

Communicating During a Mental Health Crisis - Procedure

What to do when a mentally ill person disrupts a congregational event (if you are a lay person):

Stay calm. The majority of mentally ill persons are not dangerous, but can be difficult to manage. Common signs of mental illness include: audio or visual hallucinations, disorientation, paranoia and aggression.

→ If the person states intent to harm her/himself or another person, call 911 immediately. Give explicit directions where police should enter UUCA to find you and the person.

Ask someone to let one of the staff know about what is happening and to return to let you know that a staff person was located. (The staff person will make sure that our RE classes are secured before they return to help you.)

Ask someone to stay nearby to assist you.

Using a soft, respectful approach, move the person away from the event and to another place where you can be seen (e.g., the library, or the bench near the library).

Keep your tone even and conversational. In a conversational manner, ask for the person's name and where they live.

Give the person plenty of personal space. Don't touch the person unless it is necessary and if you do, let the person know you are going to touch him/her. If possible, the person should not be physically or verbally coerced to leave the building.

Stay calm until the staff person arrives. Listen to the person's story, avoiding any attempts to challenge or argue with what may seem to be irrational remarks.

When the staff person arrives, he/she will

- give the person a choice of what to do next: (a) to return to their car to go home, (b) to contact a local family member or friend who can pick them up, or (c) to call the police so that they may help the person.
- accompany them outside to their car or wait until the family or police arrive.

A good resource with additional tips for dealing with a mental health crisis is available at: http://www.namidupage.org/support/crisis_tips.html See below:

Tips for Communicating During a Mental Health Crisis

A person with mental illness may...

So you need to...

have trouble with reality	be simple, truthful, <i>not sarcastic</i>
be fearful	stay calm
be insecure	be accepting
have trouble concentrating	be brief; repeat
be over-stimulated	limit input, not force discussion
easily become agitated (<i>not</i> to be confused with dangerous)	recognize agitation, allow retreat
have poor judgment	not always expect rational discussion
be preoccupied	first get his/her attention
be withdrawn	initiate conversation
have changing emotions	disregard and have patience
have confused plans	stick to one plan
have little empathy for you	recognize this as a symptom
believe delusions	ignore or change the subject; <i>don't argue</i>
have low self-esteem and motivation	remain positive

Try to keep in mind that your mentally ill loved one has a neurobiological disorder of the brain and they deserve our respect as much as someone with a heart disease.