



## How To Help Someone in a Mental Health Crisis

Over the last few years, workplace mental health has become an area of great individual and professional concern. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that since the start of the pandemic in 2020, 40% of American adults have struggled with their mental health, and 71% of adults have reported having difficulty managing stress and feeling overwhelmed or “burnt out.”

A mental health crisis can take many forms – self-harm, panic attacks, suicidal ideation, getting in trouble with the law, planning, or considering hurting oneself or others – but no matter what kind of crisis someone might be going through, you can help. Stay with the person while at risk, and do not hesitate to get them professional help.

### Practice Clear Communication

When de-escalating someone from a crisis, communication is critical. They must feel heard and understood, so give them your undivided attention. This is more than just listening, but also using body language, like eye contact, to *show* you’re listening. You can also use active listening techniques – such as reflecting feelings and summarizing thoughts – to help them feel validated.

Let the person talk about how they feel and ask them questions. Don’t be afraid to ask directly if they are thinking about suicide. Talk openly and lovingly about their thoughts. If they need time to respond, allow them to process. You can always repeat the question after silence, if necessary.

It’s essential to use an empathetic, non-judgmental tone. Don’t debate whether suicide is right or wrong or whether their feelings are good or bad. Minimizing their problems or giving advice may create distance between you and upset them further. Tell them whatever they’re experiencing is not their fault, and offer your help.

There isn’t one specific response that will de-escalate *all* crises – based on what’s happening; you can assess the situation and provide a supportive reaction. The most important thing you can communicate in an emergency is that you are concerned for the person’s well-being and that they can lean on you for support.

### Spotting the Signs

One of the most common signs of a mental health crisis is a clear and abrupt change in behavior. Some examples include:



- Neglect of personal hygiene.
- Dramatic change in sleep habits, such as sleeping more often or not sleeping well.
- Weight gain or loss.
- Decline in performance at work or school.
- Pronounced changes in mood, such as irritability, anger, anxiety, or sadness.
- Withdrawal from routine activities and relationships.

Sometimes, these changes happen suddenly and obviously. Events such as a natural disaster or job loss can quickly bring on a crisis. Often, though, behavior changes come about gradually. If something doesn't seem right with a friend/family member/coworker, think back over the past few weeks or months to consider signs of change.

Don't wait to bring up your concerns. It's always better to intervene early before the person's emotional distress becomes an emergency. If you feel something is wrong, you're probably right.

## Reach Out for Help

Call someone if you cannot de-escalate the person in crisis without additional support. You don't need to do this alone. If the person has a mental health provider, that would be an excellent place to start. If they don't, here are some organizations that can safely help you through any crisis.

**In an emergency, you should always call 911.**

### 1. 988 Crisis Lifeline – “Call or Text 988”

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, seven days a week, across the United States. This lifeline connects you with trained behavioral health professionals that can get all Oklahomans the help they need.

### 2. COPES (918) 744-4800

Tulsa's local crisis and emotional support helpline for the community, adults, and children.

### 3. CrisisCare Center (918) 921-3200

The CrisisCare Center is open 24/7 and serves adults 18 years and older in Tulsa County. Call the CrisisCare Center for help determining which crisis services can best meet your needs. The CrisisCare Center provides critically needed psychiatric beds and innovative crisis respite services that include:

- Triage and Screening and Assessment Unit (24/7)
- Crisis Urgent Recovery Center (up to 24 hours)
- Crisis Stabilization Unit (3-5 days)
- COPES

### 4. Employee Assistance Program (EAP) (918) 594-5232

The Employee Assistance Program is a benefit separate from health insurance and already paid for by the City of Tulsa. It is designed to assist employees, and their dependents, with problems they may be experiencing in either their home or work environment.



## Policies on Mental Health and Workplace Violence Prevention

The City is committed to ensuring a safe and supportive work environment. In our ongoing efforts to promote safety, we would like to highlight important aspects of two key policies: Workplace Violence Prevention and Mental Health and Well-being. Please take a few moments to familiarize yourself with these summarized guidelines, crucial in maintaining a secure and healthy workplace for all employees.

### Guidelines for Addressing Workplace Violence

This section covers essential steps in reporting, responding to, and preventing workplace violence incidents. We all have a role in maintaining a safe work environment, and vigilance is crucial.

1. **Reporting Workplace Violence Incidents:** Employees should report any potential workplace violence, threats, or concerns to their supervisor or manager, who will then notify City Security.
2. **Investigation and Notification:** Supervisors and managers must immediately notify City Security, HR, and their Department Head if a violent act occurs or a serious threat is received. Security will then notify the Chief of Police or Deputy Chief.
3. **Responding to Workplace Violence Incidents:** Managers and supervisors should promptly take necessary steps to ensure the safety and security of employees and the workplace. This may include initiating an investigation, paid administrative leave, or disciplinary actions as appropriate.
4. **City Security's Role:** Upon receiving a notification of potential conduct violating the policy, City Security will investigate and coordinate with Tulsa Police as needed. The results and recommendations will be shared with the department head.
5. **Employee Responsibilities:** All City employees are crucial in minimizing workplace threats and violence. They must report any witnessed or encountered threatening behavior to their supervisor, manager, or department head.
6. **Annual Employee Training:** Employees must review City-provided training on "Run, Hide, Fight" and any other training provided by City Security, TPD, HR, or their department annually.

Nothing is more critical to the City of Tulsa than the safety and security of its employees, City officials, vendors, and the public. The City is committed to maintaining a workplace free from violence and threats.

**Verbal threats, physical threats, and acts of violence in the workplace will not be tolerated by or against any individual, including employees, elected or appointed City officials, vendors, and the public.**

## Reporting Mental Health or Well-Being Concerns

An employee, supervisor, manager, or other person conducting City business who observes behavior or has information that suggests an employee may need a mental health assessment should report such behavior to that employee's supervisor/manager or the Human Resources department, [HRDirector@cityoftulsa.org](mailto:HRDirector@cityoftulsa.org) if the supervisor or manager is unknown or unavailable.

## Fit For Duty Evaluation

If an employee's mental health is in question, they may need to be evaluated by City Medical. During this evaluation, the city physician may talk to the person who requested the assessment or anyone with information about the situation.

Once the initial evaluation is done, City Medical will decide whether the employee is fit to work or not. Human Resources and the employee's supervisor will be told the next steps. City Medical will also monitor the employees' progress and instruct them on what to do next.

The sick leave policy will apply if City Medical decides the employee cannot work.

## Guidelines for Addressing Other Mental Health Concerns Within the Workplace

A healthy work environment also includes supporting the mental well-being of our employees. This section outlines resources available to employees and the process for addressing mental health concerns within the workplace.

- Follow-up Actions for Workplace Issues:** For Respectful Workplace matters, contact Human Resources. For other work rules or policy violations, take appropriate corrective action. If a management investigation is required, promptly obtain written reports from involved persons/witnesses.
- Decision-making in Urgent Situations:** Managers and supervisors should rely on available information to make the best judgment when faced with severe threats or reports of violence. Prioritize caution and consult the PPPM 400 - "Suspicion of a Significant Mental Health Disorder" for a comprehensive list of behaviors and the definitions below to assess the situation.
  - Imminent Threat** – The following conditions must be present for a hazard to be considered an imminent threat:
    - Death or severe harm must be threatened, AND it must be reasonably likely that a serious incident or bodily injury could occur immediately, OR
    - If not immediately, then before mitigation or intervention could otherwise be implemented.

- b) **Non-imminent Serious Threat** – A threat that management, City Security, or Human Resources assesses as serious but not imminent.
  - c) **Workplace** – Anywhere an employee is engaged in City-related business or on City property, including contracted parking facilities or in City vehicles.
  - d) **Violent Act** – An incident involving an individual actively killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area. The individual may be armed with a firearm or bladed weapon or engage in other violent acts, such as driving a vehicle into a crowd. There may or may not be a pattern or method to their selection of victims.
3. **Implementing Recommendations:** Management is advised to implement recommendations received after an investigation from Tulsa Police, City Security, and Human Resources. Department heads must take appropriate corrective or disciplinary action per the Personnel Director's guidance.
  4. **Wellness and Support Resources for Employees:** The City provides various resources to support employees' mental health and well-being. Supervisors and managers play a crucial role in fostering a supportive environment. Employees are encouraged to seek guidance on stress reduction, work-life balance, and self-referral to EAP services.
  5. **Confidentiality and Privacy:** The City respects employee privacy and maintains confidentiality in all mental health and well-being matters.
  6. **Seeking Help and Support:** Employees who believe they or a coworker may need a mental health assessment should discuss their concerns with their supervisor or manager or contact the City Physician or designee. Following an evaluation, the City Physician will provide guidance on the employee's work status, required follow-ups, and any necessary accommodations or support.



Consistently prioritizing, discussing, educating, and living a culture of psychological safety builds the resilience of the workforce from the ground up.

General characteristics of a psychologically safe workplace include:

- Leadership that is engaged with employees asks questions, listens to feedback, and demonstrates a strong understanding of what employees say.
- Training managers and supervisors to avoid blaming and judgmental reactions when mistakes or challenges occur.
- Decision-making processes that include the employees.
- Promoting culture and aligning policies to reduce concern about repercussions when asking for help, being creative, or admitting mistakes – all of which can be perceived as risky if the workplace isn't psychologically safe.

Leadership, supervisors, human resources, and the rest of the workforce all have a role to play in creating and maintaining a culture of psychological safety. Organizations with a strong safety culture express safety as a value from top to bottom, and employees understand, engage in, and respond to the culture.

Education and awareness building promote supportive workplace cultures, as do strong, compassionate, and flexible policies and procedures. Workplace training is also a supporter of a robust psychological safety culture.

While it is not the responsibility of management, HR professionals, or supervisors to diagnose mental health conditions, all should be trained on a variety of topics, including:

- Basics of mental health and mental illness
- Recognizing signs and symptoms of stress, mental health distress, and mental illness
- Responding to a mental health crisis
- Understanding how to help employees access services (HR, the EAP, etc.)
- Motivational interviewing and other active listening techniques
- Creating a culture of trust, support, and confidentiality
- Understanding how stigma and fear of judgment negatively impact employees who may need to seek help.

## Next Steps

The idea of addressing mental health in the workplace can be intimidating. It can be tempting to postpone discussions on the topic or to delve in only a little. However, remember that mental health is intrinsic to health, and psychological safety is inherent to workplace safety. Employees are any organization's greatest asset. Protecting, supporting, and preventing harm to employee mental health and supporting employees with mental illness is critical to a safe and supportive workplace.