

A Guide for You: Supporting a Loved One in a Digital Crisis

Practical Mental Health First-Aid Steps for Families Navigating Digital Overwhelm

It is incredibly scary to watch someone you love spiral into a mental health crisis tied to the digital world. You might feel completely helpless:

"My teenager refuses to leave their room because of an AI companion..."

"My spouse has become deeply paranoid about online threats..."

You are carrying a heavy load of worry, exhaustion, and fear. First, hear this truth: **You cannot "fix" your loved one's mental health on your own—and that is okay.** This guide uses basic mental health first-aid steps to help you keep them safe and know when to seek professional care.

1 Step 1: Check for Safety (Red Flags at Home)

The most important part of caring for someone in crisis is checking on physical safety. If you see these signs, your loved one needs professional medical help right away:

Extreme Self-Neglect

Stopped bathing, eating, or leaving their room. Staying awake for days at a time to remain online.

Detachment from Reality

Believing an AI is physically alive, watching them, or giving them dangerous instructions.

Talk of Self-Harm

Saying "I want to sleep and never wake up" or "My online friends are my only reason to live."

What to Do in an Emergency:

Do not wait. Take them to an ER, contact a doctor, or call/text the crisis line.

Call or Text 988

2 Step 2: How to Talk so They Will Listen

When someone is in a digital crisis, they are often embarrassed. If judged, they will hide their behavior. Use these tips:

Listen to Feelings, Not Just Technology

Don't argue about whether an AI friend is "real" or fight over screen time limit details. Focus on their heart.

Try saying: "I can see you are feeling really lonely and stressed lately. I want to understand what you are going through."

Do Not Shame or Mock Them

Never say "You're ridiculous talking to a computer." Shame drives them deeper into digital isolation.

Keep Your Cool

If they get defensive, take a breath: "I love you and I'm not angry. I'm worried and want to help."

3 Step 3: Getting Professional Support

Just like setting a broken bone requires a doctor, a mental health crisis requires trained professional care.

Frame as Medical Care
Compare mental health to physical health to lower stigma.
"If you had a fever, we'd see a doctor. Your stress is high and you deserve professional care."

Take the Pressure Off
Offer practical help so the step feels less daunting.
Offer to make phone calls, research licensed Christian counselors, or sit in the waiting room with them.

Involve the Church
You do not have to carry this secret alone.
Reach out to your pastor or leadership. They can pray with you and help connect you with local counselors.

4 Step 4: Reconnecting with the Real World

When your loved one is ready, take small, low-pressure actions to anchor them back in physical reality:

- Invite, Don't Force:** Don't demand they attend large gatherings or delete all apps. Offer tiny steps: *"I'm going to water the plants. Would you come stand outside with me for 5 minutes?"*
- Create Calm, Offline Spaces:** Make your home a peaceful sanctuary. Put phones away during dinner or turn off home Wi-Fi for an hour in the evening so everyone's brain can rest.
- Focus on Physical Presence:** Sitting quietly together in the same room or offering a warm hug is often far more healing and comforting than long arguments or speeches.

5 Step 5: Put on Your Own Oxygen Mask First

You cannot help your loved one if you are running on empty. Caring for someone in crisis takes a heavy toll.

Maintain Routines
Prioritize your own sleep, healthy meals, and physical exercise daily.

Stay Connected
Don't isolate out of shame. Talk to trusted friends, a pastor, or a support group.

Set Boundaries
Remember: you are a family member, not their licensed therapist. Boundaries are healthy.

Need Pastoral Care or Counseling Referrals?
Our ministry team is here to pray with you and connect your family with trusted support.

Pastoral Care Office
Contact Church Leadership