

Some examples of mental health crises include depression, trauma, eating disorders, alcohol or substance abuse, self-injury and suicidal thoughts. If you suspect a friend or family member is experiencing an emotional crisis, your help can make a difference.

Spotting the Signs

One of the most common signs of emotional crisis is a clear and abrupt change in behavior. Some examples include:

Neglect of personal hygiene.

Dramatic change in sleep habits, such as sleeping more often or not sleeping well.

Weight gain or loss.

Decline in performance at work or school.

Pronounced changes in mood, such as irritability, anger, anxiety or sadness.

Withdrawal from routine activities and relationships.

Sometimes, these changes happen suddenly and obviously. Events such as a natural disaster or the loss of a job can bring on a crisis in a short period of time. Often, though, behavior changes come about gradually. If something doesn't seem right with your loved one, think back over the past few weeks or months to consider signs of change.

Don't wait to bring up your concerns. It's always better to intervene early, before your loved one's emotional distress becomes an emergency situation. If you have a feeling that something is wrong, you're probably right.

Lend an Ear

If you suspect your loved one is experiencing a mental health crisis, reaching out is the first step to providing the help he or she needs to get better. Sit down to talk in a supportive, non-judgmental way. You might start the conversation with a casual invitation: "Let's talk. You don't seem like yourself lately. Is there something going on?"

Stay calm, and do more listening than talking. Show your loved one that you can be trusted to lend an ear and give support without passing judgment. When discussing your concerns, stick to the facts and try not to blame or criticize.

Seek Professional Help

Reaching out can help your friend or family member begin to get a handle on an emotional crisis. But professional help is the best way to fully address a mental health problem and get that problem under control. You can explain that [psychologists](/topics/psychotherapy/about-psychologists) (</topics/psychotherapy/about-psychologists>) have specialized training that makes them experts in understanding and treating complex emotional and behavioral problems. That training is especially critical when an emotional disorder has reached crisis levels.

Psychologists use scientifically tested techniques that go beyond talking and listening. They can teach their clients tools and skills for dealing with problems, managing stress and working toward goals.