

What to Expect If I Call 911 for a Mental Health Crisis

When you call 911 for a mental health crisis, expect a dispatcher to ask specific questions about safety, weapons, and behaviors to assess the situation, potentially sending police (especially Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) trained officers if available) or paramedics, or connecting you to mobile crisis teams, but remember **988** (call/text) is often better for non-immediate threats to connect with mental health support without law enforcement, unless someone is in immediate danger of self-harm or harming others.

What to tell the dispatcher:

- **It's a mental health crisis:** Clearly state this early.
- **Safety first:** Mention if there are weapons, if the person is a danger to themselves or others, and if anyone else is present.
- **Be specific:** Describe behaviors (yelling, violence, paranoia) and relevant history (diagnosis, medications, past providers).
- **What helps:** Explain de-escalation techniques or triggers if you know them.

What to expect from the response:

- **Information Gathering:** The dispatcher will try to de-escalate and get details to send the right help.
- **Potential Responders:**
 - **Police:** Often dispatched, especially if weapons are involved or the situation is volatile; ask for CIT officers if possible.
 - **Paramedics:** May be sent if there's a medical component or injury.
 - **Mobile Crisis Teams:** Some areas dispatch mental health professionals (clinicians/peers) for nonviolent calls to provide immediate support and link to care, police only if needed.
- **The Goal:** Get the person to safety and the appropriate level of care (hospital, crisis center, or home with follow-up).

When to call 911 vs. 988:

- **Call 911 for immediate danger:** Suicidal act in progress, violence, serious injury, or needing immediate police/medical intervention.
- **Call or text 988:** For emotional distress, suicidal thoughts, or if you need to talk to a counselor for support and resources without involving emergency services unless things escalate.