

Working With Patrons Who May Be Facing A Crisis

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August 8 2016
Delaware Library Reference Services
Statewide Meeting

On occasion, we may encounter a patron who is experiencing a crisis or a patron who is concerned about someone in crisis. They may reach out to the library for help.

Types of crises:

- Suicidal Ideation
- Threats of Violence
- Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault
- Child/Elder Abuse or Neglect
- Crime Victim

- Treat all statements seriously until proven otherwise
- **Imminent danger to self or others: CONTACT 911 !!!**
 - It may be necessary to contact the police for the patron. As calmly as possible, ask for the person's name and location to provide to 911. The police will reach out to Crisis Intervention Services as needed.
 - *Reach out to Cathay or an administrator if you aren't sure how to proceed.*
- Start with open-ended clarifying questions to assess the patron's expectations. Do they want information, referrals, or someone to talk to?
 - "How would you like me to help you?"
- Remember that library staff are not counselors, doctors, lawyers, etc. Be friendly and supportive but communicate that we can provide information, not advice.
- Good supportive statements:
 - "I might have resources to help you."
 - "That must be so hard."
 - "Let's work together to figure something out."
 - "How can I help?"
- Refer to local or national resources based on patron's need/request

Mobile Crisis Intervention Services

NCC 1-800-652-2929 * K/S 1-800-345-6785

- 24 hour hotline services with the ability to mobilize in the community
- Telephone services for individuals experiencing a crisis or psychological/substance abuse emergency
- Comprehensive mental health, suicide, and substance abuse assessments
- Emergency interventions (either in the community or in the office) for mental health, substance abuse, and situational crises
- Crisis management via follow-ups (well-being visits or calls)
- Provision of short-term (1-5 visits) supportive counseling services with appropriate referrals to community providers for longer-term treatment
- Provision of psychiatric evaluation including assessment and medication support
- The mobile crisis unit is staffed around the clock, 365 days per year
- Walk-in clients are scheduled to see the psychiatrist and social workers during regular business hours Monday-Friday
- Clients in crisis may be brought in by police for assessment, accompanied to off by MCIS staff for further assessment by psychiatrist or may walk in without a scheduled appointment.

http://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dsamh/crisis_intervention.html

Example from Ask-A-Librarian Delaware

Original question:

I am in a psychiatric emergency but do not need a hospital. An official at DSAM did not return my call today. I need advice and am unable to reach my Psychiatrist

Asked By: [Anon](#)

Reply from *Librarian 1* (Jul 26 2016, 08:21pm):**I'm not sure how to help you best. Most mental health professionals say to call 911 if you're in a psychiatric emergency.**

Reply from *Anon* (Jul 26 2016, 08:23pm):**I was recently harmed by professionals who I had trusted. I need an independent high level advocate in gov't now to help me. I am serious.**

Reply from *Librarian 1* (Jul 26 2016, 08:31pm):**Let me see what I can find. Hang on a sec. There should be some sort of ombudsman to assist with cases like this.**

Reply from *Anon* (Jul 26 2016, 08:34pm):**Donna Murray is supposed to be that person. She seemed helpful the other day but said she would call today and I left a message for her, no call back. Is there some way in an emergency to contact Gov't officials like her after hours? Do I have a civil or legal right to access?**

Reply from *Librarian 1* (Jul 26 2016, 08:36pm):**Generally, government officials aren't available after hours. After hours, you're stuck with emergency services like 911**

Reply from *Librarian 1* (Jul 26 2016, 08:37pm):**I found this on Delaware Health and Human Services' web site:**

Reply from *Librarian 1* (Jul 26 2016, 08:37pm):**The Consumer Issue Resolution Hotline 855-649-7944 is for clients experiencing issues with Delaware's mental health and substance use treatment system**

Reply from *Librarian 1* (Jul 26 2016, 08:38pm):**I would guess it isn't a 24-hour service, but you might be able to get more information from their office.**

Reply from *Librarian 1* (Jul 26 2016, 08:38pm):**As for what your rights are, that's a question I can't answer - we can't give legal or medical advice, as we're not trained for it.**

Example from Ask-A-Librarian Delaware

Reply from *Librarian 1* (Jul 26 2016, 08:44pm):**I have to sign off now, as we're closing. Are you going to be okay?**

Reply from *Anon* (Jul 26 2016, 08:49pm):**I will be ok. But I do want clarification on one word you used. "Generally...". What does that mean specifically. So if I am not rich or powerful I have no access to such individuals? What would it take for one of them to talk to me tonight. I am a Citizen and taxpayer. Does that still count for anything - that is a rhetorical question. My others are not.**

Reply from *Librarian 1* (Jul 26 2016, 08:52pm):**It means I don't have access to the kind of information you're seeking. Unless a government official lists an all-hours contact number on their web**

Reply from *Librarian 1* (Jul 26 2016, 08:52pm):**page or similar, I have no way to get that information to you. Again, I can't say what your legal rights are - you'd need to ask a lawyer for that**

Reply from *Librarian 2* (Jul 26 2016, 08:52pm):**Hello - I would also like to offer a crisis line for texting. It is anonymous and staffed by counselors: <http://www.crisistextline.org/> It's 24/7**

Reply from *Librarian 2* (Jul 26 2016, 08:54pm):**If you prefer to use live chat, there is also a crisis line for that as well called "IMAlive" at <https://www.imalive.org/>**

Reply from *Librarian 2* (Jul 26 2016, 08:56pm):**We hope these are helpful; and if you would like a medical/health librarian, we do have one as part of our Delaware service. I can forward this to her.**

Reply from *Librarian 2* (Jul 26 2016, 08:57pm):**Just let us know. All our best to you, and thank you for reaching out to us tonight. – "Librarian 2"**

Reply from *Anon* (Jul 26 2016, 08:58pm):**Thank you for all the info. May all members of The Illuminati be victorious and make life better for all humans; and preserve our human species. Check em out. Yes, please forward my info on for more info. Good night.**

Example from Ask-A-Librarian Delaware

Note from *Librarian 2* (Jul 27 2016, 09:00am):

Hi Alison,

Can you please follow up on this patron's question about who to contact (on a government level) if a person wants to report 'abuse' (as this patron described in the transcripts)?

Thank you so much,

Librarian 2

[Ownership assigned to Alison Wessel]

[Status changed to *Pending*]

Reply from *Alison Wessel* (Jul 27 2016, 10:54am): **Greetings. I am the medical librarian and your request from last night was forwarded to me. If you are experiencing an emergency, please call 911.**

Reply from *Alison Wessel* (Jul 27 2016, 10:54am): **For issues with the DE Mental Health system, leave a message on the Consumer Issue Resolution Hotline. They will respond within 48 hours.**

Reply from *Alison Wessel* (Jul 27 2016, 10:58am): **You may also contact Crisis Intervention Services. NCC 800-652-2929, K/S 800-345-6785. I hope this information is helpful**

Highlights from the reference interaction:

- Recommended 911 for an emergency
- Gained clarification on the patron's need and then provided a relevant resource (Consumer Resolution Hotline)
- Gave disclaimer about not being trained to give legal or medical advice
- Remained calm and supportive even when the patron was escalating (*"So if I am not rich or powerful I have no access to such individuals? What would it take for one of them to talk to me tonight"*)
- Checked in to make sure the person would be OK once the reference conversation was over
- Crisis resources that matched the patron's communication method (text, chat) were provided

Resources:

Question Point's guidelines on suicidal patrons and crisis calls

<http://wiki.questionpoint.org/w/page/13839422/247-Policies#453Suicidalpatronsandcrisiscalls>

Boylan, M. (2010, August 13). When crisis calls: New York Public Library develops a policy on callers who threaten suicide.

<https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2010/08/13/when-crisis-calls/>

Westbrook, L. (2015). "I'm not a social worker": An information service model for working with patrons in crisis. *Library Quarterly*, 85(1), 6. Accessed from MasterFILE Premier.