Practical Steps During a Crisis

ONE-PAGE QUICK REFERENCE • A calm, safety-first reference for urgent moments

FIRST: IDENTIFY IMMEDIATE DANGER

- If a suicide attempt is occurring, someone has a life-threatening injury, or they say they are about to act: CALL 911 now.
- If there is suicidal thinking or a mental-health crisis without immediate physical danger: call or text 988 for trained U.S. crisis support. You may call for advice about another person.

NEXT: HELP SAFELY

- Stay calm; speak in short, nonjudgmental sentences. Ask directly about thoughts of suicide.
- If it is safe, remain with the person or keep them on the line while obtaining help.
- Do not promise secrecy. Do not physically restrain or confront them unless directed by emergency professionals.
- Reduce access to lethal means only if you can do so safely, and follow professional guidance.

SAY SOMETHING SIMPLE

- “I am here with you. Your safety matters. We can contact someone who knows how to help.”

AFTER INITIAL SAFETY

- Help connect to professional assessment and trusted supports. Agree on a check-in; a crisis plan should be made collaboratively with clinicians.

Important: General educational information only; not diagnosis, treatment, or individualized safety planning. U.S. crisis support: call or text 988. For immediate danger or medical emergencies, call 911.

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WHEN TO CALL 911 AND WHEN TO CALL 988

911: immediate danger, attempt underway, serious injury, overdose, loss of consciousness, or another medical emergency. Give the dispatcher accurate details and follow instructions.

988: suicidal thoughts, emotional distress, concern for another person, or questions about how to respond when not in immediate physical danger. 988 can help guide further escalation when needed.

IF YOU ARE PHYSICALLY PRESENT

Keep your voice steady, create space, avoid crowding, and move away from hazards if safe. Ask permission before touching. Do not leave a person at imminent risk alone when it is safe for you to stay.

Give responders clear, factual information: location, what was said or done, known injuries, and current immediate hazards. Do not guess a diagnosis.

IF YOU ARE SUPPORTING SOMEONE REMOTELY

Ask where they are, a callback number, and whether anyone trustworthy is nearby. If imminent danger exists, contact emergency services for their location.

Stay connected if possible and direct them toward 988, emergency services, or a trusted person who can be physically present.

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AFTER THE PEAK OF THE CRISIS

Encourage follow-up care, including an urgent clinical evaluation when appropriate. Help with one concrete task, such as calling a clinic or arranging safe transportation.

A written safety plan is ideally completed collaboratively with a qualified professional; it can include warning signs, coping steps, supportive contacts, crisis numbers, and ways to make the environment safer.

FOR LOVED ONES

Support does not require perfect words. Avoid arguments about whether feelings are justified. Listen, believe reports of distress, and invite further help.

You can ask a 988 counselor how to support someone even if that person is reluctant to talk. Bring in other trusted adults or professionals when needed.

AVOID UNSAFE ASSUMPTIONS

Do not treat a sudden calm mood as proof that danger has passed. Do not assume an earlier denial of suicidal thoughts guarantees future safety. If you are worried, check again and seek guidance.

RELIABLE SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/5-action-steps-to-help-someone-having-thoughts-of-suicide

https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/warning-signs-of-suicide

https://988lifeline.org/

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