

Action Planning for Prevention and Recovery

A Self-Help Guide

Crisis Planning

Identifying and responding to symptoms early reduces the chances that you will find yourself in crisis. It is important to confront the possibility of crisis, because **in spite of your best planning and assertive action in your own behalf, you could find yourself in a situation where others will need to take over responsibility for your care. This is a difficult situation—one that no one likes to face. In a crisis, you may feel as if you are totally out of control. Writing a clear crisis plan when you are well, to instruct others about how to care for you when you are not well, helps you maintain responsibility for your own care.** It will keep your family members and friends from wasting time trying to figure out what to do for you. It relieves the guilt that may be felt by family members and other caregivers who may have wondered whether they were taking the right action. It also insures that your needs will be met and that you will get better as quickly as possible.

You need to develop your crisis plan when you are feeling well. However, you cannot do it quickly. Decisions like this take time, thought, and often collaboration with health care providers, family members and other supporters. Over the next few pages, information and ideas that others have included in their crisis plans will be shared. It can help you develop your own crisis plan.

The crisis plan differs from the other action plans in that it will be used by others. The other four sections of this planning process are implemented by you alone and need not be shared with anyone else; therefore you can write them using shorthand language that only you need to understand. However, when writing a crisis plan, **you need to make it clear, easy to understand, and legible.** While you may have developed other plans rather quickly, this plan is likely to take more time. **Don't rush the process.** Work at it for a while, then leave it for several days and keep coming back to it until you have developed a plan you feel has the best chance of working for you. Once you have completed your crisis plan, give copies of it to the people you name in this plan as your supporters.

On the fifth tab write "Crisis Plan" and insert at least nine sheets of paper. This crisis plan sample has nine parts to it, each addressing a particular concern.

Part 1 Feeling well

Write what you are like when you are feeling well. You can copy it from Section 1, **Daily Maintenance Plan.** This can help educate people who might be trying to help you. It

might help someone who knows you well to understand you a little better, for someone who doesn't know you well—or at all—it is very important.

Part 2 Symptoms

Describe symptoms that would indicate to others that they need to take over responsibility for your care and make decisions on your behalf. This is hard for everyone. **No one likes to think that someone else will have to take over responsibility for his or her care. Yet, through a careful, well-developed description of symptoms that you know would indicate to you that you can't make smart decisions anymore, you can stay in control even when things seem to be out of control.** Allow yourself plenty of time to complete this section. Ask your friends, family members, and other supporters for input, but always remember that the final determination is up to you. Be very clear and specific in describing each symptom. Don't just summarize; use as many words as it takes. Your list of symptoms might include—

- being unable to recognize or correctly identify family members and friends
- uncontrollable pacing; inability to stay still
- neglecting personal hygiene (for how many days?)
- not cooking or doing any housework (for how many days?)
- not understanding what people are saying
- thinking I am someone I am not
- thinking I have the ability to do something I don't
- displaying abusive, destructive, or violent behavior, toward self, others, or property
- abusing alcohol and/or drugs
- not getting out of bed (for how long?)
- refusing to eat or drink

Part 3 Supporters

In this next section of the crisis plan, list these people who you want to take over for you when the symptoms you listed in the previous section arise. Before listing people in this part of your plan though, talk with them about what you'd like from them and make sure they understand and agree to be in the plan. They can be family members, friends, or health care providers. They should be committed to following the plans you have written. When you first develop this plan, your list may be mostly health care providers. But as you work on developing your support system, try to add more family members and friends because they will be more available.

It's best to have at least five people on your list of supporters. If you have only one or two, when they go on vacation or are sick, they might not be available when you really need them. If you don't have that many supporters now, you may need to work on developing new and/or closer relationships with people. Ask yourself how best you can build these kinds of relationships. Seek new friends by doing things such as volunteering and going to support groups and community activities. (See *Making and Keeping Friends* a Mental Health self-help booklet in this series)

In the past, health care providers or family members may have made decisions that were not according to your wishes. You may not want them involved in your care again. If so, write on your plan, “I do not want the following people involved in any way in my care or treatment.” Then list those people and why you don’t want them involved. They may be people who have treated you badly in the past, have made poor decisions, or who get too upset when you are having a hard time.

Many people like to include a section that describes how they want possible disputes between their supporters settled. For instance, you may want to say that if a disagreement occurs about a course of action, a majority of your supporters can decide or a particular person will make the determination. You also might request that a consumer or advocacy organization become involved in the decision making.

Part 4 Health care providers and medications

Name your physician, pharmacist, and other health care providers, along with their phone numbers. Then list the following—

- the medications you are currently using, the dosage, and why you are using them
- the medications you would **prefer** to take if medications or additional medications became necessary—like those that have worked well for you in the past—and why you would choose those
- the medications that would be **acceptable** to you if medications became necessary and why you would choose those
- the medications that must be **avoided**—like those you are allergic to, that conflict with another medication, or cause undesirable side effects—and give the reasons they should be avoided.

Also list any vitamins, herbs, alternative medications (such as homeopathic remedies), and supplements you are taking. Note which should be increased or decreased if you are in crisis, and which you have discovered are not good for you.

Part 5 Treatments

There may be particular treatments that you **like** in a crisis situation and others that you would want to **avoid**. The reason may be as simple as “this treatment has or has not worked in the past,” or you may have some concerns about the safety of this treatment. Maybe you just don’t like the way a particular treatment makes you feel. Treatments here can mean medical procedures or the many possibilities of alternative therapy, (such as injections of B vitamins, massages, or cranial sacral therapy). In this part of your crisis plan, list the following—

- treatments you are currently undergoing and why
- treatments you would prefer if treatments or additional treatments became necessary and why you would choose those
- treatments that would be acceptable to you if treatments were deemed necessary by your support team
- treatments that must be avoided and why

Part 6 Planning for your care

Describe a plan for your care in a crisis that would allow you to stay where you like. Think about your family and friends. Would they be able to take turns providing you with care? Could transportation be arranged to health care appointments? Is there a program in your community that could provide you with care part of the time, with family members and friends taking care of you the rest of the time? Many people who would prefer to stay at home rather than be hospitalized are setting up these kinds of plans. You may need to ask your family members, friends, and health care providers what options are available. If you are having a hard time coming up with a plan, at least write down what you imagine the ideal scenario would be.

Part 7 Treatment facilities

Describe the treatment facilities you would like to use if family members and friends cannot provide you with care, or if your condition requires hospital care. Your options may be limited by the facilities available in your area and by your insurance coverage. If you are not sure which facilities you would like to use, write down a description of what the ideal facility would be like. Then, talk to family members and friends about the available choices and call the facilities to request information that may help you in making a decision. Also include a list of treatment facilities you would like to avoid—such as places where you received poor care in the past.

Part 8 What you need from others

Describe what your supporters can do for you that will help you feel better. This part of the plan is very important and deserves careful attention. Describe everything you can think of that you want your supporters to do (or not do) for you. You may want to get more ideas from your supporters and health care professionals.

Things others could do for you that would help you feel more comfortable might include—

- listen to me without giving me advice, judging me, or criticizing me
- hold me (how? how firmly?)
- let me pace
- encourage me to move, help me move
- lead me through a relaxation or stress reduction technique
- peer counsel with me
- provide me with materials so I can draw or paint
- give me the space to express my feelings
- don't talk to me (or do talk to me)
- encourage me and reassure me
- feed me nutritious food
- make sure I take my vitamins and other medications
- play me comic videos
- play me good music (list the kind)
- just let me rest

Include a list of specific tasks you would like others to do for you, who you would like to do which task, and any specific instructions they might need. These tasks might include—

- buying groceries
- watering the plants
- feeding the pets
- taking care of the children
- paying the bills
- taking out the garbage or trash
- doing the laundry

You may also want to include a list of things that you do not want others to do for you—things they might otherwise do because they think it would be helpful, but that might even be harmful or worsen the situation. These might include—

- forcing you to do anything, such as walking
- scolding you
- becoming impatient with you
- taking away your cigarettes or coffee
- talking continuously

Some people also include instructions in this section on how they want to be treated by their caregivers. These instructions might include statements such as “kindly, but firmly, tell me what you are going to do,” “don’t ask me to make any choices at this point,” or “make sure to take my medications out of my top dresser drawer right away.”

Part 9 Recognizing recovery

In the last part of this plan, give your supporters information on how to recognize when you have recovered enough to take care of yourself and they no longer need to use this plan. Some examples are—

- when I am eating at least two meals a day
- when I am awake for six hours a day
- when I am taking care of my personal hygiene needs daily
- when I can carry on a good conversation
- when I can easily walk around the house

You have now completed your crisis plan. **Update it when you learn new information or change your mind about things. Date your crisis plan each time you change it and give revised copies to your supporters.**

You can help ensure that your crisis plan will be followed by signing it in the presence of two witnesses. It will further increase potential for use if you appoint and name a durable power of attorney—a person who could legally make decisions for you if you were not able to make them for yourself. Since power of attorney documents vary from state to

state, you cannot be absolutely sure the plan will be followed. However, it is your best assurance that your wishes will be honored.

Taken from SAMHSA National Mental Health Information Center:

<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/SMA-3720/crisis.asp>