



Mental Health First Aid

In all types of medical emergencies, first responders are very important to deal with someone's immediate needs until healthcare professionals take over. This includes mental health emergencies, although they may require techniques other than CPR or the Heimlich maneuver. The following guidelines may be helpful if you are present when a loved one, friend or fellow parishioner experiences a mental health crisis.

- Do not try to manage the situation alone. Sometimes just having another person present or on the phone can defuse a crisis.
- Call emergency contacts, if available, or the most appropriate emergency hotline.
- Speak in a calm, quiet voice. If the ill person appears not to listen or can't hear, it is possible that auditory hallucinations may be interfering. Raising your voice won't help and may increase agitation.
- Keep instructions and explanations simple and clear. Say, "We're going to the car now," not, "After we get in the car, we'll drive to your doctor's office so she can examine you."
- Respond to delusions by talking about the person's feelings, not about the delusions. Say, "This must be frightening," not, "You shouldn't be frightened, nobody's going to hurt you."
- Don't stare; direct eye contact may be perceived as confrontational or threatening.
- Handle with care. Touch may be perceived as a threat and trigger a violent reaction.
- Position yourself so you are not towering over the ill person. Stand or sit at their side to avoid being perceived as controlling or intimidating.
- Multiple-choice questions may cause confusion. Say, "Would you like me to call your psychiatrist?" not, "Would you rather I called your psychiatrist or your therapist?"
- Accept that this is an acute medical emergency. Criticizing or placing blame won't help and may escalate tension.
- After the crisis is over, support the person and their family during the recovery period, just as you would for someone affected by a serious physical illness.

Resources: <http://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org>
<http://www.ncpd.org/ministries-programs/specific/mentalillness>

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