



**National Alliance on Mental Illness**

## **COMMUNICATING WITH SOMEONE WITH A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS**

- DO** SLOW DOWN
- DO** GIVE THEM SPACE  
Don't make them feel trapped
- DO** BE CALM  
Express your support and concern
- DO** SPEAK SLOWLY AND SOFTLY  
USE SHORT and SIMPLE SENTENCES
- DO** AVOID sudden or quick movements
- DO** BE HELPFUL. Respond to basic needs. Be very low key.  
"We are all here to help."
- DO** GIVE FIRM, CLEAR DIRECTIONS;  
One person should talk to the subject.
- DO** RESPOND TO DELUSIONAL THINKING or HALLUCINATIONS by talking  
about the person's feelings rather than what she or he is saying
- DO** LISTEN TO THEIR STORY
- DO** EXPLAIN POLICY, especially if handcuffed
  
- DON'T** TAKE CONTROL if you don't have to
- DON'T** ARGUE or try to reason with mental illness symptoms
- DON'T** STARE AT THE PERSON
- DON'T** CONFUSE THE PERSON  
One person should interact with the person  
Others should keep their distance  
Ask casual observers to leave  
Follow through with directions or commands
- DON'T** TOUCH THE PERSON UNLESS NECESSARY  
For people experiencing a mental health crisis, it may cause fear and  
lead to violence (trying to protect themselves)
- DON'T** SHOUT
- DON'T** GIVE THEM MULTIPLE CHOICES  
This can increase their confusion
- DON'T** WHISPER, LAUGH, JOKE, or DECEIVE the person  
Dishonesty creates fear and suspicion. The person will likely remember  
it in any subsequent contact
- DON'T** ARREST A PERSON FOR MENTAL ILL BEHAVIOR NOT CRIMINAL IN  
NATURE
- DON'T** JOIN into behavior related to the person's mental illness
- DON'T** HOGTIE IF A PERSON NEEDS TO BE RESTRAINED. IMMEDIATELY  
raise them to a sitting position and call for medical help