

Calling 911: How to Work With Law Enforcement

Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (www.ffcmh.org)

Your primary role in a 911 call is to be a good communicator.

Your ability to remain calm and provide factual details is critical to the outcome of this situation. Dispatchers will stay on the line after they've alerted police. During that time; you can provide more detailed information that they can further dispatch to police or an ambulance as they are enroute.



Once you call the police:

1. Remain as calm as you possibly can.
2. Provide only facts as quickly and clearly as possible.
EXAMPLE: I am calling from [address]. My 13-year-old son is threatening to cut his sister. He has [diagnosis] and is off his medication. There are 3 of us in the house: me and my son and daughter.
3. Identify weapons in the vicinity or in your child's possession and alert the dispatcher.
4. Be specific about what type of police assistance you are asking for.
EXAMPLE: We want to keep everyone safe and get my son to the emergency room.
5. Answer any questions the dispatcher asks. Do not take offense when you are asked to repeat information. This is done to double-check details and better assist you.
6. Offer specific information to the dispatcher about how an officer can help your child calm down.
7. Tell the dispatcher any addition information you can about what might cause you child's behavior to become more dangerous—suggest actions the officer should avoid.
EXAMPLE: Please don't tell him to stand still. He cannot hold his body still until he calms. If you can get him to walk with you, he can listen and respond better. He is terrified of being handcuffed. Please tell him what he needs to do to avoid being handcuffed.
8. Use this as an opportunity to develop a relationship with your local precinct. Get an officer's card and contact them later (or the captain) and explain your situation and that you may need to call again in the future. Ask for insights into how you and the police can work together. An officer might be assigned to your 'case', or your situation can be shared in a precinct meeting with staff.

Talk to your local law enforcement precinct ahead of time:

Call the non-emergency line or public affairs office and ask questions about how they respond to situations where a child or teen is mentally ill and out of control. Do they have special training? Do they transport? Will they record that your child has a mental health condition so that they'll know how best to manage when you call 911?