



Crisis Response Quick-Reference Cards

Instructions

These cards provide concise guidance for managing common mental health crises. They can be printed, cut out, and kept in accessible locations for quick reference during challenging moments.

● PANIC ATTACK RESPONSE

Signs

- Racing heartbeat
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness/pain
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Feeling of unreality
- Fear of losing control

Immediate Steps

1. **Remind yourself:** "This is a panic attack. It will pass. I am not in danger."
2. **5-2-5 Breathing:** Inhale for 5 counts, hold for 2, exhale for 5. Repeat.
3. **Grounding:** Name 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, 1 you can taste.
4. **Cold sensation:** Hold something cold or splash cold water on your face.
5. **Move gently:** Walk slowly or gently move your body.

After the Attack

- Rest if needed
 - Practice self-compassion
 - Note possible triggers
 - Return to routine when ready
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● OVERWHELMING ANXIETY RESPONSE

Signs

- Racing thoughts
- Unable to focus
- Physical tension
- Restlessness
- Feeling of dread
- Sleep disruption

Immediate Steps

1. **Acknowledge:** "I'm experiencing anxiety right now."
2. **Physical interrupt:** Change positions, stretch, or take a brief walk.
3. **Extended exhale:** Breathe out longer than you breathe in for 1 minute.
4. **Body scan:** Identify and release tension, starting at your feet and moving up.
5. **Worry container:** Write down anxious thoughts to address later.

Follow-up Care

- Schedule worry time
 - Reduce unnecessary demands
 - Prioritize sleep and nutrition
 - Implement regular regulation practices
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● INTENSE DEPRESSION RESPONSE

Signs

- Overwhelming sadness
- Loss of hope
- No energy or motivation
- Self-critical thoughts
- Withdrawal impulses
- Sleep or appetite changes

Immediate Steps

1. **Minimum movement:** Take 10 steps, stretch your arms, or change positions.
2. **Basic needs check:** When did you last eat, drink water, or rest?
3. **Sensory engagement:** Find one pleasant or neutral sensation to focus on.
4. **Micro-connection:** Text one person or interact briefly with a pet or plant.
5. **Compassion statement:** "This is a difficult moment. Others struggle too. May I be kind to myself."

Follow-up Care

- Set one tiny goal
 - Reach out for support
 - Consider professional help
 - Reduce expectations temporarily
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● SUICIDAL THOUGHTS RESPONSE

Signs

- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Feeling like a burden
- Hopelessness
- Feeling trapped
- Looking for means or planning
- Increased substance use

Immediate Steps

1. **Reach out:** Call or text crisis support (988 or Crisis Text Line: text HOME to 741741)
2. **Create distance:** Remove access to potential means of harm
3. **Delay decision:** Commit to waiting 24 hours before any action
4. **Stay with others:** Don't remain alone if possible
5. **Grounding statement:** "These thoughts are symptoms, not facts. They will pass."

Resources

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 or 1-800-273-8255
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- Local emergency services: 911

This is an emergency requiring immediate support



● DISSOCIATION RESPONSE

Signs

- Feeling detached from yourself
- Dreamlike or unreal sensations
- Emotional numbness
- Memory gaps
- Feeling outside your body
- World seems distant or foggy

Immediate Steps

1. **Name it:** "I am experiencing dissociation."
2. **Physical grounding:** Press feet firmly into floor, feel texture of clothing, or hold something cold.
3. **Sensory engagement:** Strong tastes (mint, sour candy), smells, or sounds.
4. **Orientation:** State your name, location, date, and three facts about yourself.
5. **Rhythmic movement:** Tap alternating knees, gentle swaying, or walking.

Follow-up Care

- Return to routine gradually
- Note possible triggers
- Implement regular grounding
- Consider professional support



● FLASHBACK RESPONSE

Signs

- Re-experiencing past trauma
- Feeling back in the traumatic situation
- Intense fear or panic
- Confusion about time/place
- Physical symptoms of fear
- Defensive reactions

Immediate Steps

1. **Orient to now:** Notice and name objects in your current environment.
2. **State the date:** "Today is [current date]. I am in [current location]. I am safe now."
3. **Sensory distinction:** Name three ways your current environment is different from the past.
4. **Physical movement:** Feel your feet on the ground, change positions, or gently move your body.
5. **Self-compassion:** "I'm having a flashback. My body is trying to protect me. I am safe now."

Follow-up Care

- Rest and self-care
- Gentle movement
- Reconnect with support person
- Practice regulation techniques



● ANGER OVERWHELM RESPONSE

Signs

- Intense anger or rage
- Physical tension and heat
- Urge to lash out
- Racing thoughts
- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Feeling out of control

Immediate Steps

1. **Create space:** Step away from the situation if possible.
2. **Physical discharge:** Push against a wall, stomp feet, or clench and release fists.
3. **Cool down:** Splash cold water on face or place cold cloth on neck.
4. **Breath focus:** Extended exhales with audible sighs.
5. **Delay response:** Commit to waiting before making decisions or communications.

Follow-up Care

- Process emotions when calmer
 - Examine triggers and needs
 - Address any repair needed
 - Implement regular release practices
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● EMOTIONAL FLOODING RESPONSE

Signs

- Overwhelming emotions
- Feeling hijacked by feelings
- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Physiological activation
- Uncontrollable crying or expression
- Feeling emotionally "swamped"

Immediate Steps

1. **Name the experience:** "I am emotionally flooded right now."
2. **Container visualization:** Imagine placing some of the emotion in a container temporarily.
3. **Physical support:** Place hand on chest or belly with gentle pressure.
4. **Simple statement:** "This is a lot. I need to take care of myself right now."
5. **Bilateral stimulation:** Tap alternating knees or shoulders for 1 minute.

Follow-up Care

- Allow emotional expression when safe
 - Gentle self-care activities
 - Process with support when ready
 - Honor the message of the emotion
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● GENERAL CRISIS PROTOCOL

When to Use

- Unsure which specific crisis you're experiencing
- Multiple symptoms present
- Need simple, universal steps

Immediate Steps

1. **Ensure basic safety:** Remove immediate dangers if present
2. **Breathing reset:** 4 counts in, 6 counts out for six breaths
3. **Orientation:** Feel body supported, notice your surroundings
4. **Reach out:** Contact support person or crisis line if needed
5. **Basic needs:** Water, simple food, rest if possible

Assess Next Steps

- Is professional help needed?
 - Can you implement self-care?
 - Do you need support from others?
 - What has helped in similar situations?
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● WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

Seek immediate emergency help if:

- Thoughts of harming yourself or others with plan or intent
- Unable to care for basic needs (eating, drinking, safety)
- Severe disorientation or disconnection from reality
- Crisis state lasting more than 24-48 hours without improvement

Contact your provider promptly if:

- Symptoms significantly interfere with daily functioning
- Experiencing concerning medication side effects
- New or substantially different symptoms emerge
- Previously effective strategies no longer working
- Rapid deterioration in condition

Resources

- Emergency: 911
 - Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
 - National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
 - Your provider: [space to write contact information]
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CREATING YOUR PERSONAL CRISIS PLAN

When not in crisis, create a personalized plan:

1. **Identify your personal warning signs** List thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that signal increasing distress.
2. **List your personal coping strategies** What has worked for you in the past? Include simple, accessible options.
3. **Name your support people** Who can you reach out to? Include names and contact information.
4. **Professional resources** Include your provider's contact information and crisis numbers.
5. **Environment modifications** What changes to your space help during difficult times?
6. **Simple reminders to yourself** Supportive statements that help during crisis moments.

Review and update this plan regularly. Share relevant portions with trusted support people.