to talk or would like some support?
- Ask your child if they would be happy for you to take the tablets as you want to keep them safe
- Get some advice from your medical professional such as your GP about what to do next

🟡 Take steps to find help and support

You find evidence of empty tablet packets.

What should I do?

- Ask your child calmly, if they have taken anything.



- If yes, phone emergency services as per the red column
- Try to talk to your child and offer reassurance

🔴 What should I do immediately?

You find your child unconscious / asleep following a probable overdose, or your child tells you they have taken something:

- Phone emergency services for advice immediately
- Stay with young person to monitor their physical health
- Collect all packaging relating to the tablets
- Put in recovery position, on their side
- Keep checking that their airway is open and they are breathing while you wait for the ambulance

4. Suicidal threats

🟢 Staying alert

I have found out my child might be suicidal from things they have said or written.

The thought of your child thinking about ending their life can be terrifying and sometimes an immediate reaction can be panic. See the ABC of Staying Calm in a Crisis.

What should I do?

What are the warning signs?:

- Talking about death or suicide
- Pre-occupation with death
- Persistently feeling very low
- Expressing feelings of hopelessness
- Escalating alcohol and drug misuse
- Low self-esteem and social isolation
- Recent bereavement
- Not coping with the break-up of relationship
- Previous attempts at suicide
- Previous history of suicide attempts or family
- Self-loathing or self-hatred
- Getting affairs in order, writing letters
- Escalation in self-destructive behaviour
- Sudden sense of calm or appearing very up-beat following a period of depression
- Sometimes young people might say they want to die as a reaction to a stressful event, e.g. fall out with friends/break-up. Don't be scared to talk to them about this, and remember: feelings will pass.
- How do I talk to my child? See the What next? section for further information

🟡 Take steps to find help and support

My child is saying they have suicidal thoughts and are behaving differently. I'm worried!

See suicide warning signs in Staying Alert and downloadable PDF in What Next.

What should I do?

- Contact GP or go to A&E if you are worried
- Contact CAMHS, if they are involved
- Talk to your child, take comfort in the fact that they are telling you. This is a sign that they want help
- Talk about things not related to self-harm, e.g. watch a film together, go for walk but respect requests for time alone
- If involved with CAMHS refer to care plan or remind the child/ask them about the strategies they have learnt

🔴 What should I do immediately?

My child is threatening to kill themselves and has a plan/has run away.

See suicide warning signs in Staying Alert and downloadable PDF in What Next.

- If they have run away, call the police and alert the police to the immediate risk. (see running away section)
- If your child is with you, take a deep breath, keep calm and ask the child what is going on for them
- Ask if they have access to sharps/ tablets/poisons and what they plan to do
- Ask if you can help them.
- You need advice and your child needs a mental health assessment – go to A&E, phone GP or CAMHS
- Is there anything else they can do to manage their feelings in the meantime, such as a distraction like going for a walk, watching a film or listening to music

5. Aggression

🟢 Staying alert

My child is getting more and more angry over time.

What should I do?

- Young people can find it hard to manage strong emotions- this is normal
- Talk to your child – use a calm tone, ask what they want.
- Ask if they would like some support for this-if so
- Enquire about counselling (e.g. school counsellor/online support)
- Refer to 'What to do if I am Worried' for further information.



- You can also find out information from Young Minds: http://www.youngminds.org.uk/for_parents/worried_about_your_child/anger/support

🟡 Take steps to find help and support

My child is getting into trouble with their anger outbursts

What should I do?

- Ask if they want to talk to you or talk to someone else
- Remember to talk to them when they are calm and calming down may take some time. Try not to push when they are really emotional
- Get a referral to CAMHS
- If involved with CAMHS refer to care plan or remind the child about the strategies they have learnt

🔴 What should I do immediately?

My child is very aggressive and out of control:

- Try to keep calm, take a deep breath and tell yourself you can deal with the situation. Use a calm tone and ask what they want
- Speak to GP, get a referral to CAMHS, ring if out of hours, or contact CAMHS if already involved
- If possible, remove anything

dangerous from the vicinity. If you or other family members feel at risk at all, remove yourself from the situation and call the police

6. Running away

🟢 Staying alert

My child occasionally talks about running away.

This can be a normal reaction when problems build up. It is okay to feel like this and your child might just need your support.

What should I do?

- Talk to your child
- Just listen
- Help them feel safe

🟡 Take steps to find help and support

I'm not sure if my child has run away or is just late

What should I do?

- Phone her friends (keep a list handy)
- Phone your child and leave a voicemail and text and email - tell them if they do not contact you, that you will need to ring the police as you are worried about their safety
- If no sign, ring police



and assessed. This situation can be dangerous if you leave it until tomorrow.

What should I do immediately?

My child suddenly becomes very confused or muddled

What should I do?

- You should take your child immediately to A&E to be seen.
- If they are acting dangerously, you may need the help of the police (999)

9. Police Support

Occasionally a child in an emergency may behave in a way that is very aggressive to others, including the parent who then may need to get police help through 999.

Sometimes the people who you speak to for support (police, CAMHS, GP, A&E) may need to ask other professionals to get involved such as social services or medical services. This is to ensure you and your family receive the best support to help improve the situation and get you out of the crisis.

What should I do immediately?

My child has run away and this is out of character/they are at risk/suicidal/vulnerable:

- Phone the police
- Have a recent photo handy
- Try to think about places your child likes to go or places they have mentioned
- Top Tip-waiting for the police to contact you can be an overwhelming and worrying time so ask a friend or relative to stay with you
- You might be tempted to go out and look – it's natural to want to do something.
- It is helpful to ensure someone is at home to communicate with the police and be there if your child returns or phones home.

7. Binge/purge

Staying alert

I think my child might be making herself sick.

What should I do?

- Watch carefully, especially after meals
- See Eating Disorder MindEd
- **Take steps to find help and support**
My child is definitely making herself sick.

What should I do?

- Discuss with your child booking an appointment with GP and considering referral to the community eating disorder service
- See eating disorder MindEd

What should I do immediately?

Severe food restriction with significant weight loss and/or bingeing and/or frequent purging..

What should I do?

- Book appointment with GP urgently, initiate referral to the child and young people community eating disorder service
- See eating disorder MindEd

8. Self neglect/Severe depression

Staying alert

My child:

- Has changed and their thinking is gradually becoming very muddled or
- Is not looking after themselves; their hygiene has really got much worse and they no longer care at all how they look or
- Their thinking seems to be slower and they struggle to answer questions

What should I do?

- You should take your child to the GP and get an urgent referral to Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)

Take steps to find help and support

My child has stopped eating or drinking

What should I do?

- You should take your child to the GP the same day or to A&E to be seen

10. Top tips

- First and foremost accept and try to understand your child's difficulties
- Learn about the things that could trigger a crisis and how you can help
- Ask for and accept help from professionals and family members
- Have a good crisis plan. Know what to do, who to contact, when to contact and how. In the online section What Else you will find a downloadable PDF: Parent carer crisis plan
Find and use some simple little things to help you cope and get through the crisis
- Make sure you look after yourself and get help dealing with your own feelings
- Hang on to hope no matter how difficult things may seem
- In the online section What Else you will find a downloadable PDF: Dealt with a crisis, what now?'

There are many suggestions for further reading and web searching included in the online version of this material.