



Finding Help for Kids and Teens

A Parent's Guide to Mental Healthcare in Rhode Island





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You should consult a physician in all matters relating to your health, and particularly in respect to any symptoms that may require diagnosis or medical attention. Any action on your part in response to the information provided here is at your discretion. Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island does not recommend or endorse specific providers, procedures, advice, or other information provided in this guide.

If you're worried about your child's mental health, how do you find help?

At Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI), we know many parents in our state need an answer to that question. With the difficulties of the last few years, more children and teens are experiencing anxiety, depression, and substance use disorder.

This how-to guide can make it easier to locate the care your child needs, from younger children to teenagers. We explain what signs to look for, what questions to ask, and what resources are available in Rhode Island—through providers and in the community.

This guide is for any Rhode Island parent who needs assistance. If you're a BCBSRI member, you can also contact us at **1-800-274-2958** or visit **[bcbsri.com/mentalhealth](https://www.bcbsri.com/mentalhealth)**.

As part of BCBSRI's work to support the mental health and well-being of families in Rhode Island, we've developed this guide for parents in consultation with our clinical staff, members of the Rhode Island community, and publicly available resources. For more information from those resources, please see the links provided at the end of the guide.



HOW TO:

Know If Your Child Needs Help

As your child is growing, their behaviors and emotions can change quickly and often. How can you tell the difference between challenging behaviors and emotions that are a normal part of growing up and those that are cause for concern?

If your child's behavior lasts for a few weeks or longer, is upsetting your child or your family, or makes it hard for them to function, it's a good idea to talk with their pediatrician or another provider. It's also important to watch for the signs below, which may show your child needs help.

Young children: Signs to watch for

- Has frequent tantrums or is intensely irritable much of the time
 - Often talks about fears or worries
 - Is aggressive when frustrated or disappointed
 - Complains about frequent stomachaches or headaches with no known medical cause
 - Is in constant motion and cannot sit quietly (except when they are watching videos or playing video games)
 - Sleeps too much or too little, has frequent nightmares, or seems sleepy during the day
 - Is not interested in playing with other children or has trouble making friends
 - Struggles academically or has experienced a recent decline in grades
 - Repeats actions or checks things many times out of fear that something bad may happen
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Older children and adolescents: What to watch for

- Has lost interest in things that they used to enjoy
- Has low energy
- Displays a sense of hopelessness
- Has no plans for the future
- Sleeps too much or too little or seems sleepy throughout the day
- Is spending more and more time alone and avoids social activities with friends or family
- Diets or exercises excessively or fears gaining weight
- Engages in self-harm behaviors (such as cutting or burning their skin)
- Smokes, drinks, or uses drugs
- Engages in risky or destructive behavior alone or with friends
- Has thoughts of suicide
- Has periods of highly elevated energy and activity and needs much less sleep than usual
- Says that they think someone is trying to control their mind or that they hear things other people cannot hear

HOW TO:

Recognize a Crisis—and What to Do Next

If your child's behavior is unsafe, or if your child talks about wanting to hurt themselves or someone else, seek help immediately.

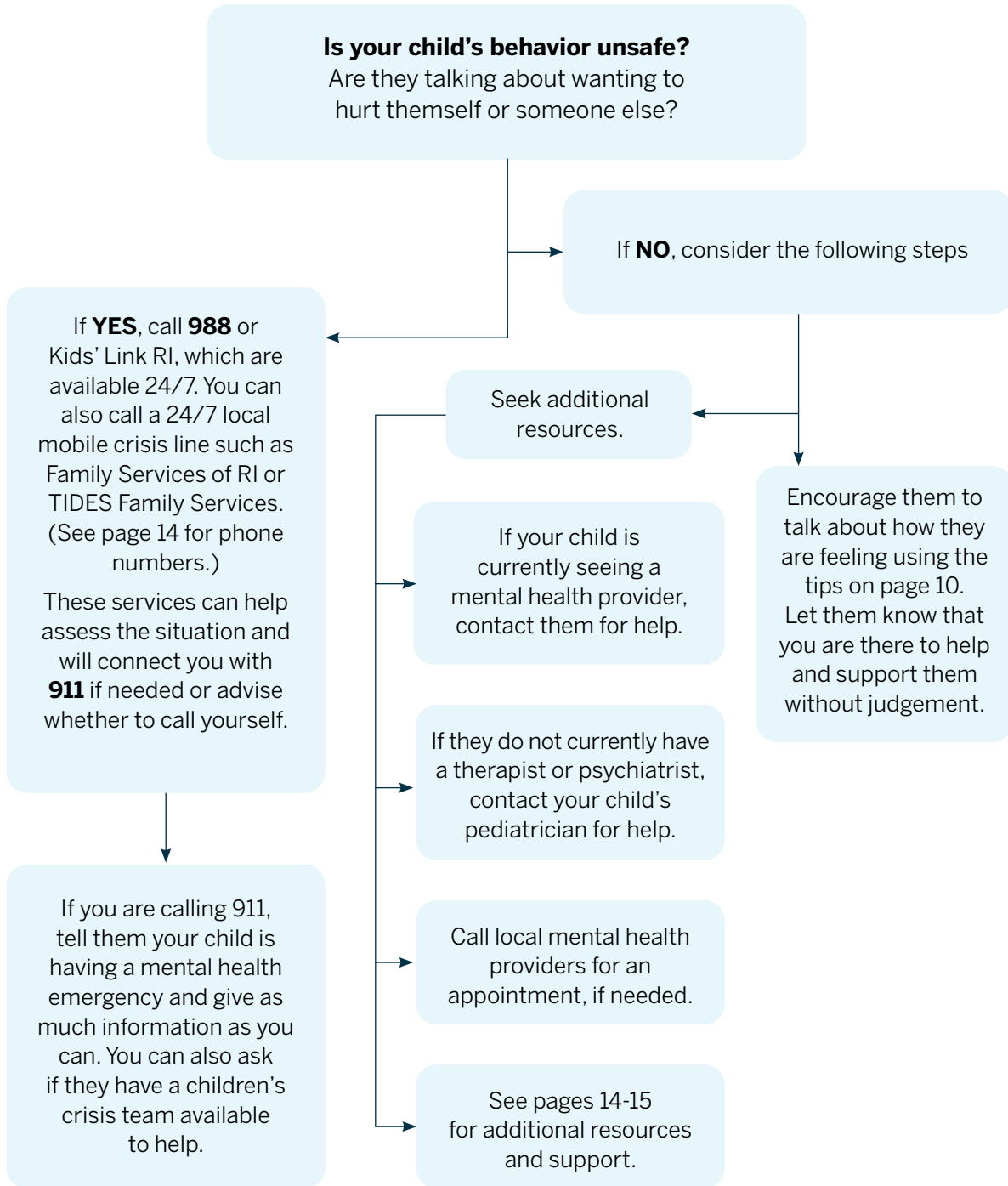
Warning signs of a mental health crisis

- Talking about or making plans for suicide
- Expressing hopelessness about the future
- Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Hurting themselves, such as cutting or burning
- Being very upset and angry, including being violent or hostile



What to do in a crisis

If you think your child may be in crisis, this chart can help you figure out what to do next.



HOW TO:

Find a Mental Health Professional for Your Child

If you're worried about your child's mental health, you can start by talking with others who are often with your child. For example, ask their teacher or other caregivers about your child's behavior. Tell your child's pediatrician about your concerns as well as what you've learned from others.

These tips can help you locate the right care depending on the situation(s) where your child is struggling. Your child may need care both at school and at home.

At school



If your child has trouble managing their emotions/behaviors at school, then:

- ▶ Reach out to school staff, such as a counselor, social worker, or psychologist.
- ▶ Ask for a team meeting with your child's teachers and support staff.

At home/in the community



If your child sometimes has the signs of a mental health issue (such as those listed on page 5) that are not life-threatening, then:

- ▶ Contact your health insurer to learn about your options for therapy and/or medication management. If you are a BCBSRI member, please call our **Care Management team at 1-800-274-2958**.
- ▶ Ask your child's pediatrician for help. The pediatrician may create a plan to assist your child or refer you to a therapist or psychiatrist. Your pediatrician may also be able to consult with a psychiatrist about your child's care or have a mental health professional right in their office that your child can see.
- ▶ Call a local provider for an appointment, if needed.
 - If no appointments are available, make sure you are on a wait list for a provider(s). If you are a **BCBSRI member**, we're making more urgent care psychiatrist appointments available so kids can get help sooner, so please contact us at **1-800-274-2958**. If you are not a BCBSRI member, check with your insurer to see if they can help.
 - If you need help finding a provider or figuring out how to help your child, contact **Kids' Link RI at 1-855-543-5465**.

If your child's behavior is unsafe, or if your child talks about wanting to hurt themselves or someone else, seek help immediately by calling 988 or Kids' Link RI at 1-855-543-5465.

Both are available 24/7. You can also call a 24/7 local mobile crisis line such as Family Services of RI at **(401) 854-6678** or TIDES Family Services at **(401) 615-9374**. All of these services can help assess the situation and will connect you with 911 if needed or advise whether to call yourself.



Find information on the types of mental health providers, services, and programs available for your child. Visit **bcbsri.com/mentalhealth**.



HOW TO: Talk With and Support Your Child

Because there is often stigma associated with mental health conditions, children may feel uncomfortable talking about how they're feeling. Even though it can be difficult, it's important to talk often with your child about their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Approach the conversation with empathy and love, and don't get discouraged if your child doesn't want to talk. Sometimes you have to try multiple times before a child will open up.

These questions can help you start a conversation about mental health with your child:



Can you tell me more about what is happening?
How are you feeling?

Sometimes you need to talk to an adult about your feelings. I'm here to listen. How can I help you feel better?

I'm worried about your safety. Can you tell me if you have thoughts about harming yourself or others?

Have you had feelings like this in the past?

Do you feel like you want to talk to someone else about your problem?

What's your favorite way to relax or de-stress?

Keep these tips in mind while talking about mental health with your child:

- ▶ Listen openly and let your child tell you about their feelings and worries.
- ▶ Discuss the topic when your child feels safe and comfortable.
- ▶ Watch for reactions during the discussion and slow down or back up if your child becomes confused or looks upset.
- ▶ Use “I” statements and avoid confrontation.
 - For example, say something like: “I’ve noticed you’re not yourself. Is something bothering you?” or “You seem down lately. What’s up?”
- ▶ Tell your child that their condition is **not** their fault.
- ▶ Keep open communication with your child’s friend(s) so they have a safe place to speak to you, as kids and teens are more likely to confide in their peers.
- ▶ Encourage your child to take care of themselves: to get enough sleep, eat a healthy diet, and exercise regularly.
- ▶ Let your child know that they can come to you anytime if they need to talk.
- ▶ If your child appears to be struggling with their condition:
 - Reassure your child that, just as with any health problem, you’ll get them help and will always be there for them.
 - Tell your child they are not alone and that many children struggle with the same condition.

Help your child understand their condition by reading age-appropriate materials or storybooks that show other children coping well with the same condition. Share information about famous people who have the same condition and their accomplishments. Introduce them to other people in the community who may have the condition and may share their journey with them.







Words of advice from other parents navigating the mental health system

Be persistent

Ask for help

Be vocal

Be patient

Be upfront and honest with your providers

**Educate yourself
and others**

**Know that you are
not alone**