



IS MY LOVED ONE SPIRALING?

NOTICE CHANGES IN FUNCTIONING, SAFETY, AND CONNECTION WITHOUT JUMPING TO A DIAGNOSIS

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START WITH CHANGE FROM BASELINE

- One symptom does not automatically mean a mental-health crisis.
- Look for a meaningful change from the person's usual functioning, a cluster of changes, increasing intensity, or growing difficulty with basic responsibilities and safety.
- Avoid diagnosing from a checklist.



CHANGES YOU MIGHT NOTICE

- Much less sleep or unusually high energy; marked withdrawal; rapidly worsening anxiety, agitation, hopelessness, confusion, or suspiciousness.
- Major changes in eating, hygiene, work, school, caregiving, communication, medication routines, or substance use.
- Statements suggesting the person feels trapped, unsafe, unable to cope, or unable to keep going.



ASK - DO NOT INTERROGATE

- "I have noticed ___ and I care about you. How are you doing?"
- "What feels hardest right now?"
- "Would it help if I listened, stayed with you, helped with one task, or helped you connect with support?"
- Listen without arguing about feelings or demanding an explanation.



CULTURE, DISABILITY, AND CONTEXT MATTER

- Communication, eye contact, emotional expression, family roles, spiritual experiences, disability, neurodivergence, and culturally meaningful practices vary.
- Do not label difference as pathology simply because it is unfamiliar.
- Focus on change from the person's own baseline, distress, functioning, consent, and safety.



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HOW MUCH IS FUNCTIONING CHANGING?

- Mild/manageable: offer practical support and encourage routine care.
- Worsening/significant: encourage prompt professional evaluation and increase supportive contact if welcomed.
- Basic safety failing: assess whether urgent or emergency support is needed.



IMMEDIATE DANGER

- Urgent examples can include current intent or plan to die or seriously self-harm, overdose, violent intent, severe intoxication, abnormal breathing or inability to stay awake, extreme confusion, or behavior creating immediate danger.
- In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate life-threatening emergency.



SUPPORT WITHOUT TAKING OVER

- Ask what support the person wants when circumstances allow.
- Offer transportation, food, childcare, help making a call, body doubling, cultural or spiritual support, disability accommodations, or company while waiting for care.
- Do not use concern as a reason to shame, threaten, crowd, or unnecessarily remove autonomy.



WHAT AM I ACTUALLY OBSERVING?

- What changed?
- How long has it been happening and how often?
- How is it affecting sleep, food, hygiene, work, school, caregiving, relationships, judgment, or safety?
- What information is observable, and what am I interpreting or assuming?