



A PARENT & CAREGIVER GUIDE TO


# Helping Your Family Before, During, and After a Crisis



# HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CONCERNED...

**You can't keep your child or others in the house safe?**

**You don't know who to call when things feel unsafe?**



**Caring for a child in crisis  
can be frightening,  
confusing, and sometimes  
more than a caregiver/  
family can handle alone.**

Asking for help doesn't mean you've done  
anything wrong, and being prepared doesn't  
mean there will be a crisis.

Sometimes asking for help is needed to keep  
everyone safe.

**Please do not leave safety to chance.**



## PREPARING

Parents/Caregivers are most helpful to a child when the family:

- Is prepared to handle a crisis.
- Knows when and where to get help.
- Can communicate effectively with emergency first responders or other treatment providers.
- Has identified and practiced strategies that help to calm the child.
- Considers creating a safety plan. Let the child's clinician, pediatrician, or school guidance counselor know you have safety concerns and would like help.



## IDENTIFYING RESOURCES

- Complete a **Crisis Worksheet (p.5)**
- Identify and connect with trusted supports. These may include family members, neighbors, or faith community members.
- Consider connecting with your local police department before a crisis occurs. Call the non-emergency number to begin this partnership. Police officers want to know what works or doesn't work when it comes to keeping a child safe.



## HELPING

You may be able to de-escalate a challenging situation. Your goal is to calm the situation with your voice, body, and actions.

- Keep your voice and body calm – children take cues from your behavior.
- Be patient. Listen. Support. Ask how you can help: "What do you need right now?"
- Verbally prompt your child to use a rehearsed strategy or point to it on a list of calming skills.
- Offer choices if possible – avoid anything that may feel scary (intense eye contact, no space).
- Avoid overreacting, threatening, reasoning, or arguing with your child.
- Be prepared to offer information to the first responders or treatment team.



## WORKING WITH LOCAL POLICE

- In a crisis, families can and should call 911. First responders are trained to know what to do in a crisis.
- Police officers take an oath to assist and serve all community members.
- Some communities have Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) officers who are skilled in helping individuals with mental health needs and substance abuse concerns.
- Once you ask for help, your role is to provide information to support the best possible outcome. Police officers will be in charge of the crisis once they arrive.
- Police officers may check in with families, calm an escalating situation, stay with a family while a clinician is reached, help with transport to the hospital, and/or calm other family members.

### FAMILIES CAN USE THIS GUIDE:

**BEFORE** a crisis to identify and connect with supports, and to practice strategies.

**DURING** a crisis to assess if you can handle the situation on your own. If you need to call for help, use the **911 Script (p.7)** and share **Crisis Worksheet (p.5)** with first responders.

**AFTER** a crisis to review what helped and what might work better next time, and to revise the crisis materials.



# CRISIS ACTION PLAN

IS THERE A CHANCE OF IMMEDIATE DANGER  
TO YOUR CHILD, YOURSELF, OR OTHERS?

NO



CAN WE HANDLE THIS  
CRISIS OURSELVES?

YES



## OUR TOOLS



- Use de-escalation techniques
- Consult **Crisis Worksheet (p.5)**
- Re-evaluate your options
- Consider getting more help if crisis not resolving
- Use one of your calming strategies



IS MANAGING CRISIS  
SUSTAINABLE  
BEYOND TODAY?



YES

NO



YES



## GET IMMEDIATE HELP!



- Call 911 (USE **911 CRISIS SCRIPT (p.7)**)
- Go to nearest Emergency Room
- Call MA Emergency Services Program/  
Mobile Crisis Intervention: 1-877-382-1609

## CALL FOR HELP OR GUIDANCE. CONSIDER CALLING



- Clinician – Crisis Team – Police
- Other trusted individual  
(family, neighbor, faith community)
- Refer to **Crisis Worksheet (p.5)**

## FOLLOW CURRENT TREATMENT PLAN



- Prepare **Crisis Worksheet (p.5)** if you haven't
- See therapist, take medication as prescribed
- Know your community-based supports
- Review resources now - don't wait for a crisis
- Have child see therapist, take medication  
as prescribed



# CRISIS WORKSHEET

Complete on your own or with a clinician

CHILD'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_

**What name and gender does your child prefer to use?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Child's disability/diagnosis (optional):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Child attends (name of school):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Medical Concerns:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Medications:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Child has the following behaviors (please describe):**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Child's reaction to unfamiliar people (please describe):**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Child is verbal:** Yes ☐ No ☐

**Child is:** Deaf ☐ Hard of Hearing ☐

**Allergies:** Yes ☐ No ☐

**Child may react to loud noises:**

(i.e. sirens): Yes ☐ No ☐

**Child is capable of being home without an adult:** Yes ☐ No ☐

**Child is able to be in the community independently:** Yes ☐ No ☐

**Weapons/firearms in the home:**

Yes ☐ No ☐

**Child is afraid/anxious around new people:** Yes ☐ No ☐



# CRISIS WORKSHEET

Complete on your own or with a clinician

## Given child's disability, they may:

(Check all that apply)

- ☐ Panic if yelled at and lash out if touched or physically restrained.
- ☐ Misinterpret things you tell or ask the child to do.
- ☐ Not be able to answer your questions.
- ☐ Appear not to be listening or paying attention.
- ☐ Tend to interpret statements literally.
- ☐ Appear rude or say things that sound tactless, especially when anxious or confused.
- ☐ Have difficulty making eye contact.
- ☐ Speak too loudly, too softly, or with unusual intonation.
- ☐ OTHER:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Strategies that might help:

(Check all that apply)

- ☐ Clearly identify yourself as a law enforcement officer/first responder.
- ☐ Understand that unusual behaviors are part of the child's disability.
- ☐ Avoid touching or restraining the child unless absolutely necessary.
- ☐ Speak to the child in normal, calm, non-confrontational tones.
- ☐ Tell child what is needed as politely, clearly, simply, literally, as possible in small step-by-step directions.
- ☐ OTHER: (i.e. favorite places to visit, toys, likes, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Parent/caregiver contact information:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

## Support Team information:

Community-based supports:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Therapist : \_\_\_\_\_

Psychiatrist: \_\_\_\_\_

Pediatrician: \_\_\_\_\_

This form was adapted with permission from the Concord Massachusetts Police Department.

<https://concordsepac.org/external-resources/concords-first-responder-information-form/>



# RESOURCES

## Massachusetts Emergency Service Program/ Mobile Crisis Intervention

Teams of clinicians available 24/7 for mental health and substance abuse crisis assessment, intervention, and stabilization services.

1-877-382-1609

[www.masspartnership.com/member/ESP.aspx](http://www.masspartnership.com/member/ESP.aspx)

## National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273 - TALK (8255)

[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

## Crisis Text Line

text "HOME" to 741741

[www.crisistextline.org](http://www.crisistextline.org)

## NAMI Massachusetts Compass

Provides help navigating mental health and related systems in Massachusetts.

1-800-370-9085

[www.namimass.org/resources/compass](http://www.namimass.org/resources/compass)

## PPAL (Parent Professional Advocacy League)

Provides guidance and support for Massachusetts families and their children with mental health needs.

1-866-815-8122

[www.ppal.net](http://www.ppal.net)

## Other Community-Based Resources:

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## SAMPLE 911 CRISIS SCRIPT

*If you think you may need to call for help, practice what you might say. Effectively communicating your concerns will help a first responder prepare to interact with your child.*

My child is having a mental health emergency.

Please send officers trained in crisis intervention or mental health response.

My safety concerns are: \_\_\_\_\_.

My child is \_\_\_\_\_ years old.

My child's name is \_\_\_\_\_.

My child does/does not have a weapon.

My child has a medical condition: \_\_\_\_\_.  
(name of medical condition if applicable)


There are \_\_\_\_\_ other people present.

There are \_\_\_\_\_ other children present.

*If possible, please tell the responding officers to come without lights and sirens and not to bring the fire department.*

*If calling from a cell phone you will need to provide your physical location.*





### Acknowledgments:

This Guide made possible thanks to generous support from the Brookline Community Foundation, the IAM Strong Foundation, the Brookline Police Department/Norfolk County CIT TTAC, and the Cambridge Savings Charitable Foundation.



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Judge Baker Children's Center provides evidence-based services through our range of direct-service programs. This includes the Manville School, a K-12 special education school; the Center for Effective Child Therapy and the Baker Center for Children and Families, our two mental health clinics; Camp Baker, a summer camp for kids with ADHD; Next Step, a transition program for college-bound teens with ASD; and more.