

My family member with a mental illness has been arrested and taken to San Luis Obispo County Jail - What do I do?

A guide to help families when a family member who suffers from a mental illness is arrested.

STEP ONE: SUPPORT YOUR RELATIVE

If your family member calls you and says that he/she has been arrested and is at the County Jail, help him/her stay calm and offer your help and support.

Upon arrival at the County Jail, he/she will be screened for mental illness, as well as other health concerns. It is very important that they be direct and honest to benefit as much as possible from this screening process. Assure your family member that it is OK to discuss his/her physical and mental condition, diagnosis, medications, etc., with the staff conducting the screening, which can include Jail Medical Services staff and Correctional staff. Feeling safe to speak openly about their medical and mental condition is important for their safety and health.

STEP TWO: CONTACT THE JAIL

San Luis Obispo County Jail
1585 Kansas Ave.
San Luis Obispo, CA 93405
Phone: 805-781-4600

Call the County Jail at 805-781-4600 and advise the answering staff member that you are calling regarding your family member who is in custody and that you have concerns about their mental status. Ask for the on-duty sergeant and inform them that your family member suffers from a mental illness and describe the diagnosis and any other concerns you might have.

Inquire as to your relative's status and estimated length of stay at this facility. Ask if he/she is expected to be released directly from the jail. If he/she is going to be released from the jail, ask for the time and place so you can be there to pick them up. Be sure to get the following information: Court arraignment date and address.

If your relative is severely ill, ask for a "5150" involuntary three-day hold for treatment and evaluation. Be ready to give specific facts that will legally enable them to articulate this. Is the person a danger to themselves or others or are they unable to care for themselves and why?

Medication needs will be evaluated during the booking process. Medical staff will verify your relative's doctor and prescriptions being taken. Once verification is made, your relative will receive the appropriate medication while in jail. Ask if your relative has been able to provide the doctors' name and list of medications to jail staff. You will assist your relative to receive medications in a timely manner by providing this information to Jail Medical Services staff.

STEP THREE: COUNTY JAIL INFORMATION

Inmate information is available on the internet at www.slosheriff.org. Click on **Who is in Custody**. Enter his/her complete legal name to bring up the booking number. Note this information for future reference.

TIP: Inmates are sometimes booked in with/without middle name. If you are unable to locate him/her, try any names your relative has used.

Use the links under **JAIL INFO/Jail FAQ** on the web page to access visiting hours, mailing address, and frequently asked questions.

TIP: When visiting inmates, a photo ID is required. All public visits are by appointment and visitor registration is required. To register and schedule appointments on-line go to:

<https://sanluisobispo.ca.gtlvisitme.com/app>

STEP FOUR: PROVIDING HEALTH INFORMATION

How to provide jail medical/mental health staff with medical and mental health information.

Once you have spoken to jail staff and have the required information, complete the **Inmate Medication Information Form** and send as soon as possible. Click on the **Inmate Medication Information Form**, [English Version](#) or [Spanish Version](#) and provide the requested information.

- The medical information you provide is very helpful in assisting the mental health staff in making an assessment and selecting the best treatment for your relative while he or she is in custody. Continuity of care is important; however, the jail mental health staff must conduct their own assessment of your relative's condition and may not necessarily prescribe exactly the same medications. For safety reasons, some psychiatric medications cannot be used in the jail.
- Be sure to provide your contact information. Forms that do not contain your contact information may not be considered valid. If you are interested in receiving protected health care information regarding your family member, please call Jail Medical/Mental Health Services at 805-781-4614.
- The jail medical/mental health staff is prohibited by law from giving anyone information about a client's status unless they have the client's written consent, but the staff can receive information from relatives or friends without the client's consent.

If the form is not available online, immediately prepare a fax requesting your family member be seen by jail mental health staff. **If you believe your family member is suicidal or has an urgent medical condition that requires immediate attention, call the jail immediately at 805-781-4600 and ask to speak to the on-duty sergeant.**

Begin the fax with your relative's:

- List full legal name
- Street address, city, state
- Date of birth
- Booking number

In the body of the fax include:

- His/her diagnosis
- Psychiatrist/physician's name, phone number, and address
- The medications that are prescribed for your family member by name, dosage, and time of day to be administered.
- Whether a particular medication has proven to be ineffective or has dangerous and/or uncomfortable side effects.
- Any history of suicide attempts/threats or other violent intentions in the recent past. Briefly describe the events and when they occurred.
- Describe any other urgent medical conditions that might require immediate attention, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, seizures, heart problems, etc., and medications currently prescribed for those conditions. Include his/her medical doctor's name, address, and phone number for verification purposes.

The medical information you provide is tremendously valuable in making an assessment and will help the medical/mental health staff select the best treatment for your relative. There is a clear preference for maintaining effective current treatment. However, jail medical/mental health staff must conduct their own assessment of your relative's condition and may not necessarily prescribe exactly the same medications.

IMPORTANT: DO NOT ADDRESS ANY IMPENDING CHARGES AGAINST YOUR FAMILY MEMBER IN THIS FAX. MEDICAL INFORMATION ONLY!!

Keep a copy of this form for future reference. If your family member is transferred to a different facility, you may need to fax this information again.

**San Luis Obispo County Jail
Medical/Mental Health Services
FAX NUMBER 805-781-4620**

STEP FOUR: DECIDING ON LEGAL REPRESENTATION

Your family member may want to retain a private attorney or use the Public Defender's Office. A public defender will be assigned at arraignment if your relative does not have or cannot afford a private attorney. Do not be afraid to use a public defender. Public defenders often have knowledge of the system as it pertains to those who need mental health services.

If your family member decides to retain a private attorney, be sure to select one that is well versed in helping people with mental illness and understands how to access the treatment facilities and mental health services that are available.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Bail: Think carefully about posting bail for your family member. No one wants a loved one to remain incarcerated for any length of time. It is an unpleasant experience for them as well as the family. However, you must ask yourself the following question. Will your family member be able to comply with the terms of the bail and appear in court when required? Also, as hard as it may seem, jail may be a safer place for a person with severe mental illness who is in crisis rather than having your loved one wander the streets with no help at all. At least in jail they will be fed, will have shelter, and be given access to medication treatments.

Working with an attorney: Call the Public Defender's office and ask for the name of the attorney who will be handling the case. It is more likely the attorney will be at his/her desk in the morning between 8:00-8:30 a.m. before court begins or later in the afternoon after 3:30 p.m. If you do not reach the attorney, be sure to leave a message requesting a return call with your name, phone number, your family member name and, if possible, the case number and court date. Due to the attorney-client confidentiality requirement, there will be information the attorney may not be able to share with you. Remember, it is your family member, not you, who is the attorney's client.

Inform the attorney of your family member's condition and any information that may be beneficial to the case. Provide the attorney with an extensive medical/psychiatric/social/educational history of your family member in writing. Include hospitalization, diagnosis information, medication treatment, and the contact information of those doctors/clinicians and of facilities that have treated your family member in the past. This information will be very useful in pursuing the best outcome for your loved one. Attorneys are extremely busy and many will appreciate written or faxed correspondence.

Supporting and coping with a loved one who suffers from a brain disorder can be extremely challenging and stressful. Knowledge, as well as your love and fortitude, will be essential in helping you to become a strong and effective support system for your family member. For information about support groups and educational programs provided free of charge in your area, contact NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, at 213-632-0782 or on the internet at www.namicalifornia.org.

This informational guide was written by NAMI volunteers based on their own personal experience to help families navigate the system. We are not attorneys, and this is not intended to be a substitute for professional legal advice. Please assist your family member in obtaining proper legal representation.