



Parents and 9-1-1

There are situations where you, as a parent, may need emergency services for yourself or your child. This article provides information about the practical and “how to” about using 9-1-1 services.

LPSHSG also has another article (i.e., **Is It Time to Call the Police on Your Child?**), on its cloud storage site, which might be of interest, as it provides some insights on the events and emotions leading up to calling the police regarding your child.

About 9-1-1

9-1-1 is the number you call for emergency services. For some local towns, the 9-1-1 dispatchers are located in the town you are calling from (e.g., at local police station). For other towns, the 9-1-1 dispatchers are located at a central location within the county which handles calls for the whole county.

The 9-1-1 dispatcher’s job is to identify which emergency services are to be sent, the location of the emergency and to log and describe the emergency so that another dispatcher can coordinate the emergency services. As you are speaking to a 9-1-1 dispatcher, he (or she) is entering relevant information into a computer and sharing this information with another dispatcher and emergency services. The 9-1-1 dispatcher’s actions are carefully scripted and it is unproductive and could cause a delay to try to get the 9-1-1 dispatcher to deviate from this script.

When To Call 9-1-1

In an emergency, call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number immediately from any wired or wireless phone. When calling from home, a wired land line is preferred because it provides additional confirmation of address.

An emergency is any situation that requires immediate assistance from the police, fire

department or ambulance. Examples include:

- A fire
- A crime, especially if in progress
- A car crash, especially if someone is injured. *Note that with most car crashes on busy roads, 9-1-1 call centers may receive many calls about the same accident. Therefore, the 9-1-1 dispatcher will try to confirm if the accident is the same as other calls. Therefore, precise location is absolutely critical.*
- A medical emergency, such as someone who is unconscious, gasping for air or not breathing, experiencing an allergic reaction, having chest pain, having uncontrollable bleeding, or any other symptoms that require immediate medical attention.
- Suspected drug overdose. For a suspected drug overdose call 9-1-1, not a drug addiction hot line.
- If someone in the home is a danger or threatening danger to themselves or others in the household.

Important: If you’re not sure whether the situation is a true emergency, officials recommend calling 9-1-1 and letting the dispatcher determine whether you need emergency help.

When You Connect to 9-1-1

When you call 9-1-1, be prepared to answer the dispatcher’s questions. The 9-1-1 dispatcher’s questions are important in getting the right kind of help to you quickly.

Be prepared to follow any instructions the dispatcher gives you. Note that dispatcher may ask you to confirm specifics such as the address of emergency. Be patient. Many 9-1-1 centers can tell you exactly what to do to help in an emergency until help arrives, such as providing step-by-step instructions to aid someone who is choking or needs first aid or CPR.



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The 9-1-1 dispatchers questions may include:

- The location of the emergency, including the street address. Use mile markers on highways. *Note that, if calling from home, the town is your municipality (not necessarily your post office); It is where you pay taxes and your town's police department.*
- The phone number you are calling from
- The nature of the emergency
- **Are there any weapons present or involved.** This is key. Police need to be informed about whether weapons are currently being used or threatened to be used and if weapons are in the home.
- Details about the emergency, such as a physical description of a person who may have committed a crime, or a description of injuries or symptoms being experienced by a person having a medical emergency. Describe symptoms; don't attempt to diagnosis cause. *If you can readily identify the suspected drug used (e.g., nearby prescription labels), inform the 9-1-1 dispatcher.*
- It is best to be as specific as possible. If a dispatcher asks you an opened ended question such "what is the nature of your emergency", be as clear and accurate as possible. For example rather than say 'my son is fighting' a better statement could be 'My son Jacob and husband John are fist fighting each other right now'.

Finally, do not hang up until the dispatcher instructs you to.

When Not To Call 9-1-1

9-1-1 is reserved only for true emergency situations in which there is a definite, likely, or uncertain immediate threat to life, health or property. Be sure to dial 9-1-1 only when the situation you are reporting requires an immediate response by police, EMS or the fire department. Note that 2-1-1 also provides additional services. 2-1-1 services for New Jersey are described in a separate document titled **New Jersey's 2-1-1 Service.**

This document is available at LPSHSG's cloud server.

A call for your child missed curfew, unexpected disruption of phone or electric service or the infamous 'cat stuck in a tree' are not appropriate 9-1-1 calls, unless there are detrimental secondary consequences (e.g. a family member at home is being maintained on some form of electrical life support and the power goes out; the broken water line is rapidly flooding your house, et cetera). These are obviously only a few examples, but you get the idea.

Tips

Know Where You Are

This is probably the most important information you can provide as a 9-1-1 caller. If you are not calling from home try to check out your surroundings. Make a real effort to be as detailed as possible. If you are outside and don't know the street address, take a look around and try to find landmarks (e.g., mile marker on highways or cross streets). If you are inside a large building or one with multiple levels, you can help emergency services by letting them know which floor you are on, which apartment you are in, etc.

Stay Calm

When you are on the phone with 9-1-1 dispatcher, you are their eyes and ears. Even though you may want to, try not to panic. If you are crying or yelling, it can be hard for the 9-1-1 dispatcher to understand you. Pull yourself together, and answer all of the 9-1-1 dispatcher's questions. They can get the right services to you fastest if you clearly answer their questions.

Listen to the 9-1-1 Dispatcher; Follow Orders

Have strict, unwavering faith in the 9-1-1 dispatcher. And remember that even while the 9-1-1 dispatcher is asking questions or giving instructions, the dispatcher is simultaneously handing off information to appropriate emergency services.

Most 9-1-1 centers will be able to provide you with instructions that will help (e.g. CPR



instructions, the Heimlich Maneuver). If you are not physically able, or are afraid to carry out the instructions given to you, try to find someone else who is with you and can carry out the instructions. If immediate medication is required (e.g., EpiPen, Narcan, etc.) the 9-1-1 dispatcher cannot provide this guidance. They will tell you to default to your doctor's instructions.

Never Hang Up

You may have called 9-1-1 by accident, or your situation may have resolved itself, but it is important to let the 9-1-1 dispatcher know this. If you end the call abruptly, the folks at the 9-1-1 center are going to assume that something has gone very wrong and will either call you back or send help anyway. This will take away from the 9-1-1 center's ability to take calls and dispatch services to on-going emergencies, so make sure the 9-1-1 dispatcher tells you it is ok to disconnect before you hang up. And keep in mind that the dispatcher can dispatch responders to your location without disconnecting from the call, so, until you are instructed to do otherwise, make sure to hold the line so that you can provide any necessary information or assistance to the 9-1-1 dispatcher.

Calling Surreptitiously

If you are calling because of an actual or potentially violent situation with your child, it may be best to quietly remove yourself to another room. You can call 9-1-1 when your child cannot hear the call if you do not want your child to attempt to take your phone or escalate the situation. Once police are in route you can, at your discretion depending on the situation, state that the police are in route.

Another solution is to have a prearrangement with a close friend who will call 9-1-1 for you when you call or text this friend. A dispatcher gave this advice:

*"I've had calls in the past in which the neighbor dialed 9-1-1 after receiving a short text (e.g., **call 911**) from the woman next door about a domestic violence issue. The two neighbors had this pre planned and the caller was able to provide me with a history of the issues at the residence and the fact that receiving this text*

meant she was in a dangerous situation with her family at home. She had the proper address, names of those involved, and history of the family which was able to at least let us know this needed multiple officers."

Open Line Calling

You may have heard that, in an emergency where you want to hide that you are talking to 9-1-1 you can call 9-1-1 and leave an open line because the dispatcher supposedly can discern what to do from background noise. This is not advised because the 9-1-1 dispatcher can have difficulty discerning what is going on, does not know the nature of emergency, and may believe call is an error. Especially do not do this with a cell phone as there are too many accidental "pocket dials" of cell phones.

Calling Local Police vs. 9-1-1

If your child missed a curfew or you want to talk to a juvenile officer about suspected drug use by your child, use the phone number for your local police, not 9-1-1.

9-1-1 Calls and Deactivated Cell Phones

9-1-1 calls will go through even on deactivated cell phones. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has ruled that all cell phones, even those that do not have an active subscription plan, can call 9-1-1. Because of this, it is very important that parents make sure that their children are not given retired cell phones as toys, because they can accidentally call 9-1-1.

Text messaging 9-1-1

Currently, the 9-1-1 system in most towns does not allow receipt of text messages.

9-1-1 Confidentiality

In the state of New Jersey, the audio recordings of 9-1-1 calls are not confidential. There are some restrictions on the dissemination of information about an emergency as described in NJ Statue sec. 2A:58D-2. Moreover, information about 9-1-1 calls are not automatically provided to public media.