

# Psychiatric Emergencies



Children's  
of Alabama®

Psychiatric Intake Response Center • Birmingham, AL 35233 • 205.638.PIRC (7472)

Families have a hard time deciding when to seek emergency treatment for a mental health concern. A psychiatric emergency is a situation that is dangerous and life-threatening. Seek immediate attention if any of the following are present:

## Risk to others:

- Threatening to or thinking about harming a person or group of people
- Threatening a person with a weapon
- Harming animals
- Becoming more violent toward others

## Risk to self:

- Threatening or thinking about suicide
- Taking steps to commit suicide such as getting a weapon, making a noose, or gathering pills
- Writing a suicide note

## Changes in behavior or thinking:

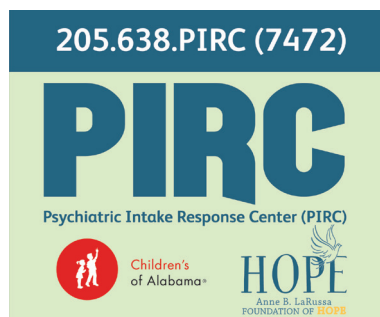
- Hearing or seeing things that are not present (hallucinations)
- Hearing commands to harm others or themselves
- Overly fearful, anxious or unreasonable (symptoms of paranoid thinking)
- Losing touch with reality
- Severe anxiety
- Two or more of these behaviors: decreased appetite, decline in personal hygiene, poor sleep, increased isolation at home/refusal to leave home
- Online searches about ways to harm themselves
- Cutting or hurting themselves in an attempt to die

**If your child is in immediate danger, call 911 or go directly to your nearest emergency room. If you cannot transport your child safely call an ambulance or the police.**

**Some issues are concerning but do not require emergency psychiatric treatment and may be addressed by a pediatrician or outpatient mental health provider during regular business hours:**

- Routine medication changes or medication refills (prescriptions will not be provided in the emergency room)
- Behavioral symptoms that have not improved with a prescription or prescription change
- Full mental health evaluations (IQ testing and school IEP services)
- Chronic concerns that are not life-threatening, such as mild anxiety and defiant behavior
- Request for placement in a long-term residential facility

Call the **PIRC at 205-638-PIRC (7472)** for mental health resources in your community.



# What to Expect in the Emergency Room



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## Registration/Triage

- Registration staff will ask for the reason you have come to the emergency room, as well as other basic information.
- A nurse will assess the patient's needs and urgency of treatment.

## Treatment Room

- The patient and caregiver will move to a secured and safe treatment room in the emergency room.
- A Clinical Associate (CA) will remove all patient belongings and place in a locker for safety.
- Staff will provide patient with paper scrubs to change into.
- At least one family member or caregiver is required to stay with the patient at all times.
- No electronics or personal items are allowed in the room for safety reasons. Personal belongings will be secured in a locker. Phones are available for caregivers to use.
- A nurse and/or a CA will check vital signs and the nurse may give medication as needed.

## Medical Exam

- The patient will be assessed by an Attending Physician who determine if medically stable.
- If cleared medically, the patient is seen by the mental health team.

## Psychiatric Exam

- An intake assessment will be conducted by a Licensed Professional Counselor, Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker, Nurse Practitioner or doctor, all under the care of the Attending Psychiatrist. The assessment includes reasons for the emergency room visit, a history of mental health concerns past or present, any previous treatment, family history and a mental status exam.
- An evaluation may be conducted by the Attending Psychiatrist.

## Treatment Plan/Admission or Transfer/Discharge from Emergency Room

- The mental health team will consult with the Attending Psychiatrist, Attending Physician, and family/caregiver to determine the best treatment for the patient.
- Admission to Children's or transfer to another facility will be coordinated by a staff member.
- If the patient is not admitted for care, a team member will refer the patient back to their mental health provider or give a list of outpatient providers for follow-up.

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