

NAVIGATING

a mental health

CRISIS



PREPARING for a crisis

No one wants to worry about the possibility of a crisis—but sometimes it can't be avoided.

It's rare that a person suddenly loses control of thoughts, feelings and behavior. General behavior changes often occur before a crisis. Examples include sleeplessness, ritualistic preoccupation with certain activities, increased suspiciousness, unpredictable outbursts, increased hostility, verbal threats, angry staring or grimacing.

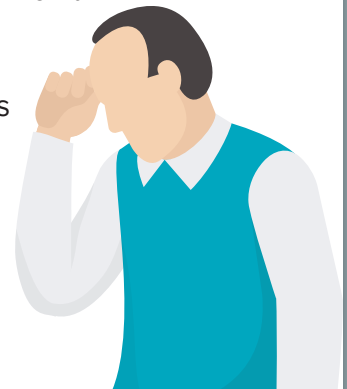
Don't ignore these changes, talk with your loved one and encourage them to visit their doctor or therapist. The more symptomatic your family member becomes, the more difficult it may be to convince them to seek treatment.

If you are alone and feel safe with them, call a trusted friend, neighbor or family member to come be with you until professional help arrives. In the meantime, the following tips may be helpful:

If you're feeling like something isn't right, talk with your loved one and voice your

concern. If necessary, take action to get services for them and support for yourself.

When a mental health crisis begins, it is likely your family member is unaware of the impact of their behavior. Auditory hallucinations, or voices, may be giving life-threatening suggestions or commands. The person believes they are hearing, seeing or feeling things that aren't there. Don't underestimate the reality and vividness of hallucinations. Accept that your loved one has an altered state of reality and don't argue with them about their experience. In extreme situations, the person may act on these sensory distortions.



- ✓ **Learn all you can about the illness your family member has.**
- ✓ **Remember** that other family members are also affected, so keep lines of communication open by talking with each other.

- ✓ **Avoid guilt and assigning blame to others.**
- ✓ **Learn to recognize early warning signs of relapse**, such as changes in sleeping patterns, increasing social withdrawal, inattention to hygiene, and signs of irritability.
- ✓ **Do what your loved one wants, as long as it's reasonable and safe.**
- ✗ **Don't shout or raise your voice.**

- ✗ **Don't threaten;** this may be interpreted as a play for power and increase fear or prompt an assault.
- ✗ **Don't criticize or make fun of the person.**
- ✗ **Don't argue with other family members**, particularly in your loved one's presence.
- ✗ **Avoid direct, continuous eye contact or touching the person.**
- ✗ **Don't block the doorway or any other exit.**