

THE INTERVENTION PROCESS

Definition of Crisis

A crisis is a normal response to ordinary or extraordinary stress. A crisis for a person may occur when the level of stress exceeds the person's usual coping skills setting off a process whereby the person tries various tactics to regain equilibrium.

Crisis Categories

Crises are classified into one of the following categories:

1. **A Developmental Crisis** is the normal changes/stages of life that may temporarily disturb one's equilibrium.
2. **A Situational Crisis** is classified as an unpredictable accident or stressful event.

Crisis Theory

Most crisis theories contain the following components:

1. Because persons cannot maintain high levels of tension inherent in a crisis, the duration of a crisis is limited from four to six weeks.
2. There is a **precipitating event** which is usually the last in a series of stressors.
3. There is a **subjective nature** to the crisis. The meaning that a person attaches to the event has a great deal to do with whether he/she experiences a crisis or not. One person's crisis may be another person's ordinary train of events.

Stress Reactions

Normal Reactions to Stress

It is normal for people to experience physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioral reactions to stress or crisis. Sometimes the reactions appear immediately, while in other situations they may appear days or weeks later.

With understanding and support, the reactions usually pass more quickly. If these reactions have not improved in approximately two weeks, or if the person is unable to manage them, contacting a counselor or mental health support person is recommended. If the physical symptoms persist or are problematic, a physician should be consulted.

Physical Symptoms

Appetite changes, headaches, grinding of teeth, sleep changes, digestive problems, tension, dizziness, rapid heart rate, muscle tremors, increased susceptibility to colds, flu or allergies.

Emotional Symptoms

Anger, guilt, irritability, feeling overwhelmed, apathy or depression, frustration, anxiety about future, emotional fatigue, emotional outbursts, hopelessness and helplessness.

Cognitive Symptoms

A person may experience confusion, difficulty with problem solving, difficulty concentrating, intrusive images, suspiciousness, blaming, cynicism, disorientation, nightmares and sense of unreality.

Behavioral Symptoms

These symptoms may include withdrawal, inability to sleep, crying for no apparent reason, isolation, increased use of chemicals, domestic violence, changes in activity levels, pacing and compulsive behaviors.

Goals and Steps of Crisis Intervention

Goals of Crisis Intervention

1. Symptom relief, lower the anxiety level.
2. Restore balance, help person return to pre-crisis level.
3. Understand the precipitating factors. This may be a string of events and finally, a last straw event.
4. Know the *why* of the crisis. How does the person feel about self as result of the crisis? Their self worth, self blame, issues, past victimization and loss.

Steps in Crisis Intervention

Crisis vs. Emergency

If police or paramedics are needed, call 911 immediately and then proceed with intervention.

1. Establish a relationship and be aware of trust issues.
2. Obtain information, but don't assume you know what the crisis means to the person.
3. Identify and clarify the focal problems as the person may not be able to identify or verbalize the problem.
4. Evaluate seriousness. Is there danger to self or others and are emergency services needed?
5. Assess strengths and resources. The person may have coping skills and support systems and be able to use them.
6. Mobilize resources. Know your limits, do you need consultation or help assessing and managing the situation?
7. Formulate and initiate treatment plan. Is the person able to engage in planning?
8. Arrange follow up. When will you or other staff check back with the person to see if plan is working or further intervention is necessary?

Key Points in Crisis Intervention

1. Establish a relationship and create trust.
2. **Listen, then listen and listen again.** You are providing an opportunity for catharsis.
 - a. The **purpose of listening** is to make an assessment and to let the person know and feel that they are understood.
 - b. If it takes ten minutes to get the facts and make an assessment, listen another ten minutes before moving to next step.
3. Listening selectively for indicators of risk to self and/or others as well as the meaning that the individual attaches to the events.
4. Be interested and actively involved.

5. Communicate hope and optimism.
6. Provide factual information.
7. Formulate the problems.
8. Predict future consequences.
 - a. Let the person know that you have experience.
 - b. Such as “we want to help you get some relief from this anxiety, perhaps if I may suggest (your professional advice goes here), may be helpful in situations like yours.”
9. Giving advice and making suggestions.
 - a. Crisis intervention is more active than other types of therapy giving advice or taking charge when needed.
 - b. The goal is to engage individual in planning.
10. Setting limits as needed on behavior, time constraints and/or requests.
11. Clarifying and reinforcing adaptive behaviors/skills individual has demonstrated in past or is currently using.
12. Confronting the individual as needed. This is more active than other first sessions of therapy may be, depending on level of risk.
13. Moving into the planning stage as needed.
 - a. Determine when it is time to move from active listening, clarifying etc. into taking action.
 - b. This depends again on level of risk involved.
14. Working out a plan.
15. Enlisting the aid of others as needed such as primary providers, emergency services etc.
16. Assist the person in following through with needed referrals, making phone calls, arranging transportation, etc. Do not assume that the person is able to navigate the system in time of crisis.

Process of Crisis Intervention

It is the crisis responder’s responsibility to be aware of the **process** of crisis intervention and move the intervention forward. The person in crisis may not know where to begin, what is important to include or, in some instances, be too fearful or anxious to engage in the process.

The general steps in crisis intervention are:

- 1. Catharsis.** Being listened to, heard and understood. Crisis responders may need to direct the questions so the individual has a chance to tell their story.
- 2. Focusing.** Highlighting the problem, the meaning and the feelings attached. Help the person gain or reclaim a sense of control.
- 3. Intervention and/or Resolution.** Engage the person in planning. Set a plan in place to include a follow-up. Do not do for a person what he/she is able to do for themselves. Even in situations where the crisis responder needs to make decisions for the person due to danger to self and/or others, try to offer some choices when possible.
- 4. Termination.** End the session and ensure that the person knows how to access needed assistance in the future.