

Crisis teams

Crisis teams can give urgent help to people who have a mental health problem. This factsheet explains what a crisis team can do and how to get help from them. Crisis teams are part of the NHS.



KEY POINTS

- Crisis teams can support you if are having a mental health crisis in the community. This could be in your own home.
- Staff from the crisis team will help you get better. They will try to make sure you don't have to go into hospital.
- You need a professional such as your GP to give your details to the crisis team before they can help you. This is called making a referral.
- Crisis team is a general term. The team might be called something else where you live.
- There should be a crisis team available in your area 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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1. What are crisis teams?

Crisis teams are part of mental health services. They can support you if you are having a mental health crisis in the community. In the community means you are not in hospital.

Having a mental health crisis can mean different things. It can include:¹

- thinking about suicide or acting on suicidal thoughts,
- going through psychosis, where you are out of touch with your normal reality, or
- doing something that could put you or other people at risk.

If you are not having a crisis you can still get support from other mental health teams. Such as a Community Mental Health Team (CMHT).

Crisis teams are sometimes called:

- home treatment teams,
- crisis resolution teams,
- crisis and assessment teams,
- rapid response services, and
- psychiatric emergency services.

You can check what sort of crisis team your area has by:

- looking on your NHS trust's website,
- calling NHS 111, or
- talking to your GP.

A crisis team can help in different ways. They will carry out an assessment to find out if they can help you. In the assessment they might ask questions about how you're feeling, what has happened and your mental health history. You can ask a relative, carer or friend to help you in the assessment.

The team may:²

- offer medication,
- arrange regular visits, and
- make sure you are in touch with other services to get long-term support.

The team are trying to make sure you don't need to go into hospital. But you might still need to go if you are very unwell.

A crisis team can also support you when you are discharged from a short stay in hospital.³ Someone from the team may visit you at home to make sure you are keeping well.

There should be a crisis team in your area which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.⁴ Most crisis teams try to see you either the same day or the next day. This will depend on the situation and how busy they are. You can find out more about how to get help from a crisis team in [Section 3](#).

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2. Who is in a crisis team?⁵

Crisis teams are made up of mental health professionals.

Psychiatrists

A psychiatrist is a mental health doctor. They can assess you and give you a diagnosis. They can prescribe medication and manage your treatment.

Community psychiatric nurses (CPNs)

A CPN is a qualified mental health nurse who works outside of hospitals. A CPN will check that your care plan still works for you and offer support to you and your family. They will help you with medication.

Social workers

A mental health social worker can give practical help with your social care needs. This might be help with housing, money or giving general support and advice.

Other people will also be in the team such as psychologists, support workers and administrators.

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3. How do I get help from a crisis team?

How you get help from a crisis team depends on where you live.

Most crisis teams will only help if a professional gives them your details. This is called making a referral. This might come from:

- your GP or out-of-hours GP service,
- Community Mental Health Team (CMHT),
- accident and emergency (A&E) department, or
- the police.

But you may be able to contact a crisis team and ask for help without a referral. You can search for your local team online, ask at your GP surgery or call the NHS on 111.

If you can self refer to your crisis team its telephone lines may only be open outside of normal office hours. If you need urgent help and cannot get through to the crisis team you can follow these crisis options.

If you are getting help from the CMHT, they should give you details of who to contact in a crisis. They should include this in your care plan. Ask your care coordinator or key worker if you have one.

If you need urgent help while you are waiting for a referral you can do the following.

- **Ask your GP for an emergency appointment.** Although GPs won't be able to offer direct help in a crisis situation, they may be able to contact other relevant teams, such as the crisis team. Most GPs have a 24 hour 'out of hours' telephone number that you can contact.
- **Go to the accident and emergency (A&E)** or casualty department of the local hospital. You can also do this if you have physical injuries (for example, because of self harm, injury or overdose). A&E will assess you and may get a psychiatrist to see you. You could get admitted to a mental health ward in hospital.
- **You can call the emergency services on 999** if you cannot go to A&E. They may contact mental health services such as the crisis team or take you to A&E.
- **You can call NHS 111.** The line is for when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. You can call 111 if you don't know who to call or you don't have a GP to call. Or if you need health information or advice about what to do next.

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4. What about confidentiality?⁶

Confidentiality means that the crisis team should not tell other people personal things about you. This includes family members or carers. The only time they can tell others your details is if you agree that they can. This is called giving consent. They can only give your details to others without your consent if you or another person is at risk. For example, if you said you are going to harm yourself.

Other people may also work with the crisis team. This could include your care coordinator or GP. The crisis team may need to contact them and give them important information.

You can find more information about '**Confidentiality**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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5. What if I am under the Care Programme Approach (CPA)?

Mental health services might say you have complex mental health needs. If they do then you might be placed under the Care Programme Approach (CPA). This says how your mental health care should be organised.

If you are under CPA, then you should get a care plan.⁷ Every care plan should include a crisis plan. The crisis plan must say what will happen if your mental health gets worse. It will also have clear details of who is in charge of your care and support, and who to contact.

The care plan should also include what else you can do if your main crisis plan options aren't available.⁸

Even if you are not under the CPA, then you should still be able to get support from a crisis team.

You can find more information about '**Care Programme Approach (CPA)**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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6. What if I am not happy with my crisis team?

You may find that you don't see crisis team staff as often or for as long as you would like. This can be because crisis teams can get very busy and have a limited amount of staff and resources.

The people who work in a crisis team will also work in shifts. This means that you might see different staff members. This could make it difficult for you to build up trusting relationships.

You can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) at your NHS trust if:

- you are unhappy with how your treatment or care is being handled, or
- you feel that the relationship between you and a professional is not working.

PALS can try to resolve any problems you have. You can find your local PALS' details at: [www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-\(PALS\)/LocationSearch/363](http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Patient-advice-and-liaison-services-(PALS)/LocationSearch/363).

You can also complain to the service if you are not happy.

You can find more information about '**Complaints**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

An advocate might be able to help if you are unhappy with your treatment. An advocate is someone independent from mental health services. They can help to make your voice heard when you are trying to resolve problems.

This might help you to be more involved in decisions about your care. An advocate might be able to help with writing letters or support you in appointments or meetings.

You can find more information about '**Advocacy**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

There may be a local advocacy service in your area which you can contact for support. You can search online for a local service or the Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service could search for you. You can contact them by email at advice@rethink.org or by phone on 0300 5000 927 (Monday – Friday except bank holidays 9.30am to 4pm).

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7. When will I get discharged from the crisis team?

Crisis teams offer short-term help. They should make sure that you have the right support to stay well before they discharge you.⁹

They should make sure you are in contact with other mental health services if you need long-term support. This might include giving your details to a community mental health team (CMHT).

You can find more information about '**Community mental health team (CMHT)**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask us to send you a copy of our factsheet.

The crisis team should also check if you have support from people close to you. This can include family members, friends or your partner.¹⁰ They should give you information on what to do or who to contact if your mental health gets worse.¹¹

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8. What if I'm a carer, friend or relative?

You might know or care for someone who has a mental illness. There may be times when they have a crisis and you need to get them help.

Most crisis teams only accept referrals from healthcare professionals. But some may accept referrals from carers, friends or family. We talk about how to get help in [Section 3](#).

The person you care for might have a care plan. A care plan should explain who to contact in a crisis. You could ask to see their care plan. Then if a crisis does happen, you know who to get hold of.

If you care for someone with a mental illness, you could be involved in care planning. But there are rules about confidentiality and carers. Confidential information about a person cannot be passed on to others

unless the person agrees. This includes family members, friends and carers.¹²

The team should ask the person you care about what they are happy for others to know.¹³ This includes any care plans that are drawn up.

You can find more information about:

- Getting help in a crisis, and
- Confidentiality and information sharing for carers, friends and relatives

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheets.

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¹ NHS Choices. *What are crisis resolution and home treatment services (CRHT)?* www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/mental-health-services-explained/Pages/mental-health-emergencies.aspx (Accessed 25th July 2016).

² Sonia Johnson. Crisis resolution and home treatment teams: an evolving model. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*. (2013) Volume 19 (issue 115-123) p 115-123. <http://apt.rcpsych.org/content/aptrcpsych/19/2/115.full.pdf>; (21st September, 2016.)

³ As note 1.

⁴ As note 1.

⁵ Royal College of Psychiatrists. *Mental Health Services/Teams in the Community*.

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/treatmentwellbeing/mentalhealthinthecommunity.aspx> (Accessed 15 September 2016).

⁶ Department of Health. *Confidentiality – NHS Code of Practice*. London: Department of Health; 2003.

⁷ Department of Health. *Refocusing the Care Programme Approach: Policy and Positive Practice Guidance*. London: Department of Health; 2008. Page 18.

⁸ As note 7, at [Page 19]

⁹ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. *Service user experience in adult mental health: improving the experience of care for people using adult NHS mental health services*. Clinical Guidance 136. London: national Institute for Health and Care Excellence; 2011. Page 25, para 1.7.1.

¹⁰ As note 9, at [page 25] [para 1.7.3].

¹¹ As note 9, at [page 25] [para 1.7.2].

¹² As note 6, at [page 8] [para 14].

¹³ As note 6, at [page 40].

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Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0300 5000 927

Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm
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