camh

Is It a Psychiatric Emergency?

What is a psychiatric emergency?

Do a person's thoughts, feelings or behaviours put them or others at immediate risk of harm?

If yes, it is a psychiatric emergency, which requires immediate medical attention.

What are the signs of a psychiatric emergency?

- Shows signs of seriously considering suicide, such as increased talk about ending their life, giving away belongings, researching a plan or buying items that could be used in a suicide attempt
- Expresses an intention to attempt suicide
- Serious self-harm
- Threatening or trying to hurt others
- Extreme confusion, agitation or paranoia
- Hearing voices or seeing things others don't (also called hallucinations)
- Sudden, severe mood swings or loss of touch with reality
- Refusing to eat, drink or take necessary medication
- Acting in a bizarre, reckless or violent way
- Substance use that is causing immediate harm
- Has overdosed on drugs or medication
- Person has stopped psychiatric medication and is experiencing worsening or new symptoms

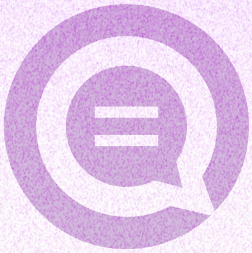
How can I help in a psychiatric emergency?

Stay calm and speak clearly.

Don't argue or try to reason if a person is confused or delusional.

Remove dangerous objects or weapons if it is safe to do so.

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.



How should I communicate with a person experiencing a psychiatric emergency?

Listen without judgment.

Let them know you care: "I'm here for you. You're not alone."

Offer to stay with them or help call for support.

Encourage professional help: "Let's find someone who can help."

Don't promise to keep suicidal thoughts a secret.

Support them in creating a safety plan (such as the Stanley Brown Safety Plan, which you can find on 988.ca).

Use the CAMH Hope app (Available for Android and iOS).

Should you visit the emergency department in a psychiatric emergency?

Yes, go to any emergency department. All of Ontario's emergency departments can help in a psychiatric emergency.

Helpful things to bring to the emergency department:

Medication lists for the person in crisis

Contact information of current care providers

Discharge notes from other care teams, or any other supporting documentation

Important contacts

For Ontario residents (available 24/7):

Emergency Services
911

Suicide Crisis Helpline
988 (call or text) 988.ca

Kids Help Phone
1-800-668-6868 Text: 686868
kidshelpphone.ca

Connex Ontario
1-866-531-2600 Text: 247247
Live Chat: connexontario.ca

For Toronto residents (available 24/7):

Toronto Community Crisis Service
211
This service provides a non-police-led, trauma-informed response to mental health crisis calls within Toronto.

Distress Centres of Greater Toronto
416-408-HELP (4357)
www.dcogt.com

For more information on addiction and mental health issues, or to download a copy of this pamphlet, visit our website:
www.camh.ca

For other formats of this pamphlet, to order multiple copies or to order other publications, contact CAMH Publications:

Toll-free: 1 800 661-1111
Toronto: 416 595-6059
publications@camh.ca
store-camh.myshopify.com

If you have questions or feedback about services at CAMH, contact the Patient and Family Experience (PFE) Office:

416 535-8501, ext. 32028
pfe@camh.ca

Family members can access the Family Resource Centre (FRC) and the RBC Patient and Family Learning Space (PFLS) for support, resources and help connecting to services.

1025 Queen St. W. (McCain Complex Care and Recovery Building)
FRC: 416 535-8501, ext. 32028; pfe@camh.ca
PFLS: 416 535-8501, ext. 33995; pfls@camh.ca
www.camh.ca/pfls

To make a donation, please contact the CAMH Foundation:

416 979-6909
foundation@camh.ca

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