

How to Help a Friend in Crisis

One of the most common signs of emotional crisis is a clear and abrupt change in behavior. Some examples include:

- Recent neglect of personal hygiene
- Dramatic change in sleep habits, such as sleeping more often or not sleeping well
- Weight gain or loss
- Decline in performance at work or school
- Pronounced changes in mood, such as irritability, anger, anxiety or sadness
- Withdrawal from routine activities and relationships
- Expression of thoughts about harming self or others
- Impulsivity
- Expressions of hopelessness
- Substance abuse

Reach Out: Let your friend know that you care for them and you would like to do what you can to help. If fear or personal issues make you hesitant to reach out, find another trusted person to reach out. But remember, it is not up to you to “fix” the crisis. You can only offer support and let the person know that they are not alone.

Listen, Don't Give Advice: When someone tells us about a problem, our tendency is to fix it or find a solution. Your friend may be getting advice from several different people, including a professional. So, try not to offer advice. Lend a listening ear, and try not to say, “I know how you feel.” Even if you have dealt with similar circumstances, it's impossible to know exactly how one feels in a crisis. It may be helpful to ask your friend what s/he thinks would be helpful. Many times, people know what they need.

Be mindful of your triggers: We all face difficult issues at some point in our lives. If you are dealing with a personal or family issue that hinders your ability to regulate your own emotions or remain supportive to your friend in crisis, ask another friend or trusted person to reach out instead. Meanwhile, make sure to engage in self-care activities that help you stay well.

Get professional help on board: There are community resources and crisis hotlines available in almost every community. Offer to sit with your friend while they make a call to seek help. If you feel your friend is in danger, be sure that you share this information with another person. Your friend may ask you to keep it a secret, but they would not be telling you about these thoughts if they didn't want help. You should:

- Call 911 for emergency services if your friend is in immediate danger
- Get your friend to the nearest hospital emergency room.
- You and/or your friend can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) to be connected to a trained counselor at a suicide crisis center nearest you, available 24 hours a day.
- File a Student Needing Assistance report with the Office of Wellness and Mental Health at NOVA