

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

CARING FOR A LOVED ONE IN CRISIS

Your help and support can make a difference.

Do you know what to do if a friend or family member is overwhelmed and in crisis? One in every five American adults experiences mental illness in a given year, but many are never diagnosed or receive treatment. Stressors at home, work, or school can lead to panic attacks, depression, anxiety, substance use, unusual or risky behavior, self-harm, and suicidal thoughts. While it can be unnerving to see someone you care about suffer emotional distress, your help and support can make a difference.

Signs that a person is in an emotional crisis include the following:

- Personality changes and rapid mood swings.
- Inability to perform daily tasks such as bathing and dressing.
- Out-of-control behavior, emotional outbursts, severe anxiety, anger, or agitation.
- Feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness.
- Withdrawal and isolation from others.

Sometimes, these changes are sudden, but behavioral changes may also be gradual.

You can show support for someone in crisis by letting them know you are concerned about their health and safety. You can start the conversation by telling them what you have noticed specifically, why you are worried, and ask if they want to talk about it. Try deep listening, which is paying close attention to the person's words, emotions, and body language. Avoid interrupting, jumping to conclusions, blaming, or judging. Assure the person that you are there for them. Stay calm and ask how you can help.

If you think the person is at risk of suicide, it is a medical emergency and it is important to get professional help immediately. Do not try to resolve the situation yourself and never agree to "keep it a secret" if the person expresses suicidal thoughts. If the person has been seeing a psychiatrist or therapist, start there. If not, or you cannot reach the person's healthcare provider, call 911, or the National Suicide Prevention Line at 1-800-273-8255. Remove access to firearms and other weapons, as well as medications. Stay with the person until help arrives, and continue to express your support and concern. Your intervention can make the difference in getting your loved one the care they need to get through the crisis and beyond.

