

# Mental Health Emergencies

**A Mental Health First Aid course will equip people in your organisation to support your team and deal with an emergency. This is a concise guide to getting the right professional help to a colleague in such an emergency. The contact numbers are valid throughout the UK. You will need to research a few local numbers for some services.**

## What is a Mental Health Crisis?

**Suicidal thoughts** – people who have thought about suicide and may have a plan and the means to do so.

**Self-harm** - people who are coping with emotional distress by harming themselves.

**Panic attacks** – People experiencing overwhelming fear and physical symptoms such as inability to draw breath and palpitations (rapid, powerful, heart beat).

**A psychotic episode** – people who lose touch with reality and who hallucinate and/or have delusions and/or confused and disordered thoughts.

All kinds of people can experience a MH crisis from high

## In a crisis...

**Stay calm** – your calmness is contagious, your calmness helps others who are distressed.

**Talk and listen** – without judging the person. Ask one of these questions: "What would help you best right now?" "Would it help if..?" "When this has happened before, that helped you then?" Listen to the person, do not 'interrogate'.

**Imminent risk of suicide** – if someone has thoughts of suicide, a plan to do it and the means to do it they are at imminent risk and need professional help as soon as possible. Your organisation's safeguarding policy may give directions about this.

## Getting help in a crisis...

### Initial Response Team (Crisis Team)

[Google the number for your area and write it below]

### Self-help

*Northumbria NHS have a superb series of self-help guides for a variety of mental health conditions on their website for purchase or free download.*

*<https://web.nyu.nhs.uk/selfhelp/>*

Crisis teams are available 24/7/365, they are qualified nursing staff who can provide emotional support and route people to the right professional services. They should arrive within 90 minutes but usually take **much** longer.

Sometimes, more rapid help can be accessed via **NHS 111** –the call handler will need to speak to the person you are helping, not you. Though you can initiate the call. The call handler will assess risk and – where necessary – escalate the call to a psychiatric nurse or a doctor.

If a visit to Accident and Emergency is advisable NHS 111 will make an appointment for you. When you arrive at the hospital you will be expected and the waiting time should be shortened.

**Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN)** – if someone has a chronic (long-term) illness then may have a named CPN and their contact details. Contacting that person can be a rapid way to access specific help. When dealing with a psychotic crisis a good question to ask is, "Do you have a CPN?"

**Samaritans** – for suicidal crisis, the Samaritans are outstanding.

## More about suicidal thoughts

**Suicidal thoughts are common, but it has been shown that people are at greater risk if they have a plan and the means to do it.**

**Listen for hints** – "I've had enough", "I wish I could disappear", "I feel like giving up", and other hints of hopelessness.

**Ask about suicide directly and gently** – "Are you having suicidal thoughts?" "Do you feel like killing yourself?" The evidence says that this is good practice.

**What if they say yes?** – follow-up questions are important, "Have you thought about how you would do it?", "Do you have the means to do it?"