

A Guide to understanding and coping with common mental health issues.

Issues covered in this guide include:

- Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis
- Coping With Anxiety
- Coping With Depression
- Coping With Stress
- Coping With Bullying & Cyber-bullying
- Active Listening and how it can help

Help And Assistance

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family get immediate support and information 24/7 by FreeTexting **HELP** to **50015**. Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit.

For information on Emergency Contacts, National Helplines, Local Support Groups and your nearest Places of Safety visit www.ineedhelp.ie

Always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured, and their life is at risk.

Gardaí / Ambulance / Fire call 999 or 112

Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland

Registered Charity 20070670

83A New Street, Killarney, County Kerry V93 FR59

☎ 1800 828 888 ✉ admin@yspi.ie

🌐 www.yspi.ie 🌐 www.ineedhelp.ie

🌐 schools.yspi.ie 🌐 www.youthcrisiscounselling.ie

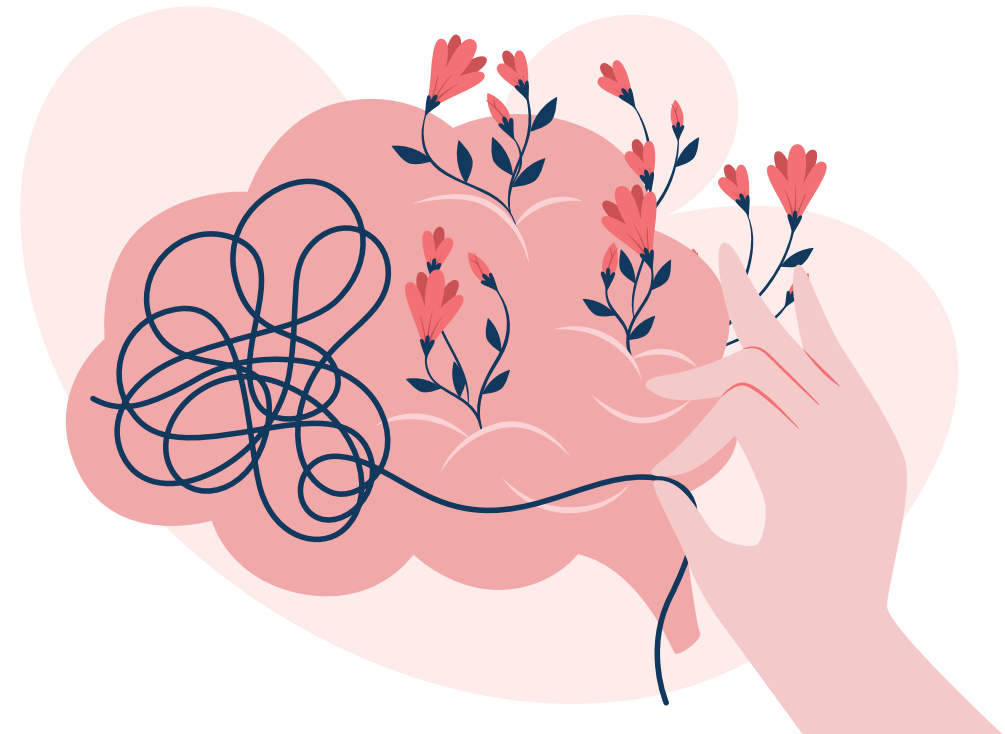
YSPI Youth
Suicide
Prevention
Ireland

YSPI Youth
Suicide
Prevention
Ireland

10

Warning *signs of*

A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS



WARNING SIGNS OF A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Short guides to coping with common mental health issues

Warning *signs of*

A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

First Publication March 2022

Written by Dr Hannah Farnsworth

Published by Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited

This document is copyrighted to the authors and licensed to Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited on an exclusive basis. The Four Steps to Help Programme is republished by kind permission of Alan McKelvie and Anthony Philpott. Four Steps to Help Programme Copyright © Alan McKelvie and Anthony Philpott 2010 – 2022. All rights reserved. E&OE. Written by Dr Hannah Farnsworth, a retired Medical Practitioner (GMC 7072713).

This publication may not be copied, reproduced or changed in any way without the express written consent of the publishers. You must obtain written permission before editing or changing this document. Selling without prior written consent is prohibited. In all cases this notice must remain intact. This work cannot be retailed or resold without the publisher's written consent. Published by Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited.

All information herein is provided as an information resource about suicide prevention and research activities only. It is not the intention of Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited to provide specific treatment or care advice. Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited does not provide certification or accreditation for any counselling organisation, individual practitioners or treatment or care models that users may find out about through our information or publications or other materials provided by or through us. Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited does not endorse or recommend any of the service providers, agencies or organisations listed on any leaflet or publication provided by us or any other organisation. In no event shall liability exist to any user (or any third party who obtains access to the information) under any law for any loss or damage (including but not limited to direct, indirect, economic and consequential damage) in respect of any matter whatsoever related to any information in any website or leaflet or publication nor for the use of the information nor for actions taken or not taken as a result of information contained in this or any other websites leaflets or publications (including, without limitation, loss or damage caused by negligence). The material contained in this leaflet is provided for general information purposes only and does not constitute care, treatment or other professional advice. Due to the general nature of the information provided in the leaflet, should you require specific help, you should seek the assistance of an appropriately trained professional person. While every care has been taken in the preparation of the information contained in this leaflet, due to the nature of the information and the processes of publication, the information may not be complete, correct or up to date. Information contained in this leaflet which has been provided by recognised third parties is provided in good faith and no liability shall exist for any errors or omissions contained.

Periods of poor mental health can affect us all at one time or another. You may notice an episode of anxiety, a time of persistently low mood, or a reaction to a bereavement, traumatic event, or exam-related stress.

Although it is normal to have fluctuations in how happy you feel, sometimes an individual's mental health can reach a crisis point. This is the stage at which you might feel pushed to your limit or at breaking point. It may seem that there is simply too much for you to cope with.

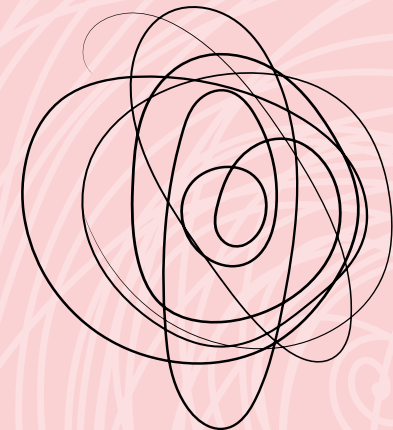
If you think you might be heading for a crisis, or want to know what to do if this should happen in future, this article will tell you everything you need to know.



What is a Mental Health Crisis?

Many people live with mental health illnesses, such as depression or anxiety. However, there are times when worsening of your mental health can leave you in urgent need of professional help. If you feel that your mental health is at its worst, that you cannot cope, or that you are on the verge of emotional collapse, you could be experiencing a mental health crisis.

Whether your mental health seems to gradually worsen, or appears to become severe overnight, recognising the signs can help you realise when you need to get immediate help.



What Can Cause a Mental Health Crisis?

A mental health crisis can be caused by something traumatic, or occur despite there being no obvious trigger.

Sometimes there is an obvious cause for the crisis. This might include:

- Feeling stressed about school, exams, or work
- Worrying about money
- Stress from family relationship breakdowns including your parents getting divorced
- Having housing worries
- Suffering a bereavement (someone dying) or another loss
- Worries about your own, or someone else's, drug or alcohol addiction
- Going through a relationship break-up
- Being abused by a partner, friend, or family member
- Going through a traumatic event such as an assault.



If there is no obvious cause for a mental health crisis, this does not mean that you cannot be having one. If you feel that you are at breaking point but don't know why, your concerns are just as valid. Whether there is an obvious cause or not, you are entitled to professional help.

What are the Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis?

Sometimes a mental health crisis can appear out of the blue, but at other times there are warning signs that a crisis may be about to occur. If you can recognise the signs of an impending crisis, being proactive in accessing help may help you to prevent the crisis from occurring.

The warning signs that you could be at risk of a mental health crisis include:

- Wanting to withdraw from, or avoid, your family or friends
- Severe mood swings
- Not getting enough sleep, or sleeping too much
- Feeling tired all the time
- Not being able to concentrate, even on things you would usually enjoy such as TV shows
- Not enjoying activities or hobbies you used to like
- Eating too little or too much
- Significant weight loss or weight gain
- Thinking about self-harm, or actually causing harm to yourself
- Thinking about suicide or death
- Using alcohol or drugs, or engaging in another form of self-destructive behaviour
- Giving away possessions you used to love
- No longer taking care of personal hygiene or basic appearance, such as not brushing your hair or getting dressed each day.



It can be reassuring to know the warning signs, so that you can reach out for help if they occur. You do not need to have all of these signs to request help; if you feel like you are in crisis, support is available.

How Do I Recognise a Mental Health Crisis?

A mental health crisis might feel as if you have hit rock bottom. Life can feel extremely difficult, and you may feel that each day is a struggle.



A crisis may cause the following to occur:

- Feeling so anxious that it is impossible to leave the house or complete any of your usual daily activities
- Feeling extremely depressed
- Intense periods of crying
- Having panic attacks or flashbacks
- Self-harming behaviour, or the urge to hurt yourself
- Feeling suicidal
- Feeling 'high' (also known as feeling manic)

If you experience a mental health crisis, specialist support is available. You must seek urgent help from your doctor, hospital, or crisis team to manage it.

I have a friend who is showing some warning signs. What should I do?

If a friend is showing warning signs of a mental health crisis, there are some strategies that may help them to feel calmer. Your friend may want to try:

- Relaxing exercises such as meditation, mindfulness or breathing exercises
- Writing about their feelings in a journal
- Completing a creative activity
- Listening to music
- Going for a walk
- Having a bath.



A friend who shows warning signs of a mental health crisis may feel able to talk to you about how they are feeling. They might also want to speak to a teacher at school. Alternatively, they may appreciate you finding out about counselling services at school, or talking therapies or medication they could access by visiting their doctor.

Managing Emergency Situations

If your friend is currently in crisis, you may need to request emergency assistance by calling 112 or 999. You can then request an ambulance, Gardaí, or both, depending on the situa-

112

Don't Try to Manage Alone

If you have a friend who is showing warning signs of a mental health crisis, it is important to remember that you do not have to manage it on your own. If you have concerns, you must speak to your parents, your friend's parents, a teacher, or call 112 or 999 in an emergency. Although your friend may ask you not to do this, in a mental health crisis they may not realise how unwell they are. Others need to act on their behalf to provide the help they need.

It can be scary to see a friend struggling, and you must make sure that you are also supported. Speak to friends, family, or your teachers if you need some help, too.

I think my child might be having a mental health crisis. What should I do to help?

If there is an immediate risk to your child's health or safety, you must either call 112 or 999 for emergency care. If they require urgent but not immediate care, you should take them to A&E or another emergency healthcare setting yourself.

For non-emergency, but urgent, care, speak to your family doctor. Alternatively, if your child is already under the care of a mental health crisis team, you should contact them straight away. If you remain unsure about who to contact, immediate support and advice is available by texting HELP to 50015.



Are there any teen-specific warning signs?

There are some teen-specific warning signs that a mental health crisis might be imminent. The signs include:

- Talk of suicide – if a teen mentions suicide, it must be taken seriously. If they have access to medication or another means of suicide, you must stay with them and call for help. Do not leave them alone at this time.
- A fixation on death, which could include research on celebrity or other reported deaths, as well as drawing pictures, reading or writing about death.
- Feeling that there is no hope for the future, or that they will never achieve anything.
- Becoming withdrawn from their friends or family, school avoidance, or no longer attending extra-curricular clubs. They may stay in their bedroom or refuse to leave the house.
- Describing voices or experiences that other people can't hear or see – this could be a sign of psychosis.
- Becoming self-destructive. This might include excessive alcohol consumption, recreational drug use, reckless behaviour, or unsafe sex. They may appear to be out of control or 'spiralling' into unusual or worrying behaviours.
- Complaints about physical symptoms including stomach pains, headaches, or feeling generally unwell.
- A dangerous calm period, which may indicate that a child has made a decision about acting on thoughts of self-harm or suicide.



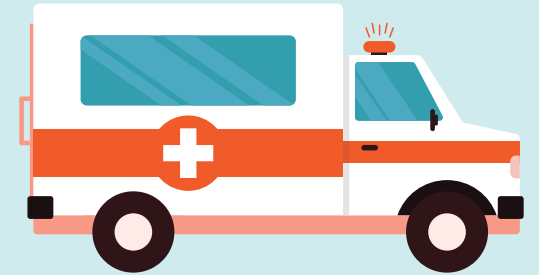
Responding to these warning signs may help to avoid a crisis from occurring. However, you should not feel guilty if, despite your efforts, a mental health crisis later occurs.

What should I do in an emergency?

In an emergency, do not leave your child alone but instead call 112 or 999 for urgent assistance.

If your child does not require immediate assistance, but the situation remains urgent due to the risk of a mental health crisis, specialist help is available. Consider getting a same-day appointment with a community doctor, get an emergency assessment at A&E, or contact your mental health crisis team for advice.

Caring for a child who is struggling with their mental health can be incredibly worrying and upsetting. If your child is unwell or in crisis, it is important that your own health and emotional wellbeing is taken care of. If you notice that you are becoming anxious, have low mood, or feel that you need some additional support, you may find it helpful to reach out to a counselor or your own doctor.



Help and Assistance

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family you should contact your GP or Out of Hours Service immediately.

You can also get immediate support and information 24/7 by

FreeText HELP to 50015

Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit. This service is fully confidential and YSPI has no information on mobile numbers that use the FreeText service



For information on:

- Emergency Contacts
- National Helplines
- Local Support Groups
- Directions to your nearest GP or out of hours clinic
- Directions to your nearest safe place or refuge

 www.ineedhelp.ie

Always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured, and their life is at risk.

Gardaí / Ambulance / Fire call 999 or 112

About Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland

Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland was founded in 2007 as there were no national charities focusing specifically on the problems and issues of youth suicide and self-harm in Ireland. We now provide a range of services aimed at mental health awareness and suicide prevention amongst teenagers.



We run our “Four Steps to Help” Programme for schools and colleges around Ireland which provides Zoom workshops. We also have a video workshop presented by John Sharpson that any organisation can book through our website at schools.yspi.ie/video.php We provide a wide range of free information including our “Let’s Talk About Mental Health” magazine delivered to schools and organisations as well as the “Coping With” series of mental health guides.

We also operate a **24/7 FreeText Crisis Information Service** and fund a Youth Crisis Counselling Service.

Full details are available at www.yspi.ie

You can help us save more young lives by donating to our work or by joining a fundraising event.



To make a donation please visit

donations.yspi.ie



or to try a Skydive For Life by visiting

skydive.yspi.ie

