

What to do in an Emergency

Living with someone with a mental health problem can throw up some challenges for young carers.

Most of the time it will be fine and the person will be able to cope from day to day. However, like everything else, there are times when a person with a mental health problem may become very ill and require immediate help.

This can happen suddenly and might be quite frightening. Or it might be that you notice the person you care for is acting a bit differently or doing or saying things that they wouldn't normally and you might be worried about them.

As young carers there are things you can do in such situations which will be of huge help to the person you care for.

PLEASE REMEMBER THAT IN ANY EMERGENCY SITUATION YOU MUST KEEP YOURSELF SAFE AND ALWAYS GET HELP FROM OTHERS, SUCH AS THE POLICE, AMBULANCE OR A DOCTOR.

It might also be a good idea to have a list of phone numbers you can use in an emergency. This list should be kept near to the telephone or stored in your mobile. You can write this list with your young carer worker, or why not ask the person you care for who you should contact if they become unwell and need emergency help?

Remember that the emergency services (police, ambulance and fire services) can all be contacted on **999**. In Scotland NHS 24 can be contacted on 0800 24 24 24. In England and Wales you can contact NHS Direct. Both these places will give you help in dealing with an emergency, and they can get a doctor or an ambulance to you if needed.



Depression

Depression is where someone has very low moods over a long period of time and can see no way forward.

Depression can happen for many reasons. Some seem obvious such as losing a job, while other causes may not be so obvious.

It's normal for us all to get a bit down every now and then, but depression lasts for a long period of time and doesn't move even when what made us sad goes away.

Most people with depression can have good days and bad days. On the good days their mood might not be too low and they can carry on with everyday life. When their mood is low, however, they may not be able to do the things they usually do.

If you live with someone with depression, try to talk to them when they are feeling well (at times when their mood is good) and find out what kinds of things you could do to help them when their mood gets low.

It might be that you could put together a list of people who you can call on to help when the person you care for is not doing well. This can include other family members, friends, doctor, nurse or relatives. Keep these numbers handy or in your mobile phone so you can call them as soon as you need to.

Make sure you speak to someone about how you are feeling and explain to them the kinds of things you might need help with. Then if you do need to help the person you care for when their mood is low, you too can get some support. You don't have to do this all on your own. There are things you can do to help.

What you can do to help

It can be very hard to live with someone with depression, but the low moods generally do pass and people do get better with help, medication and support from others.

It is important that, as a young carer, you realise that you are not to blame for what is happening, you can only do what you can to help, and that it is ok to ask for help. You are, after all, a young person who should not be left to deal with this on their own.

Some tips when the person you care for is suffering from depression.

Contact someone on your list of helpers who could help you with the person you care for.

If you are very worried about the person you care for and think that their mood is getting very low, or that they are not responding to you call for a doctor or nurse. You can also call the local Mental Health Crisis Team (again get their number on your list of people to contact).

Explain to the person you are calling what is happening and how the person you care for has very low mood and you are worried about them. Tell the doctor or nurse that you are a young carer and you need them to see the person as soon as they can. If you have a list of people you can call on for help then do that.

Some people who become very depressed may also think about killing themselves. If you are worried that the person you care for might be thinking that, if they have told you that is what they are going to do, or have tried to kill themselves, call for an ambulance at once.

Tell the 999 operator that you think the person may have tried to kill themselves, or they are talking about doing it and needs help. Explain that you are the carer and need their help. Stay with the person until the ambulance arrives. Tell the ambulance people what has happened.

If the person you care for is unconscious (it looks like they are asleep but you can't waken them), try and get them onto the floor and roll them onto their left side. Try and keep them in this position until help arrives. **Do not** give them anything to drink or eat, even if they come round. It's better to wait until ambulance staff gets there and they can take over.

If the person you are with is drinking or taking drugs don't put yourself in danger. Go to get help as quickly as possible if this is the situation, call emergency services for help or your family doctor and explain what is going on. You can also call a family member or friend or neighbour for help.

Panic Attacks

Panic attacks happen when someone has severe anxiety. Anxiety is where people get very worried about things. This worry can make some people become so frightened or afraid their body reacts by panicking.

Some signs of a panic attack might be:

- Shaking all over, or maybe just hands or legs
- Dizziness or ready to faint
- Rapid breathing
- Feeling sick or that they're going to be sick
- Feeling sweaty, especially hands and under the arms
- Person might feel as though they are going to die they are so frightened
- Really fast heart beat
- Chest pain
- Fingers or toes may feel numb or have a tingle like "pins and needles"
- Chills or hot flushes

Something you can do if you live with someone who takes panic attacks is to write a list of telephone numbers on a piece of paper and keep it somewhere near to a phone, or put the numbers in your mobile.

These numbers can be for people who can help you when someone has a panic attack. It might be another family member or a friend who can talk to the person having the panic attack, or come and be with the person. It might also be someone that you need to be with you while this is happening.

Make sure you have money in your mobile, or have a mobile you keep just for use in emergencies. You can call 999 from a mobile without having any money on it.

If you live with someone who has panic attacks, try to work out with them when they are well what you should do in an emergency. Ask them what kinds of things would help them, what you should say to them, should you call for a doctor or an ambulance etc.

If the person you are caring for is having chest pains, difficulty breathing, or is distressed (really upset and frightened) then you should call for an ambulance.

If you are at all unsure whether the person is having a panic attack or is having some other medical problem then always call an ambulance. Stay with the person and keep talking to them until the ambulance gets there. Tell the ambulance people what has happened and what the person was like just before the attack took place if you can.

What to do during a panic attack

If you find yourself in the situation where you are the only other person around when someone has a panic attack here are a few steps to take. Remember - a panic attack will pass.

1. If you know the person is having a panic attack (and not having chest pain or difficulty breathing) try to get them to move to a safe, quiet place if possible. This might be when you call someone on your list for extra help.
2. Help calm the person down by asking them to take deep, slow breaths. Ask the person to follow you as you breathe. Lift your arm up to the count of 3 (1, 2, 3 nice and slowly as you lift your arm) and get the person to breath in as you do this. Ask them to hold their breath for 3 seconds (just count to 3). Then slowly lower your arm to the count of 4 (1, 2, 3, 4 nice and slowly as you lower your arm) and get person to breath out. You may have to repeat this several times until their breathing becomes more normal and calm.
3. Talk to the person in a calm voice and don't shout at them. Remind them that you are there and that everything will be ok. You can tell them they are having a panic attack and it will pass, it might take a little bit of time but it will pass.
4. Tell the person you are with that you will stay with them until this passes (or that someone else will stay with them if you have called someone to come and help), and that they will be safe.
5. After the attack let the person have some time to come round and recover from what has happened.
6. Encourage the person you care for to get help in dealing with their anxiety. This way they might be able to reduce or stop having panic attacks.

After such an emergency it is important that you talk through with someone what happened and how you feel about it. If you can't, or don't want to, talk to the person who has just had the attack, then speak to your young carer worker, a family friend or member, a teacher, or a doctor.

By speaking about what happened and what you did to help you can help yourself deal with it and be ready in case it happens again.

It might be an idea to practice doing some of the calm breathing activity from above so that if you ever have to do it in an emergency you feel more confident about doing it. See if you can practice it with the person you care for or your young carer worker.

Bi-Polar Disorder

Bi-polar disorder is the name given to a particular mental health problem where the person suffers from depression some of the time, and mania at different times. It is also sometimes called Manic Depression.

Mania is the opposite of depression. A person might become full of energy and confidence, and feel as if they can take on the world. They usually say that their mood is very high and they feel really good about themselves and what they can do.

This all sounds really good, but mania can have its bad side. People suffering mania may not sleep well. They may become very talkative, be full of ideas, and may take risks.

Some people also think things about themselves or others that are only real to them. For instance, some people might think that they are being watched by neighbours or the police, when that is not true, but for the person it is very real.

Other people with mania may see or hear things which you can't. When someone experiences this, or thinks things which are not real to others, this can be called psychosis.

At other times a person with bi-polar disorder may become depressed and be the opposite of what has just been described.

As the carer you can usually spot some signs that a person's mood is going high. When the person is well (their mood is not too high or too low) try to talk to them about what kinds of things you can do to help them, and who else can help when the person becomes unwell. Make a list of people you can contact quickly if you need help, or the person you care for needs help.

Try to talk to them also about signs that you should look out for which would tell you their mood is getting high and help may be needed. Maybe you find that it is difficult to keep up with their conversation, or they may start jobs and not finish them. If the person isn't sleeping well then you may find you are getting up to be with them to make sure they are safe.

Some signs of mania

- The person may start talking a lot faster than normally and moving from one subject to another very quickly
- They may become a little confused as they try to speak fast
- The person may start to spend money without thinking about it, and the money may be spent on things which aren't needed, or which the person can't afford
- Sleep may be poor, they may only sleep for short periods of time

- The person may start to talk to something which you can't see, or may hear things you can't hear
- The person may be full of energy and always on the go, they usually start something but don't finish it
- The person may put themselves at risk, maybe going out during the night looking for someone or something they think they need
- The person may become more irritable than usual and their temper may be shorter. Maybe they snap at you more, especially if you disagree with some of their grand plans or ideas

With the right treatment and support people can live with bi-polar and cope with day to day life.

As a young carer living with someone with bi-polar it is important that you get support too. Speak to someone about it and ask for help for the person you are caring for.

What to do during manic episode

1. If you think that the person you care for is becoming manic, if you spot some of the tell-tale signs that their mood is becoming high, get help at this stage. Tell their doctor, psychiatric nurse, or support worker or social worker. This way help can be given which can prevent the mania getting any worse.
2. If the person you are caring for becomes very upset or angry, get immediate help by calling a doctor or emergency services. Keep yourself safe at all times.
3. Try and remain as calm as you can if someone is manic around you. Talk slowly and simply. Try to get them to speak to someone who can help them, such as a doctor or nurse.
4. If the person you care for won't speak to a doctor or nurse then you do that. Explain that you are a young carer and are very concerned and need their help.
5. If the person you care for is drinking or taking drugs, get help immediately and keep yourself safe. Get a friend, family member or neighbour to help keep situation calm until doctor or nurse arrives.
6. If you know what kind of things can calm the person or distract the person then use these (usually this will only be known if you have talked to the person when they are well).
7. Remember that mania will pass if the right treatment is given so it is important to get help from the family doctor or psychiatric nurse as soon as you can.

Self-Harm

Some people find it very hard to deal with what is happening in their lives. For some people their emotions can become very hard to cope with and they may turn to deliberately hurting themselves.

Showing how we feel is sometimes a hard thing for people to do and they can turn to using their bodies as a way of showing how they feel. They do this by hurting themselves in some form, such as cutting, hitting, biting, burning or picking at skin.. This is referred to as self-harm or self-injury.

Self-harm is not about crying out for attention (although for some people it might be the only way they know how to show how they feel). It can become a way of coping with difficult feelings and emotions for some people.

There are other ways to cope and other ways to express how we feel or what we think. If you are caring for someone who self-harms, or know of anyone who self-harms, there are a few things you could suggest that they try which might distract them from the urge to harm themselves.

They could try:

- Listening to music
- Painting, drawing, colouring
- Sporting activities/exercise
- Calling or texting a friend
- Drawing on themselves with a non-permanent red marker pen
- Popping bubble wrap
- Snapping an elastic band on the wrist
- Putting plasters or bandages on where they want to self-harm
- Punching a punch bag or cushion
- Shouting or screaming
- Dancing
- Singing
- Playing with a pet
- Taking a bath
- Having a massage or massaging their own feet and hands
- Doing school work
- Calling a helpline, such as Samaritans, Child Line
- Putting on fake tan

If you are with someone who is self-harming, encourage them to get help, see their GP or talk to someone at school or in the family. Talking can be a good way of getting a person to start to open up about how they are feeling.

It's OK if you don't want to be the person they talk to, you can be there to give them ideas about who they could talk to.

If the person you are with has self-harmed and you are worried about the injury or their safety then call an ambulance or their GP surgery. You can also try NHS 24 in Scotland (08454 24 24 24) or NHS Direct in England (0845 4647) Encourage the person to get medical help as soon as possible if you are concerned.

Do not try to talk a person out of harming themselves, suggest some alternatives they could do until they can get help, such as the techniques mentioned above. Try to stay calm and let the person talk if they want to, or get someone they trust to be with them.

If you care for someone who self-harms, try to talk to them when they are feeling good about things. Ask them what you should do if they start to think about self-harm.

This might lead to you helping them to write out a list of things they can do to prevent themselves from self-harming. The list could also include people they might talk to or want to have around when they feel like this, telephone numbers they can use to talk to someone and an emergency number they can use if they need urgent help.

If you are very worried about someone who is self-harming try to find out if you can talk to someone about it. You may not want to say who it is that is self-harming, but you might want to talk to someone about how it is making you feel. This gives you a safe way of dealing with your own feelings and emotions.

If you are going to speak to someone about a friend or relative who self-harms, you should tell them that you are very concerned and feel that you need to speak to someone. Make sure that whoever you talk to is someone you can trust.

For more tips about distraction techniques and other ways to help people who self-harm, go to www.nshn.co.uk