

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Crisis decision tree: 988 vs 911 vs mobile crisis vs ER

Four doors. Three of them are not the ER. Knowing which door to open in the worst hour of your year could be the difference between a clinician at your kitchen table and a tactical team at your door.

BY JIM PALASTY · 12 MIN READ · FAMILY SAFETY

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CRISIS PATHWAYS

Three of them keep your adult out of restraints. Pick the right one in the first five minutes.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Triage the moment



STEP 2

Pick the door



STEP 3

Hand over the card

Which door, for which scenario

Suicidal talk	988 first. Warm-transfer to mobile crisis if needed.
Meltdown, no harm	Mobile crisis. Bring a clinician to the home.
Self-injury	If wounds need stitches, ER. Otherwise mobile.
Aggression, no weapon	Mobile crisis. Lock yourself in a room. Wait.
Aggression with weapon	911. State: autistic, mental health, no weapons by responders if possible.
Overdose	911 and ER. Bring all medication bottles.
Catatonia, regression	ER with neuro and psych. Bring baseline notes.
Lost or eloped	911 immediately. See B36 for full elopement plan.

TWO CALLS, TWO OUTCOMES

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The first time Sandra called 911 for her son Eli the tactical team came. Three cruisers. A K-9. They put him face-down on the kitchen floor and he has not slept in that room since. The second time she knew better. She called the county mobile crisis number. A clinician and a peer specialist arrived in a Camry. They sat at the kitchen table. Eli cried. They made a plan. The team left at 1 a.m. with a follow-up scheduled for the next afternoon. Same kid. Same crisis. Different door.

THE DOOR IS THE INTERVENTION

What matters, at a glance

988

National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Call or text. Counselor on the phone in under a minute. They can warm-transfer you to local mobile crisis without escalation.

Mobile crisis

A clinician (often unarmed, sometimes paired with a peer) comes to your house. Typically dispatched by 988 or by a county number. Outcome: a plan, not a hold.

911

Armed response. Use when there is imminent physical danger to your adult or others. Be explicit: "Send mental health response if available. My adult is autistic."

Emergency room

For overdose, injury, seizure, suspected catatonia, or when 72-hour psychiatric hold may be needed. Bring the crisis card, the med list, and a snack. You are going to be there a while.

Pre-script

Spend fifteen minutes today writing what you will say on the call. The script lives on the fridge. You will not have words at 2 a.m. with the right ones already typed.

After-hours

Most crises arrive between 9 p.m. and 4 a.m. Mobile crisis runs 24/7 in most counties. 988 always answers. The ER is open. Your psychiatrist is asleep.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Photo, name, date of birth, diagnosis | ☐ Communication style and AAC device location |
| ☐ Current medications and last dose times | ☐ Sensory triggers and known calming inputs |
| ☐ Past restraint trauma or holds to avoid | ☐ Three specific phrases that have worked before |
| ☐ Psychiatrist, PCP, and case manager numbers | ☐ Hospital preference and reason |

YOUR MOVE

When the call has to happen, here is how you make it

- 1 Open with the door. "I need mobile crisis." Or "I need 988." Or "I need an ambulance." Name the door first.
- 2 State the disability. "My adult is autistic. He is in a mental health crisis. He is not violent right now."
- 3 State the address and floor. "We are at 412 Oak Street, second floor, in the bedroom."
- 4 State the request. "Send mental health response, no lights and sirens, plain clothes if possible."
- 5 Confirm the unit. "What is the unit number? When will they arrive? Stay on the line."
- 6 Meet them outside with the crisis card and the med list. Hand it over before they cross the threshold.

Write this script now. Tape it inside the kitchen cabinet door. The 2 a.m. version of you will thank the 2 p.m. version of you.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

SAMHSA 988 page · <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988>

NAMI HelpLine · <https://www.nami.org/help>

Crisis Now framework · <https://crisisnow.com/>

Informational only. Not legal or medical advice. Verify current program rules before acting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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