

# How to Make a Crisis Plan When a Child Has a Mental Disorder

Margaret Puckette, CPSP

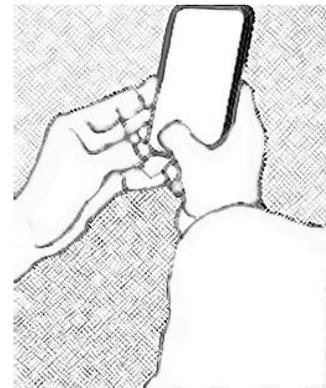
We plan for emergencies all the time. We know to put smoke detectors in our homes; we know how to use the oxygen mask in an airplane; and we know how to prevent someone from choking to death. Do you know how to handle a mental health crisis? A crisis plan helps parents act immediately and avoid wasting time in chaotic situations. It also aids in stabilizing a serious situation quickly.



## Here's how to start

1. **Recruit a team**, including as many participants as possible. This means immediate family, friends and neighbors, teachers and school staff, a therapist or psychiatrist, and employers.
2. **Include everyone** in planning, or communicate your plans. Many may be involved or impacted by a child's crisis, and they need to know what to expect or do.
3. **Work out who will do what and how**, and clarify *what not to do*. Since the crisis could involve any number of scenarios, you should identify the most likely scenarios and have a plan for each.
4. **Build a relationship between members** for emotional support and trust ahead of time.

- "We'll have your back;" "Just do the best you can;" "Call for back-up if there's something you can't handle;"
- For anyone potentially at-risk: "Go and hide in a room," or "Get your siblings and stay at a neighbor's."
- Ask a mental health provider if they can take an emergency call from you.



5. **Plan for the aftermath**. This means two things:

- **You and other team members need to decompress** and catch your breath emotionally, so help each one find something that works for them. A sibling could stay at a friend's house overnight; someone gets to sleep in; someone takes a 'mental health day' off from work; someone gets a deadline pushed back or permission to postpone an assignment.
- **You and other team members stay on yellow alert**. The Red Alert has passed, but consequences of the crises may last a while (days), so your team needs to stay settled but ready to act. This is when some of your team can be really supportive: taking the dog for a few days, getting a few groceries, checking in (or *not* draining you with frequent check-ins).

## Examples of how your team can help:

- **Who goes out and searches for a runaway?** This person should be able to bring the child back to school or home without mutual endangerment, and they should know how to work with police or community members.
- **Who gets on the phone and who do they call for help?** A neighbor or relative? Do they call the police or an ambulance? A crisis line? Does your town or city have a crisis response team for kids? Some do.
- **Who should communicate with the child?** This should be a family member or friend that the child trusts more than the others.
- **Who should step in and break up a fight?** And what *specifically* should they do or say each time to calm the situation? Believe it or not, your troubled child can often tell you who this person is in advance, and what works best, and what will make things worse. Listen to them. It doesn't have to sound rational to you if it works to prevent a crisis.
- **What and how should schools handle a situation** so the crisis is averted without affecting other students as much as possible?



Evidence shows that a **rapid cooling down of emotions** and rapid reduction of stress hormones supports resilience—the ability to bounce back in a tough situation.

Margaret Puckette, CPSP  
Certified Parent Support Provider  
raisingtroubledkids@comcast.net  
<https://raisingtroubledkids.com>