

# TAKING THE FIRST STEP

**Seeking help with health issues can be very hard.** Health, especially mental health, is a deeply personal matter. Reaching out to others for support with such a personal experience is often necessary, but not always easy. So when you do reach out, you should feel proud for taking a difficult step. Taking care of yourself is responsible, strong, brave and admirable.

Extensive research tells us that seeking help early on is extremely important. The earlier people receive care, the better the long-term outcomes (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000).

Based on the type of health coverage you have (or do not have), this section will describe the very first steps to take if you notice emotions or behaviors in yourself or a loved one that concern you. *Mindcheck.ca has quizzes, assessments and other useful info to get a sense of what you or a loved one may be experiencing.*



## IF YOU THINK IT MAY BE URGENT...

**STEP 1: CALL YOUR COUNTY'S CRISIS SERVICE LINE** (see directory on pages 73-81). Crisis workers can provide a supportive ear, give referrals and keep you safe when things are really breaking down.

**STEP 2: CHECK OUT THE CRISIS SECTION** of this guide for additional resources (pages 44-57).

## IF YOU HAVE INSURANCE (ANY TYPE)...

**STEP 1: MAKE AN APPOINTMENT** with your primary care doctor and describe your concerns. Your primary care doctor is a good starting point but they do not specialize in mental health issues, so be sure to ask them how to connect with mental health professionals!

*Primary care doctor: doctors who provide routine medical care, sometimes called a general practitioner (GP) or family doctor*

**STEP 2: ASK YOUR INSURANCE PLAN** about mental health services covered by your plan and how to make an appointment with a provider (therapist AND psychiatrist). See "tips for making phone calls" on the opposite page.

*You can find contact information for your insurance plan on your monthly bills, insurance card or by searching the internet.*

## IF YOU DO NOT HAVE INSURANCE...

### APPLY FOR INSURANCE

- You may be able to get very affordable insurance through the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare). Most will qualify for lower costs on health coverage and everyone can get free one-on-one help with the application process. Visit [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov) or call (800) 318-2596 for more info and/or to apply.
- Check your eligibility for BadgerCare Plus and/or other Medicaid programs (public insurance for low-income people and/or people with disabilities). Visit [dhs.wisconsin.gov/forwardhealth](http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/forwardhealth) or call (800) 362-3002 for more info.

### GET HELP IN THE MEANTIME

- Dial 2-1-1 (a statewide social service information and referral line) and ask about sliding-scale, reduced cost or free mental health services that your community may offer. 2-1-1 call center websites have a wealth of information: [211wisconsin.org/call\\_centers.html](http://211wisconsin.org/call_centers.html). You might also check out the WI Dept. of Health Services listing of free/reduced cost clinics: [dhs.wisconsin.gov/forwardhealth/clinics.htm](http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/forwardhealth/clinics.htm)
- Call your local NAMI! We may be able to help you locate or better understand mental health services available to you (contact info on pages 73-81).



## Tips FOR MAKING PHONE CALLS IN “THE SYSTEM”

**STAY STRONG.** Insurance personnel and others can sometimes seem a bit short with callers. It's important to remember that although their tone might make you feel otherwise, (for whatever reason), you have a VERY important reason for calling. Your questions are valid.

**BE PREPARED.** Spend a few minutes thinking about or jotting down what you need out of the conversation. Don't hang up without that information. When talking with the insurance plan: if you need help with a specific condition, ask for a professional that specializes in that issue. When calling for appointments: if they tell you there is a waiting list, make one anyway. You can always cancel if you get an earlier

appointment somewhere else. Keep in mind that someone else can call for you if you feel uncomfortable.

**DEBRIEF.** Write down what you learned and who you talked to. Talk with a family member, friend or other trusted person to help you decide your next steps. Write down your next steps.

