

# TIP SHEET: SUPPORTING A TEEN IN A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

## Recognize the Warning Signs

- Persistent withdrawal from activities and relationships they previously enjoyed.
- Isolating in their room away from family members.
- Talking about seeing no purpose in their lives; expressing hopelessness.
- Engaging in self harm and/or excessive alcohol or other drug use.
- Talking about suicide or being better off dead.
  - *If you are concerned that your teen may be suicidal or a danger to themselves, Belmont families can call Advocates at (800) 540-5806.*

## Prepare for a Crisis

- Create a safety plan with your child and their mental health care provider. Include:
  - Contact information for family and friends, therapist and/or psychiatrist, and primary care physician.
  - A list of triggers and warning signs of a crisis.
  - Examples of skills, people, activities, or places that have helped them deescalate in the past.

## Offer Support During a Crisis

- When your teen is in crisis, offer hope and try not to judge or downplay their emotions and experiences.
- Validate your teen's struggles; it is important to acknowledge that they are real and valid.
- Ask your teen: "How can I help?"

## Know Where to Get Help

Although accessing help can be daunting, it is important not to delay. There are multiple levels of care you can utilize when your child is experiencing mental health challenges.

- **Emergency room** - necessary in a serious crisis or when your teen's safety is immediately at risk. ER visits can include psychiatric evaluation and counseling.
- **Psychiatric emergency services** - help triage during a crisis and assist in finding the appropriate level of care. Belmont families can call Advocates at (800) 540-5806. More information [here](#).
- **Inpatient hospitalization** - the best option for teens who are at high risk of harming themselves (or others) and who cannot have their needs met through lower levels of care such as individual or group therapy.
- **Outpatient care** - an option for teens who are safe in their homes and communities, but require mental health services and support.
  - **Partial hospitalization programs** offer monitoring and care for people who may be at risk of harming themselves. These are full day programs, Monday through Friday.
  - **Intensive outpatient programs** are treatment programs for teens who require higher levels of support. They typically take place 2-3 days per week, and can last several hours.
  - **Individual outpatient therapy** is a source of ongoing support. If your teen does not already have a therapist, they'll likely need one. For provider names, ask your teen's doctor or mental health provider, or see the [BWC Therapist List](#).
- **Group therapy or support groups** - can offer your child support and coping skills, as well as the language to share their feelings with others. Reach out to Sophia Suarez-Friedman (Sophia\_Suarez-Friedman@WaysideYouth.org) for a list.

Remember that life after a teen has experienced a mental health crisis is, as one Belmont parent said, "a marathon, not a sprint...see this as a long-term journey rather than a 'quick fix.'"

"It can take time to be admitted, but it's worth the wait."  
- Belmont parent

"Don't wait. If you sense something is wrong, immediately reach out to find therapy to get them the support they need."  
- Belmont parent

## Take Care of Yourself!

- Parenting through a mental health crisis is stressful and exhausting. Seek support from friends, family, professionals, and/or support groups.
- Taking care of your own mental wellbeing will allow you to better care for your teen.
- Make time for fun activities as a family, e.g., cooking, crafts, walking, and movie nights to create a positive space for discussion and de-stressing as a family.
- Ask your teen's doctor about reputable resources to learn more about your child's mental health conditions and how to support them. Additional resources and information can be found on [Hand Hold's](#) website.

**Talk with your child about mental health early on.** Engage in ongoing conversations with your children before the situation escalates. If you notice they are struggling, check in on them: ask what might be helpful, suggest therapy, offer resources.

### Resources

- National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 800-273-8255
- Crisis Text Line: text "HOME" to 741741

**Main References:** [Getting Treatment During a Crisis](#) (NAMI), [Being Prepared for a Crisis](#) (NAMI), [Know the Warning Signs](#) (NAMI), [Learning to Help Your Family](#) (NAMI), [Make Space, Listen, Offer Hope: How to Help a Child at Risk of Suicide](#) (NPR), [Reach out: How to Help Someone At Risk of Suicide](#) (NPR), [Therapy to Improve Children's mental Health](#) (CDC), [10 Things Parents Can do to Prevent Suicide](#) (Healthy Children).