

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN

988 & 911

Knowing when and how to communicate the distinctions between 988 and 911 is critical.

People may not always know when to reach out for behavioral health support versus emergency services.

988

A Resource for Behavioral Health Crises

911

A Response System for Medical, Fire, or Police Emergencies

DESCRIPTION

The 988 Lifeline connects people with counselors who are trained to provide emotional support, crisis de-escalation, and local resources, without relying on law enforcement or emergency medical intervention unless necessary.

911 is the primary contact for medical emergencies, fire, crimes in progress, or other situations requiring immediate physical intervention. Although 911 is highly effective for emergencies involving physical harm, it is not specialized to manage behavioral health crises.

KEY FEATURES



Skilled, Caring Support 24/7:

988 counselors are trained to provide emotional and mental health support and crisis intervention.



Minimal Law Enforcement

Intervention: Most crises are managed without involving law enforcement, reducing the likelihood of escalated responses.



Connection to Local Resources:

People are referred to local mental health and/or substance use treatment services for follow-up care, ensuring continuity of support.



Immediate Intervention for Physical

Danger: 911 dispatches police, fire, or EMS to address urgent threats to life or safety.



Law Enforcement Involvement:

Law enforcement officers are typically dispatched in crises involving potential violence or criminal activity.

Summary: Both 988 and 911 provide critical support but focus on different crisis types. 988 specializes in behavioral health crises and offers crisis counseling and emotional de-escalation; 911 addresses physical dangers needing police, fire, or EMS. Understanding the distinction is essential to ensuring the appropriate response and care.