CARE RESPONDERS

Your Rights During a Mental Health Crisis

A Guide for Children, Young People, Families, and Professionals



Young People's Mental Health Research Centre
NHS Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust
NHS Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust
NHS Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
NHS Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust
NHS Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust
NHS Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust

MANCHESTER 1824 The University of Manchester
Lancaster University
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
GREATER MANCHESTER POLICE

FUNDED BY NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research
IRAS: 332304, NIHR 158509

Introduction

Experiencing a mental health crisis can be frightening, confusing, and overwhelming for children, young people, and their families. During these difficult times, it is important to know that everyone has rights and should be treated with compassion, dignity, and respect.



When a child or young person experiences a mental health crisis, support may come from a range of services, including paramedics, police officers, mental health professionals, hospital staff, or a combination of these.

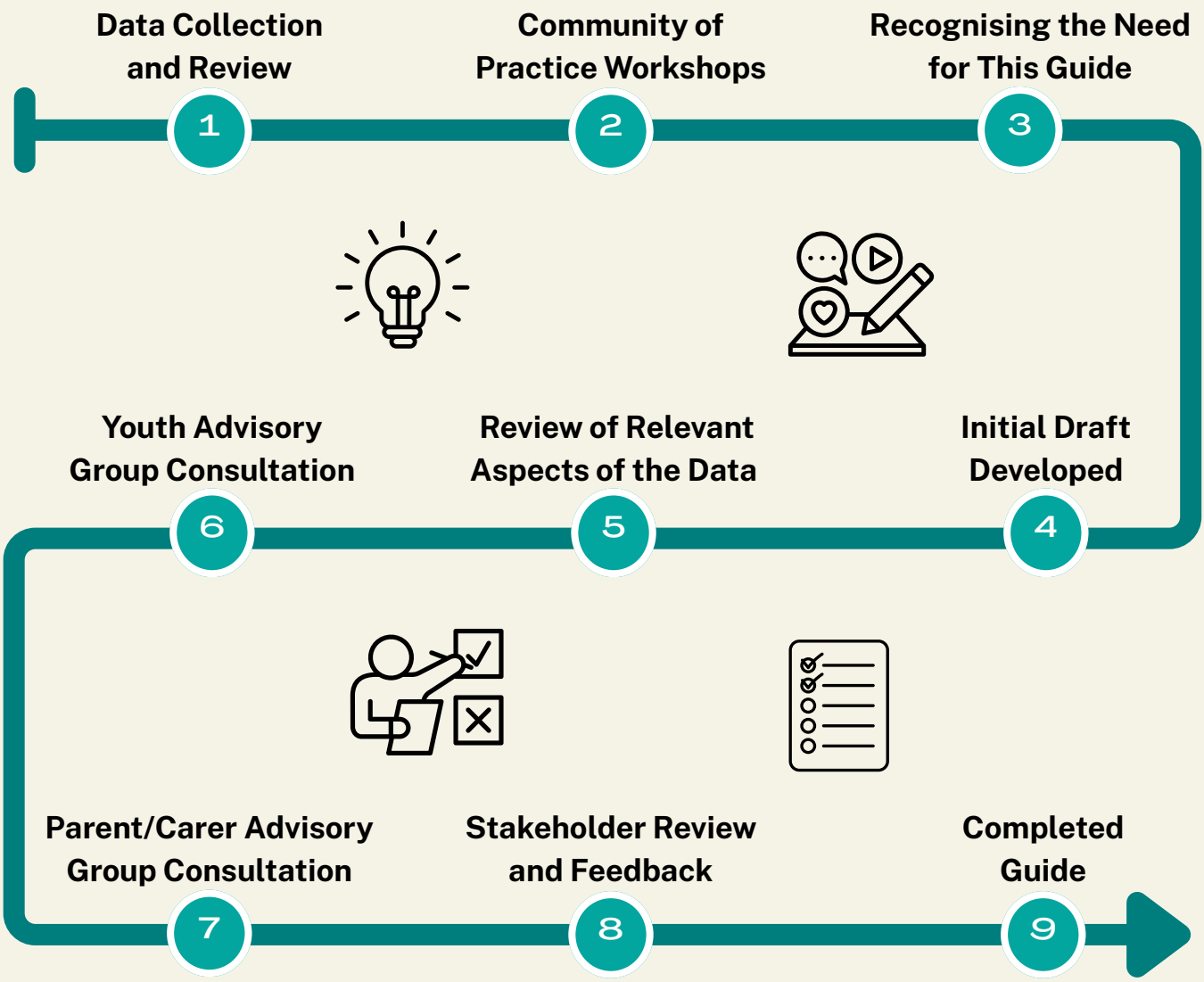
Purpose of the Guide

This guide explains the rights of children, young people, and families when emergency and crisis services are involved, helping them to understand what support they can expect and how decisions about their care should be made. It aims to inform children, young people, and their families of their rights, and to remind professionals of their responsibilities to uphold these rights.

What You Will Find in This Guide

- **How This Guide Was Developed and Acknowledgements** 03
- **Children and Young People: Why Am I Being Helped?** 04
- **Parents and Caregivers: Supporting Your Child During a Mental Health Crisis** 10
- **Professionals: Responding to Children and Young People in Crisis** 15
- **Advocacy and Support: If Your Rights Are Not Being Respected** 21

How This Guide Was Created



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the development of this guide. In particular, we are grateful to the Care Responders Study Advisory Group members, whose lived experience, insights, and expertise helped shape the content and direction of the guide. We also thank the stakeholders who have reviewed the guide and provided valuable feedback.

Finally, we are grateful to the children, young people, parents, caregivers, and professionals who participated in the Care Responders study. Their experiences, perspectives, and contributions have been invaluable in ensuring this guide reflects the needs and views of those it is intended to support.

CARE RESPONDERS



Children and Young People:

Why Am I Being Helped?

If you are feeling very distressed, struggling to cope, thinking about hurting yourself, feeling unsafe, or experiencing a mental health crisis, you may be helped by paramedics, police officers, hospital staff, a social worker, or mental health professionals.

Their job is to help keep you safe and make sure you get the support you need.

You Have Rights



No matter what has happened, you have the right to:

✓ Be treated with kindness, dignity and respect

✓ Be listened to and taken seriously

✓ Be told what is happening and why

✓ Ask questions and have things explained in a way you understand

✓ Have your views and feelings considered when decisions are made

✓ Receive care that is appropriate for your age and needs

✓ Be safe from harm

✓ Have your privacy respected

✓ Have your physical needs met, such as having access to toilets and water

✓ Have your religious and cultural needs met

✓ Request written information about the identification and roles of the professionals who attend to you.

If Paramedics Come to Help You

Paramedics are healthcare professionals whose job is to keep people safe and well.

You have the right to:

- Be treated with compassion and respect.
- Have your physical and emotional wellbeing checked.
- Be told why they are concerned about your safety.
- Be involved in decisions about what happens next whenever possible.
- Have a parent, carer, or trusted adult involved where appropriate.
- Be taken to a safe place if professionals think you need urgent help.

If you need to go somewhere for further support, paramedics should explain where you are going and what will happen when you arrive.

If the Police Are Involved

Sometimes police officers help during a mental health crisis because they are concerned about someone's safety.

Being helped by the police during a mental health crisis does not mean you have done anything wrong.



You have the right to:

- Be treated fairly and respectfully.
- Know why the police are involved.
- Have your wellbeing considered at all times.
- Have information explained in a way you can understand.
- Have your parents, carers, or another appropriate adult informed if you are taken into police custody.

If You Are Taken to a Custody Suite

A custody suite is a safe and secure area within a police station where people may be taken temporarily. Sometimes, the police may use this if they are concerned about your immediate safety or the safety of others, and no other suitable place is available at that time.

Being taken to a custody suite does not automatically mean that you have committed a crime or in trouble.

If you go to a police custody suite, you have the right to:

- Free legal advice.
- Support from an Appropriate Adult (usually a parent, carer, social worker, or trained volunteer).
- Help understanding your rights and what is happening.
- Healthcare and mental health support if you need it.



If You Are Taken to Hospital (A&E)

If you go to A&E because of a mental health crisis, you have the right to:

- Be assessed by healthcare professionals.
- Have both your physical and mental health needs considered.
- Be listened to.
- Talk with a professional alone.
- Have your wishes and feelings taken seriously.
- Have your family involved where appropriate.
- Be cared for in a safe environment.

If you stay overnight, staff should continue to support your safety, wellbeing, and comfort.

If You Are Taken to a Place of Safety

A place of safety is somewhere you can be looked after while professionals assess how best to help you.

You have the right to:



- Be cared for in a safe and suitable environment.
- Know why you are there.
- Be assessed as soon as possible.
- Be treated with dignity and respect.
- Have your views heard.
- Have your family or carers involved where appropriate.
- Receive food, drinks, medication, and healthcare if you need them.

A place of safety is there to help and protect you, not to punish you.

The Rights of Your Family, Caregivers, or Supporters



Parents and carers should usually:

- Be informed about what is happening.
- Be involved in decisions about care and support.
- Be given information about next steps.
- Be treated with respect and compassion.

There may sometimes be limits to what professionals can share if they need to protect a young person's privacy or safety.

Remember

- **You deserve help.**
- **You deserve to be listened to.**
- **You deserve to be treated with respect.**
- **You have rights.**

The people supporting you should work with you and your family to help keep you safe and support your recovery.

From Young People to Young People

Recommendations and experiences from young people who have experienced a mental health crisis:

“Make sure that, you know, you're at the forefront of the conversation and you're explaining your situation to the professionals so that they can provide you with the best level of support.“

- A young person who participated in the Care Responders study.

“I think some people aren't always confident to fully like talk about their situation, but I made sure that I spoke about absolutely everything to the professionals who I was interacting with to make sure that I got the best level of care from them.”

- A young person who participated in the Care Responders study.

“It was really personal, in a good way, and I felt heard.”

- A young person who participated in the Care Responders study.

“I know it seems really hard right now and you feel so alone, but there are people out there who want to help and you don’t have to go through this alone.”

- A young person from the Care Responders Advisory Group.

CARE RESPONDERS



Parents and Caregivers:

Supporting Your Child During a Crisis

If your child is experiencing a mental health crisis, it can be frightening, confusing, and overwhelming. You may find yourself speaking with paramedics, police officers, A&E staff, mental health professionals, or social workers.

Remember: both you and your child have rights.

Your Child's Rights

Children and young people have a right to:

Be Safe	Professionals should take your child's safety seriously and act to protect them from harm.
Be Listened To	Your child's thoughts, feelings, and wishes should be heard and considered when decisions are made about their care.
Be Treated with Dignity and Respect	Your child should be treated kindly and compassionately, regardless of the nature of the crisis or how distressed they may appear.
Understand What Is Happening	Professionals should explain what is happening, why decisions are being made, and what will happen next. Your child's understanding should be checked.
Receive Appropriate Care	Your child has the right to timely, age-appropriate physical and mental health care that meets their individual needs.
Have Their Privacy Respected	Information about your child should be shared only when necessary to support their care, safety, or legal responsibilities.
Experience the Least Restrictive Care Possible	Professionals should use the least restrictive and least intrusive approach needed to keep your child and others safe.

Your Rights as a Parent or Caregiver

You have the right to:

Be Involved	In most situations, professionals should involve you in discussions about your child's care and support.
Be Kept Informed	You should receive clear information about what is happening, what support is available, and what the next steps are.
Ask Questions	You can ask professionals to explain decisions, assessments, treatments, or plans that affect your child.
Share Important Information	You know your child best. Information you provide about their needs, strengths, history, and current difficulties should be considered as part of assessment and care planning.
Be Treated with Respect	Families should be treated as partners in care, not as obstacles to it.
Receive Support	Supporting a child through a crisis can be extremely stressful. Professionals should consider your wellbeing and help you access support.

If Information Cannot Be Shared

As children get older, they may have rights to confidentiality regarding some aspects of their care.

Your child may ask to speak to a professional without a parent or caregiver present. This is normal and is often encouraged so that young people have an opportunity to express their feelings openly.

Professionals can share information without consent when necessary to protect a child or someone else from serious harm. If information cannot be shared, professionals should explain as much as they can about the reasons for this.

If Your Child Is Taken to Hospital (A&E)

Your child has the right to:



- Be treated with dignity, respect, and compassion.
- A physical and mental health assessment.
- Safe and appropriate care.
- Have information explained in a way that you all understand.
- Be involved in decisions about treatment wherever possible.

You should usually be involved in discussions about care and discharge planning. Staff should keep you informed, listen to your views and concerns, and involve you in ongoing support plans, unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so.

If the Police Are Involved



If the police attend because they are concerned about your child's safety:

- This does not mean your child has done anything wrong.
- Your child's welfare should remain the priority.
- Children have additional legal protections because they are under 18.
- If your child is taken into police custody, they are entitled to support from an Appropriate Adult and access to legal advice.



Remember

- During a mental health crisis, your child is first and foremost a child if aged 17 years and under.
- Their distress should be met with care, compassion, and support.
- If you are unsure about a decision or feel your child's rights are not being respected, it is okay to ask questions, request clarification, or seek advocacy and support.
- As a parent or carer, your voice matters too. You have valuable knowledge about your child and an important role in helping professionals understand what they need to feel safe, supported, and hopeful about recovery.

Advice for Parents, Caregivers, and Supporters

Advice from others who have supported a young person through a mental health crisis:

"I understand the need for the young person to make autonomous and independent decisions... But especially in crisis, I think we should be depending more on those trusted people around them, whether it's parents, caregivers or whoever's kind of playing that role in that young person's life".

- A professional who participated in the Care Responders study.

"It doesn't have to be family, I think we need to emphasise that everyone says family but people's nearest and dearest might be a best friend or someone that they kind of rely on closely."

- A professional who participated in the Care Responders study.

"Allow the child to be the front of the crisis response, and if they are comfortable, speak to them alone without the parent present first."

- A professional who participated in the Care Responders study.

"By the time you've got to the child you've already got a massive idea of what's happened and then the child's there like try to tell you the story and you've already got that pre idea. So I try and go to the young person first."

- A professional who participated in the Care Responders study.



Professionals and First Responders

The Rights of Children and Young People in Crisis

This section is for police officers, paramedics, mental health professionals, A&E staff, social workers, youth justice practitioners, and all professionals responding to children and young people in crisis.

A mental health crisis can be one of the most frightening experiences in a child or young person's life. The way professionals respond in the first minutes and hours can significantly influence a young person's sense of safety, trust, dignity, and recovery.

Every Contact Matters

When a young person is experiencing a mental health crisis, every contact is an opportunity to make a positive difference. Kindness, empathy and effective communication can not only improve their immediate experience but also influence how they engage with services and seek support in the future.

Children and Young People Have a Right to:

- Be safe.
- Be listened to.
- Have any documents or hospital passports considered.
- Be treated with dignity and respect.
- Receive timely and appropriate healthcare.
- Participate in decisions affecting them.
- Receive the least restrictive care necessary.
- Have their welfare and best interests prioritised.



Key Legal and Policy Frameworks

Children have a fundamental human right to:

- The highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (Article 24).
- Protection from harm (Article 19).
- Have their views heard and given due weight (Article 12).
- Be treated in their best interests (Article 3).
- Be free from prejudice and discrimination (Article 2).

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

All agencies have responsibilities to:

- Safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- Work together to protect children from harm.
- Recognise vulnerability and unmet need.

Children Act 1989 and 2004



Children experiencing mental health crises should:

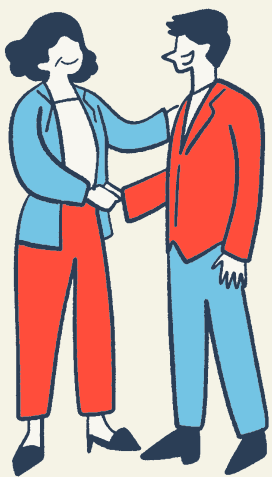
- Be cared for in age-appropriate settings wherever possible.
- Receive the least restrictive intervention necessary.
- Have their rights and welfare actively protected.
- Be supported through lawful assessment and treatment processes.

Mental Health Act 2025

Mental Capacity and Consent

Professionals should:

- Presume capacity unless there is evidence otherwise.
- Assess understanding and decision-making ability in line with age and developmental stage.
- Explain information in accessible, age-appropriate language.
- Seek consent wherever possible.



What Every Child Should Experience During a Crisis Response

"I am safe."

- My immediate safety is prioritised.
- Physical and emotional needs are addressed.
- I am protected from further harm.

"I am listened to."

- Someone takes time to hear my story.
- My feelings and experiences are taken seriously.
- My views inform decisions about my care.

"I understand what is happening."

- Professionals explain what is happening and why.
- Information is provided in language I can understand.
- I know what will happen next.

"I am treated with dignity."

- I am spoken to respectfully.
- My privacy is protected.
- My identity, culture, and individual needs are respected.

"I am not punished for being distressed."

- My behaviour is understood within the context of my experiences and needs.
- Restrictive interventions are used only when absolutely necessary.
- Care is trauma-informed and compassionate.

"Find out what's happening with the child and work around that, I feel like chatting away about irrelevant stuff is nice but definitely not helpful."

- A young person sharing their advice for first responders



"They listened without judgement."

- A young person sharing an example of what helped them feel safe and supported during a crisis.

Supporting Parents, Caregivers, and Families

Parents and carers are often experiencing significant distress themselves.



Professionals should:

- Recognise families can be important partners in care.
- Share information appropriately.
- Offer reassurance and practical guidance.
- Consider parental mental health, stress, and support needs.
- Remain alert to safeguarding concerns while maintaining a strengths-based approach.

Trauma-Responsive Principles for First Responders

Trauma-responsive care recognises that **a young person's behaviour, emotions and reactions may be influenced by difficult life experiences**. It focuses on understanding their experiences, needs and strengths, while promoting safety, trust, choice and collaboration.

Aim to:

- Reduce fear.
- Increase safety.
- Promote connection.
- Restore dignity.
- Support hope.

Before asking:
"What's wrong with this child?"

Consider:
"What has happened to this child, what matters to them, and what do they need right now?"



Remember

A rights-based, trauma-informed response is not an additional aspect of care, it is fundamental to good practice and better outcomes for children, young people and their families, and preventing future crises.

Every interaction is an opportunity to communicate:

- "You matter."
- "You are safe."
- "We will listen."
- "We will work with you and those who care about you."



Children do not lose their rights because they are in crisis.

Recommendations for First Responders

“The police talked about the things I enjoy and let me talk about it too.”

- A young person who participated in the Care Responders study.

“When they tell you they've done a referral and then they don't do it. If they had just told me they weren't going to do it I could've asked my GP instead of being delayed for months.”

- A young person who participated in the Care Responders study.

“They sympathised and listened and really cared and made me feel wanted.”

- A young person who participated in the Care Responders study.

“Having a quiet space, that would have been really helpful just to sort of like regulate my emotions and just not feel like the overwhelming presence of lots of people.”

“For someone like me who was at the point of self-harming, I would have just wanted anyone to talk to and someone to actually understand me.”

- A young person who participated in the Care Responders study.

“Listen to your patient when asking for something or help.”

- A young person who participated in the Care Responders study.



Advocacy and Support

If Your Rights Are Not Being Respected

Children and Young people: What You Can Do

If you are in hospital, a custody suite, or receiving help from emergency services and do not think your rights are being respected, tell a member of staff as soon as you can. This could be a nurse, doctor, police officer, mental health professional, social worker, a family member, or another trusted adult.

You can ask questions if you do not understand what is happening, why decisions are being made, or what will happen next.

If you feel you are not being listened to, ask to speak to the person in charge, such as the senior nurse, ward manager, custody sergeant, or team leader. They should listen to your concerns and explain what support is available.

Parents and Caregivers: What You Can Do

If your child is in hospital, a custody suite, or receiving help from emergency services and you do not think their rights are being respected, tell a member of staff as soon as you can.

You can ask questions if you do not understand what is happening, why decisions are being made, or what will happen next.

If you feel you are not being listened to, ask to speak to the person in charge, such as the senior nurse, ward manager, custody sergeant, or another senior member of staff. They should listen to your concerns and explain what support is available.

You could say:

- "I don't feel like my concerns have been understood. Please could I speak to a manager?"
- "I'd like more information about why this decision was made."
- "Can someone explain what happens next?"



Raising a Concern

Most concerns can be raised directly with the service management. Different services often have their own escalation procedures.

You could:

- Ask to speak to a senior manager or team leader.
- Contact the service's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).
- Use the organisation's complaints process if concerns remain unresolved.

Advocacy Support

An advocate can help:

- Understand your rights.
- Express your views.
- Prepare for meetings.
- Raise concerns.
- Make a complaint.
- Challenge decisions if needed.

Ask a healthcare professional, local authority, social worker, CAMHS team, or school for information about local advocacy services.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS provides confidential advice, support and information about NHS services.

They can help:

- Explain NHS processes.
- Guide you through complaint procedures.
- Signpost additional support.



Organisations That May Be Able to Help

VoiceAbility: www.voiceability.org
Independent advocacy and support.

The Children's Commissioner for England: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk
Provides information about children's rights and how to make your voice heard.

YoungMinds: www.youngminds.org.uk
Information about navigating services, complaints, and support for families.

Citizens Advice: www.citizensadvice.org.uk
Free advice on rights, advocacy, complaints procedures and accessing support.

CARE RESPONDERS

If something doesn't feel right, it's okay to speak up.

Young people, parents, carers, families, and professionals all have a right to raise concerns, be listened to, and be treated with respect. Speaking up is not about causing trouble. It is about helping to ensure that young people receive the care, support and understanding they deserve.



The Care Responders study was funded by the NIHR (National Institute for Health and Care Research).
The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.

FUNDED BY NIHR | National Institute for Health and Care Research
IRAS: 332304, NIHR 158509