

Family Interaction with Law Enforcement

Calling 911

Having to call 911 is an extremely stressful situation. It is by definition an emergency. Not only do you have concern for the person about whom you are making the call, but also you want to make sure that you give law enforcement enough information so that they will be able to respond effectively and safely.

Try to control the volume of your voice. When you shout over the phone it is difficult for the 911 Operator to understand what you are saying. Certainly, this is a very emotionally charged time, but if the Operator can only hear shouting, the information is not efficiently received.

As calmly and clearly as possible, tell the Operator the following:

- Your name and address.
- The patient's name.
- Your relationship to the patient.
- That the patient is mentally ill.
- The patient's diagnosis (schizophrenia, Depression, etc.).
- Any medication being used.
- Has medication stopped? How long?
- Describe what the patient is doing now.
- Do you feel threatened?
- Is there a history of violent acting out?
- Does the patient hear voices?
- Does the patient have fears?
- Are there weapons available? (Try to remove them)
- Location of patient in house?
- Request a Crisis Intervention Trained (CIT) Officer, if available.

When Law Enforcement Arrives:

Have all the lights in the house turned on, so that all occupants can be clearly visible to the arriving officers. Have nothing in your hands if you come out of the house to meet the officers. Do not run up to the officers. They have no idea who you are and anything you may carry can possibly be interpreted as a weapon. It is essential that the officers responding to your emergency call establish a comfort zone – knowing who the patient is and that you, who possibly may be also agitated, are not a threat. As calmly as possible, identify yourself.

Tell the Officers:

- Who you are.
- Who you have called about.
- Your relationship to the patient.
- That the patient has a mental illness.
- What kind of mental illness it is.
- Medication being taken.
- Has medication stopped? When?
- Is the patient violent or delusional (paranoid)?
- History of suicide attempts?
- The attending psychiatrist's or case manager's name, if any and their phone #.

Officers responding to a 911 emergency call are very focused when they arrive on the scene. First, they will make the scene safe for you, the patient, and themselves. The more informed and at ease the officers are, the less likelihood that someone will get injured or that the situation will worsen. Spend all the time that is necessary to answer the officers' questions. Answer directly and concisely. Offer any advice you deem helpful. Do not ramble. Officers tend to tune out persons who try to tell their entire life's story. After this is done, they will usually be able to deal with you and answer any questions. Although it is difficult in times of crisis, being patient is essential.

This information was provided courtesy of NAMI California.