

CHILDREN IN CRISIS: DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES

Children cannot always communicate their thoughts, feelings or emotions clearly or understand what others are saying to them during a crisis. As a caregiver or someone who is working closely with a child, it is important to empathize and connect with the child's feelings, attempt to de-escalate the crisis, and assess the situation to determine if you need emergency assistance, guidance or support. Seek outside resources when your actions are not helping.

When involved in a crisis, try these de-escalation techniques:

- Keep your voice calm
- Avoid overreacting
- Listen to the child
- Don't make judgmental comments
- Don't argue or try to reason with the child
- Express support and concern
- Avoid continuous eye contact
- Ask how you can help
- Keep stimulation level low
- Offer options instead of trying to take control
- Avoid touching the child unless you ask permission
- Gently announce actions before initiating them
- Give the child space, so they don't feel trapped
- Move slowly
- Be patient

If you are unable to de-escalate the crisis yourself, you should seek additional help from trained mental health professionals who can assess your child to determine the level of crisis intervention required. Often a trained professional can help a family de-escalate the situation or prevent the crisis from ever occurring.

While the child remains in crisis, stay as calm as possible and continue to seek guidance and support until the crisis is resolved. Safety is of the utmost importance. When your or anyone else's safety is in doubt, back off or leave the situation.

NOT IN IMMEDIATE DANGER?

If you do not believe that you, the child, or other family members are in immediate danger, call a professional familiar with the child's history — a psychiatrist, clinic nurse, therapist, case manager or family physician. This professional can help assess the situation and offer advice. They will be able to schedule an appointment or may be able to admit the child to the hospital.

WHO TO CALL FOR URGENT HELP

If you need additional assistance to ensure your own safety or the safety of others because of a crisis, please call your local law enforcement agency and ask for a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) trained officer. If available, an officer who is trained in crisis management will be dispatched.

Adapted for Montana from "[Mental Health Crisis Planning for Children](#)" from NAMI Minnesota