

# HELPING A FRIEND WITH A PANIC ATTACK

## WHAT IS A PANIC ATTACK?

A panic attack is defined as the abrupt onset of intense fear or discomfort that reaches a peak within minutes and includes at least 4 of the following symptoms:<sup>1</sup>



- Palpitations, pounding heart, or accelerated heart rate
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Sensations of shortness of breath or smothering
- Feelings of choking
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Nausea or abdominal distress
- Feeling dizzy, unsteady, light-headed, or faint
- Chills or heat sensations
- Paresthesia (numbness or tingling sensations)
- Derealization (feelings of non-reality) or depersonalization (being detached from oneself)
- Fear of losing control or “going crazy”
- Fear of dying

note: symptoms may appear differently depending on the person

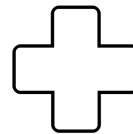
1. American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: Author.

2. Mental health first aid USA. (2015). Washington DC: National Council for Behavioral Health.

## HOW CAN I HELP A FRIEND?<sup>2</sup>



1. **Approach** the person and express a willingness to help.
  - *Reintroduce yourself to the person*
2. **Ask** the person if they have experienced a panic attack before, and if they know they are having one. If they have had one in the past, ask them what was helpful before.
  - *Remain calm, speak in short clear sentences, be patient, and avoid expressing your own negative reactions.*
  - *Reassure them that what they are having is a panic attack and that it should pass in 5-10 minutes.*
  - *Acknowledge the experience as valid and assure them that this is not life threatening .*
  - *Wait with the person until the panic attack subsides, offer to breathe with the person or sit with them until it subsides.*



3. **Call** Campus Security (507-222-4444) or 9-1-1 if you are unsure or believe they are not having a panic attack. Follow physical first aid guidelines.



4. **Follow up** with the person after the panic attack subsides.
  - *Offer a variety of resources on stress, anxiety, sleep and panic attacks.*
  - *Let the person know that if another panic attack occurs they might want to consider visiting a healthcare provider.*