

Navigating Through Youth Mental Health & Suicide Prevention:

A TOOL FOR
PARENTS AND GUARDIANS



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Dear Parents and Guardians

As a parent, we know that when your child is struggling mentally, it can be difficult to know the warning signs, appropriate treatment plan, and knowing exactly when it is time for emergency services to get involved.

This tool is designed to help you navigate through a situation where your child may need to be connected with resources or taken to the hospital in a crisis situation. We hope that this guide will provide you the resources to understand the processes set in place to keep your child safe and connect both you and your child to the support you need.



Signs and Symptoms for Parents/ Family Members



- **Suicide Awareness Signs & Symptoms**

- Talks about harming self, feeling hopeless, or having no reason to live
- Expresses feeling like a burden to others
- Increase in alcohol or drug use
- Withdraws from activities
- Isolates self from friends & family
- Reduced effort at school (i.e. stops trying academically or increased absences)
- Changes in sleeping patterns; always fatigued or not sleeping
- Displays abnormal aggressive behaviors or irritability
- Gives away possessions, says goodbye to family & friends
- Online searches for materials to end life or for self-harm
- Makes unusual or cryptic social media posts about topics listed above

- **Depression**

- Feelings of sadness that persist (more than 2 weeks)
- Trouble thinking, concentrating and making decisions
- Changes in sleeping patterns (sleeping a lot more or a lot less than usual)
- Changes in eating patterns (eating a lot more or a lot less than usual)
- Feeling worthless, useless, or guilty
- Changes in energy (being tired and sluggish or tense and restless a lot of the time)
- Lack of interest in activities
- Feeling sad, hopeless, or irritable a lot the time
- Irritability

- **Anxiety**

- Irritability
- Feeling nervous, restless or tense
- Trouble concentrating
- Withdrawal from social activity
- Avoidance of new or difficult situations
- Chronic complaints of stomach aches or headaches
- Fearfulness when away from parents
- Extreme fear about a specific thing or situation (i.e. dogs, insects, or phobias)
- Being afraid of school or places where others are
- Being worried about the future or about bad things happening
- Having repeated episodes of sudden, unexpected, or intense fear that also comes with increased heart rate, dizziness, trouble breathing, sweating, or shaking

- **Self-harm***

- Cutting
- Scratching
- Burning
- Carving words or symbols into the skin
- Hitting or punching oneself with objects or another surface like a wall or table
- Piercing the skin with sharp objects
- Pulling out hair
- Picking at existing wounds

- **Excessive Substance Use**

- Increased use, or misuse, of alcohol and other substances, prescribed medications
- Drug-seeking behavior

- **Crisis Signs And Symptoms**

- When is it Appropriate to Call 911?
 - If the individual is in danger of hurting themselves, others, or property
 - This includes threats and/or actions/plans
 - If the individual is severely disoriented or out of touch with reality
 - i.e. Confused on who they are, unclear thinking patterns, making statements that don't make sense, seeing or hearing things that aren't there
- If there are access to means:
 - Includes weapons, drugs, medications, rope, etc
 - Efforts should be made to remove and secure these items

**see definition for Self harm and self injury*

What You Can Do Before Your Child Is In Crisis

- **Seek out services for professional evaluation**
 - Reach out to your child's school for information on services available for your child including:
 - Evening Counseling
 - Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
 - Ongoing counseling with the school's social work team
 - **Counseling with a community provider**
- **Schedule a visit with your child's provider for potential medication management or referral to a counselor.**
- **Develop a Safety Plan with your child.**
 - Several Safety Plan Phone Applications are available including:
 - "Safety Plan"
 - "Mood Tools"
 - "Stay Alive"
 - A Brown Stanley Safety Plan is also included below for you to fill out and have readily available.
- **If your child attempts suicide, the first thing to do is make sure your child is physically okay. They should then be immediately seen in the ER.**

Safety Plan

Step 1: My Warning Signs

Step 2: My Coping Strategies

Step 3: My Distractions

Step 4: My Supports

Supports are people you feel comfortable talking to about what you're going through, and who can provide some help.

Name: _____ Contact Info _____
Name: _____ Contact Info _____
Name: _____ Contact Info _____

Step 5: Professional Supports

Professional contacts are people who can provide professional care and support.

Name: _____ Contact Info _____
Name: _____ Contact Info _____
Name: _____ Contact Info _____

Step 6: My Safe Environment

In this step, evaluate means that could be considered during a suicidal crisis and how to clear them from your environment.

What Happens After Emergency Services are Called or Utilized?

- **When a police officer arrives, provide a detailed account of the incident. Please be sure to include concerns about the safety of your child or others.**
 - If your child meets Emergency Petition criteria, they will be transported by law enforcement to the emergency department.
 - If your child is transported in a law enforcement vehicle, it is St. Mary's County Sheriff's Office policy that they be handcuffed, both for their safety and the safety of the officer. If there are medical needs/concerns, an ambulance may be called to transport the child to the emergency department. If this occurs, the officer will meet the ambulance at the hospital.

Term to Know: Emergency Petition

- An emergency petition is a legal process that allows a police officer, doctor, or psychologist to bring a patient to the hospital when they are at risk to hurt themselves, or to protect the property or safety of others. An emergency petition does not mean the child has to be admitted to the hospital.
- A person meets Emergency Petition criteria when mental illness is suspected and/or present AND they present an immediate danger to themselves or others
- If your child is brought to the ER under emergency petition they will have to change into a hospital gown and remove jewelry and accessories. They will not be allowed to have any belongings including cell phones. A phone can be provided if they need to make or receive a call. A staff person will be assigned to sit with them to make sure they cannot hurt themselves with their own things or things around them.
- If your child is transported to the emergency room (ER) by emergency petition, it means an ER doctor must provide a medical screening exam after first seeing a nurse who will check vital signs and assess for suicide risk. Your child will also see an emergency psychiatric service worker - usually a social worker - who will perform a dedicated psychiatric exam by speaking with your child and their family members.