

https://www.santafenewmexican.com/opinion/commentary/in-a-mental-health-crisis-heres-what-to-do/article_f6dc5f46-2f3b-11ed-addd-8bb5694e09ab.html

COMMENTARY ADAN MENDOZA, ROBERTO LUJAN AND RACHEL FELDMAN

In a mental health crisis, here's what to do

By Adan Mendoza, Roberto Lujan and Rachel Fedlman

Sep 10, 2022

In Santa Fe County, we view mental illness and addiction as health problems. If you or someone you know is expressing potential self-harm, dangerous or frightening behavior toward others, we will provide a compassionate response. To get the most appropriate response and protect everyone involved, we want you to know your options.

Who to call

- 988: The national suicide/mental health emergency hotline. Trained operators will listen to concerns and find local resources to help. If life-threatening, 988 will link to 911.
- 911: The Regional Emergency Communications Center, where dispatchers are trained in screening mental health, addiction, health and public safety emergencies. Dispatchers send emergency medical personnel (via ambulance), police/sheriff, fire and alternative response/mobile crisis response teams including mental health professionals.
- 505-428-3700: The nonemergency operator at the Regional Emergency Communications Center may assist you in finding appropriate resources or dispatch an alternative response/mobile crisis response team.
- Register for RAVE (santafenm.gov/alertsantafe): You can enter information an emergency responder needs about anyone in your household. You set up a profile for each household member and can describe medical and behavioral health conditions, disabilities, language preferences, emergency contacts and other relevant information. In about 15 minutes for setup, this can save time in an emergency, providing information to any first responder en route to your home address or triggered by the phone number you register.

What to do while waiting for help

- Keep calm: Strong emotions tend to escalate.
- Use quiet, distance and slow things down.
- Don't try to control the person in crisis.
- Keep yourself and others safe, letting first responders do their job.
- Calm others present — law enforcement response is to help and protect.
- Gather information first responders need.

Information needed about person in crisis

- Name, age, physical description and language spoken.

[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)

- Detailed description of behavior, any triggers that worsen or escalate behavior.
- Context, history, what has worked or not in the past.
- Statements of intent to self-harm or threats to others.
- Emotional expression — anger, sadness, responsiveness, excitement.
- Evidence of drugs/medication ingested by person in crisis, names or descriptions (if possible, find containers).
- Known medical, psychiatric or addiction diagnoses, and recent episodes of concerning behavior.
- Prescribed medications.
- Weapon(s) in possession.
- Injuries.
- Mental status — alert, unconscious, disorientation, dementia, confusion, hallucination.
- Physical status — breathing, disability, agitation.

Info to communicate about the scene

- Description of location and setting.
- Number and age of persons at scene, and relationship to person in crisis.
- Anyone injured, type of injury, need for medical assistance.
- Vulnerable persons at scene — frail elderly, disabled, children.

First responders are trained to help

- 911 dispatchers are licensed by the state, receive extensive training in screening calls and follow protocols developed to national standards.
- Emergency medical technicians and paramedics arriving on ambulances or fire trucks have specialized training in medical intervention and may transport to local hospitals if violence is not involved.
- Police and sheriff's deputies receive core training in behavioral health emergency intervention when they are licensed, and continuing education every two years. In Santa Fe, additional training is provided by local behavioral health crisis agencies. Many officers are certified in crisis intervention techniques. Law enforcement emphasizes patient, empathic, respectful, culturally appropriate and compassionate response by all personnel. The Santa Fe Sheriff's Office employs a licensed therapist, uses a crisis negotiation team and has a contract for licensed behavioral health services. Santa Fe city and county have alternative/mobile crisis response teams that include behavioral health clinicians with goals to expand.

Law enforcement intervention priorities

- Harm reduction.
- Use of time, distance, active listening and deescalation training.
- Offering services.
- Emergency treatment for opioid overdose (Narcan).
- Calm, restore and secure scene and all present.

Ask for help.

Adan Mendoza is the sheriff for Santa Fe County, and Roberto Lujan is the director of the Santa Fe County Regional Emergency Communications Center. Rachel Feldman chairs the Civil Rights and Law Enforcement Reform Committee of Indivisible SOS Santa Fe.