



You can support *anyone* experiencing a mental health emergency

with the acronym RAILS.

R = RECOGNISE THE WARNING SIGNS

Although mental health emergencies like physical health emergencies are unique to the individual, some people may present with one or more of the following: increased risk taking behaviour, agitation or anger, preoccupation with death or dying, appearing sad, depressed or with changes of mood (including sudden calm or elation). They may withdraw from others; speak of feeling hopeless, worthless or helpless about their current situation.

Some people will explicitly say that they are feeling suicidal or are planning on ending their life.

A = ASK THE PERSON DIRECT QUESTIONS

Start an open conversation. This gives the other person a chance to express how they are feeling without having to fit your perception. **Ask directly if they are thinking about suicide** - this gives the person an opportunity to speak openly and honestly and shows you're okay with the subject matter. Being able to speak about suicidal thoughts can be a relief for that individual and allows you to know that you are dealing with suicide and how you need to act next.

*You can **not** make a person feel suicidal just by asking them about suicide.*

I = INTERVENE

If you are worried that the person is in immediate danger, just as you would in a physical health emergency, support the person to go to A&E, or call 999.

If you do not think the person is at risk of immediate harm, it is important to convey the message of hope and that with the right support things can get better.

L = LISTEN

People often feel 'alone' when they are experiencing a crisis and knowing that someone is there and cares may be all that they need to open up. The person is looking for empathy and understanding. If the person is having trouble communicating, you should know that your presence alone can be reassuring for them.

Try to stay calm and remember that you are not responsible for the other person's actions – whatever the situation or scenario you are presented with.

S = SIGNPOST

Getting professional help is a very difficult but often vital step in mental health recovery. You can help that person make the decision. People can get help in the form of their GPs, Counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists, crisis teams, community mental health recovery teams, helplines, websites, apps, support groups or specific services such as drug and alcohol. One of the easiest ways to signpost someone is through downloading the app 'Hub of Hope' - a national database of mental health organisations. You can also visit the website on <https://hubofhope.co.uk/>

+ SELF-CARE

Some people will appear to be struggling with their mental health, but refuse help. It is important to respect the person's right to refuse unless it is an emergency. You can however, encourage them to self care. This is the practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being in particular during periods of stress. It involves taking positive steps in terms of physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, social, and personal welfare. Examples include exercise, listening to music, spending time with nature, healthy eating and avoiding risk behaviours. Self care is just as important for you as it is for the person you may be supporting: it is important for all of us!