

# INTRO TO CIVIL COMMITMENTS

**There is a wide range of beliefs about court-ordered mental health treatment.** Some people believe that involuntary treatment is underutilized. Others believe that such an extreme violation of civil rights should never be practiced. Many people fall somewhere in the middle — believing it to be necessary in rare cases. Because the emergency detention and commitment process is so confusing and overwhelming, we want to provide a basic guide to the process — specific to Wisconsin law and procedures. It is also important to address the following common misconceptions about court-ordered treatment.

## COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT INVOLUNTARY TREATMENT

**If the person receives involuntary treatment, they are guaranteed to get well.** As discussed elsewhere in this guide, there is no single “cure” for mental illness. Taking medication alone does not typically facilitate meaningful recovery. Some people do not understand this and mistakenly believe that forcing someone into treatment will “cure” them.

**Involuntary treatment is an easy or straightforward experience.** Commitment is often a traumatic, frightening, confusing process for most involved. It is an emotionally intense experience for all involved and should not be taken lightly.

**If family members are involved in a commitment process,** it means they cannot see the person’s strengths or have hope for recovery. Family members involved in the commitment process do not want to hurt their loved one or foster distrust. But they may be afraid for the safety of their loved one (or others) and feel they have no other choice.

**If someone receives treatment involuntarily, all alternative options have been explored.** Prior to the circumstances leading up to involuntary treatment, the person may not have had access to high-quality, community-based mental health services.

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*“Underneath pain, there is always a whole person.  
A person is never broken and thus does not need to be fixed.  
People must be supported, not ‘fixed.’ ”*

—Anonymous

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