

Week #1

Introduction

Being alive means we must constantly resolve problems. Every new situation we encounter provides us with opportunities to learn new ways of using our resources in order to gain control or to cope.

When we encounter a change or a problem that exceeds our capacity to cope, we are experiencing a *crisis*.

Two goals of this series will be to equip church members to better handle their own crises, and to equip our folks to help others who are experiencing crises.

The reason that most people hesitate to become involved in helping those in crisis is that they feel inadequate. They don't know what to say or do.

The good news is that this is normal!

Next Week: Examples Of Crises and Why We Suffer

Week #2

Examples Of Crises and Why We Suffer

There is no limit to the number of losses and crises that occur in life.

Examples include:

- Job loss
- Loss of a position of status and respect
- Incapacitating illness or accident
- Death of a parent, friend, spouse, or child
- A terminal diagnosis
- The discovery that a child is addicted to drugs or a homosexual
- A natural disaster
- An abortion or unwanted pregnancy
- Living with a spouse who has Alzheimer's disease and the accompanying loss of memory for your spouse
- Having surgery

The list never ends.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 tells us: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles.....with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.*

To paraphrase, when we go through crises, our experiences can be used to minister to others.

This series, then, will provide Biblical principles and general instruction in loss, crisis, and trauma. It will conclude with learning how to determine when to refer a person in crisis to someone with more advanced training than yourself.

Next Week: What exactly is a crisis? What causes a crisis?

Week #3

What Is a Crisis? What Causes a Crisis?

Webster's Dictionary defines a crisis as a crucial time or a turning point.

This often refers to a person's internal reaction to an external hazard. It is a disruption to the balance of someone's life. Often, there is an increase in anxiety, depression, and tension. Also, there is a temporary loss of coping abilities, although this emotional disruption is reversible.

So, what causes a crisis? A crisis is an event involving loss that leads to the loss of equilibrium in everyday functioning.

Some factors causing a crisis could include a loss that is too overwhelming to cope with, such as the death of a loved one. There may be a minor problem that, for a given person, is too great a loss for that person's coping system. An example may be the loss of a pet within a short time after losing a close friend and a parent. Or, a crisis may occur when a problem occurs at a time of special vulnerability, when someone's normal coping mechanism is not working, or a support system is lacking. An example here might be a job loss and the resulting financial insecurity while receiving a large hospital bill.

So, it may not even be an actual event that causes the crisis. It is often a person's response to the event that brings on the crisis.

Next Week: Elements of a crisis

Week #4

Elements Of A Crisis – Part 1

A hazardous event starts the cascade that leads to crisis. This is an occurrence that initiates a chain reaction of events that leads to a crisis. An example might be a widower raising five preadolescent children who loses his job in a very specialized profession.

Jane Crisp has said: Crisis intervention is a process used to interrupt and/or positively impact a person's immediate crisis reactions. Sometimes called "emotional first aid," crisis intervention involves the use of verbal and non-verbal communication to encourage, empower, and build confidence in those who experience a crisis.

So, be thinking of what verbal and non-verbal communication would be helpful to this widower.

1. A vulnerable state must be present for a crisis to occur - things such as sleep deprivation, illness, or depression can lower coping mechanisms.
2. A precipitating factor must take place for a crisis to occur - this is the straw that broke the camel's back. Someone who has seemed to hold it together very well through extreme loss and heartache may fall apart after a broken dish.

Next Week: Elements Of A Crisis - Part 2

Week #5

Elements Of A Crisis - Part 2

The state of active crisis occurs when a person can no longer handle the situation. There are four symptoms of this state.

First, there are symptoms of stress, which could include depression, headaches, anxiety, bruxism, ulcers, and others.

Second, there is an attitude of panic or defeat. People feel like failures, defeated, overwhelmed and helpless. They may respond by becoming agitated and combine this with non-productive behaviors, such as drinking or getting into fights, or becoming apathetic (excessive sleeping).

Third, the person wants relief from the pain of the stress but is not in a position to deal with the problem in a rational way. They may appear dazed or be somewhat frantic in their efforts to seek help from others.

Fourth, is a time of lowered efficiency. The greater the perceived threat, the less effective the coping mechanism will be. People may appear to function normally, but instead of responding at 100 percent, their response may be at about 60 percent. At this time, our best response is to help them see the event through their own eyes, not ours.

Next Week: God Is Involved With Us In Our Crises

Week #6

God Is Involved With Us In Our Crises

A person's theology affects how they cope with a crisis. Those who believe in the sovereignty and loving nature of God have a better basis from which to approach life.

Crisis from a Christian perspective:

- Being a Christian doesn't exempt a person from all crises.
- A crisis to humans is not a crisis to God.
- God comforts and promises to be present.
- A crisis will not last forever.
- Hope is resident in crisis. Romans 5:3-5 acknowledges that believers will have struggles, but difficult times do not have to dictate negative outcomes.

Finally, crisis crushes, then God steps in to comfort and teach.

The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those who are crushed in the spirit. Psalm 34:17-18 NLT

Next Week: The Phases Of Crisis

Week #7

The Phases Of Crisis – Part 1

The Impact Phase: becoming aware of the crisis and experiencing the effect of being stunned.

In most cases, it lasts a few hours to a few days.

The more severe the crisis, the greater the impact and the greater the amount of incapacitation and numbness.

If the Impact Phase lasts longer, as in a divorce, the person must choose whether to stand and fight to resolution, or to ignore the problem (fight or flight). The healthier response is to fight. Running away only prolongs the pain.

Thinking capability decreases during the Impact Phase. The tendency is toward numbness and disorientation. It is not a good time to make decisions, although some may be necessary and can't be postponed. Otherwise, people may be needed for input. These ideas are best put into writing, since understanding and memory may be compromised at this time.

The Lost Object - the person symbolically searches for the lost object in a photo album, personal items, etc. Reminiscing is very important at this stage. The person must be listened to and their feelings validated. Feelings rejected will only delay resolution of the problem. Feelings should also not be buried or denied.

Guilt is frequently a part of crisis. Potential solutions for guilt include rationalizing away the guilt, projecting the blame onto others, paying penance and working off the guilt, OR applying the forgiveness available through God where there has been genuine sin. God can and does remove true guilt, although there may be feelings of guilt that have no basis in truth (false truth).

The solution? Help the person change their perspective or self-talk by changing their thinking. The crisis will probably not be fixed during the Impact Phase.

Next Week: The Phases Of Crisis Part 2

Week #8

The Phases Of Crisis Part 2

The Withdrawal-Confusion Phase: feelings may range from a rapid churning of emotions to numbness.

In this phase, the urge to deny feelings is the strongest because feelings are the ugliest. The process begins with anger, which becomes guilt, then shame, and the desire to suppress all feelings. This process will prevent the grief process from taking place.

The following nine symptoms indicate a person's inability to properly cope.

1. A sense of bewilderment: I've never felt this way before.
2. A sense of danger: I feel scared that something terrible is going to happen.
3. A sense of confusion: I can't think clearly.
4. A sense of impasse: I'm stuck and nothing I do seems to help.
5. A sense of desperation: I've got to do something, but I don't know what to do.
6. A sense of apathy: Nothing can help me. Why even try?
7. A sense of helplessness: I can't cope by myself. Please help me.
8. A sense of urgency: I need help now.
9. A sense of discomfort: I feel so miserable and unhappy.

Three questions which may help the person.

1. Could it be that you aren't thinking clearly, like your mind isn't working?
2. Could it be that you feel stuck, like nothing you do seems to help?
3. Could it be that you feel immobilized and you don't see any solutions?

Nevertheless, feelings need to be expressed!

Next Week: More Aspects Of The Withdrawal-Confusion Phase

Week #9

More Aspects Of The Withdrawal-Confusion Phase

Extra Support - Ideally, a card, phone call, or a visit should take place every 3 months for the next 2 years.

During this stage, people do not need or benefit from spiritual and psychological insights or teaching. Their emotional state interferes with the information.

Good Organization - Our task is to restore equilibrium for the person. Provide assistance for routine responsibilities.

The best approach is to listen, reassure, encourage, and reflect. These lower anxiety, guilt, and tension, and provide emotional support.

Self-pity - which manifests itself as confusion.

Making significant decisions during this time, especially in finding and marrying a new spouse, is not wise. The person is not ready for this, since the loss has not been fully released.

Counseling Guidelines

Crisis Counseling is not therapy. However, these three things will be helpful:

- Keep questions and statements short

- Ask only one question at a time

- Let them tell their story.

Verbal Effects

In crisis, our words, tone of voice, and even off-hand comments can calm trauma victims or spiral them into worse anxiety. **When you don't know what to say, don't!** For more information, go to the Georgetown Bible Church website, click on Get Help, How Can We Help, and then Caring for Those Who Hurt.

Next Week: Verbal First Aid

Week #10

Verbal First Aid

In the aftermath of a crisis, every spoken word is significant. Spoken well, our words can bring comfort to a person who is hurting and can honor God in the process. We call this “Verbal First Aid.”

The following are traits of effective Verbal First Aid:

1. When silence occurs, just let it happen. Those in crisis have slowed reactions. Often, their ability to respond to questions is impaired.
2. It's all right to interrupt gently, if necessary, especially if the person is rambling. A gentle “I just wanted to be certain I'm hearing you correctly” is appropriate.
3. Listen with your eyes as much as with your ears. You may pick up more information or make note of contradictions with what is being verbalized.
4. If the person vents at you, don't take it personally. You may be the first safe person they have met in a while.
5. As you listen, prioritize the problems and help the person discover if the crisis is interfering in their lives.
6. Help the person generate options.
7. Have resources available. These may include books, support group information, and contact information for local and national agencies. See me for more information, if needed.
8. If you are planning to see this person again, discuss how they will be able to keep the appointment.
9. Work together to see what options work for this person.
10. Put the plan in writing for both of you.
11. Check to confirm that there is no potential for suicide/homicide.

By following these characteristics of Verbal First Aid, it is often possible to jump-start the recovery process.

Next Week: Evaluating Progress

Week #11

Evaluating Progress

Progress in assisting people through crisis can be measured using the acronym BASIC.

1. **B** refers to behavior patterns of the person in crisis. How are they working, eating, and sleeping? Is this different than prior to the crisis?
2. **A** is for affective functioning. Identify feelings and determine how this affects behavior.
3. **S** stands for physical symptoms. Are these new symptoms or previous ones that have intensified?
4. **I** stands for interpersonal functioning. How has the crisis impacted the person's relationships? Is the person's support system adequate?
5. **C** stands for cognition. Is the person thinking rationally, or experiencing thought distortions?

With this information in hand, you will be better able to help the person move forward.

Next Week: The Adjustment Phase Of Crisis

Week #12

The Adjustment Phase Of Crisis

The Adjustment Phase takes longer than the other phases. Emotional responses have turned hopeful and depression becomes inconsistent. The person in crisis has just about completed detachment from what was lost.

During this phase, the person in crisis does not need helpers to be critics. The one area in which helpers do need to caution victims is in the selection of a new partner. In this phase, simply, it is too soon to go down that road!

Recovery must take place first or the victim will select a partner while bringing baggage with them into the new relationship. This will sabotage the new marriage.

People in this phase are beginning to gain hope which is not yet consistent. Insight is returning so they can be objective about what has happened and accept new information and suggestions.

New spiritual insights are possible and goals, values, and beliefs can have greater depth.

Next Week: The Reconstruction Phase of Crisis

Week #13

The Reconstruction Phase Of Crisis

The final phase of a crisis is the Reconstruction Phase. During this phase there is a spontaneous expression of hope. There is also a sense of renewed confidence. Doubt and self-pity are gone, and the person takes the initiative for progress.

The final resolution of a crisis is a reflection of the newness of a person. A crisis leads to an opportunity to gain new strengths, new outlooks, new appreciation, new values, and a new approach to life!

Conversely, what causes a major crisis to become a restrictive, crippling, eternal tragedy, instead of a growth-producing experience? Our attitude, which is a choice.

Most significantly, many who work through a crisis find that they can minister much better to others. Out of our difficulties comes the ability to feel with others and walk through their trials with them in a new, more effective manner.

Next Week: The Steps In The Process Of Crisis Intervention

Week #14

The Steps in The Process of Crisis Intervention

There are eight steps to follow in order to minister to a person in crisis.

Step number one: Implement Immediate Intervention

- A. The Waiting List - In crisis, there is a sense of urgency. Do not make the person wait more than overnight to be seen.

If this is not possible, arrange for another person to assist them.

Let the person know that they have done a great thing by reaching out to you for help.

- B. Sustainment Techniques - these are designed to stabilize the person in crisis.

Reassurance lowers anxiety. It also helps the person overcome feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.

Direct Influence procedures - these are designed to encourage new behaviors in the person. Most important, however, is that it helps avert disastrous outcomes, such as suicide or family break-ups.

Crisis does often lead to a person being more transparent, and less defensive. The result is they are more open to change.

Next Week: Immediate Intervention - Part 2

Week #15

Immediate Intervention - Part 2

Step Number One: Immediate Intervention

C. Basic Intervention Procedures (BIPs)

The following are foundational to helping those in crisis.

1. Listen very, very well.
2. Assess the person's needs and progress.
3. Normalize - all victims need to know that what they are experiencing is normal. Validation gives reassurance and encouragement.
4. Reassure the person in crisis that people will be available to walk with them through the experience.
5. Support any effort they make at growth.
6. Plan - plans must be attainable, prioritize the needs and decisions of the person, and be co-designed between the person and the helper.
7. Educate - provide printed material whenever possible. Be willing to repeat yourself to the person.
8. Monitor - look for regression, depression, withdrawal, suicidal ideation, or anger.

Remember, it is better to refer too soon than too late!

Next Week: Step Number Two In Crisis Intervention

Week #16

Step Number Two In Crisis Intervention

Step Number Two: Take Action

Something needs to start happening right away. Listen carefully and help the person understand that the crisis is related to some event.

A. Consider prior crises.

It is important to determine how a person was functioning prior to the crisis.

Have the person tell their story using the who, what, when, where and why format.

Most people involved in a crisis have experienced some type of precipitating event, and it needs to be uncovered.

Focus on the person's strengths and weaknesses as you initiate the helping process.

Does the person have an adequate support system, or must one be created?

B. Consider communication skills.

Be patient as the person tells their story. Any verbal or non-verbal indicators of impatience will be detrimental.

Determine what must be done immediately.

Ask for clarification when necessary and help the person explore available alternatives to dealing with the situation.

C. Consider perception.

A crisis is triggered by a person's perception of what has occurred.

Someone in crisis sees their environment as something difficult to manage, perhaps leading to chaos and confusion. Therefore, bringing a sense of order to the environment will be helpful.

The Rule of Thumb is that only if the circumstances severely limit the person's ability to work through the crisis do we take extensive action. If action is taken, it must move the client toward an independent role as soon as possible.

Next Week: Take Action - Part 2

Week #17

Take Action - Part 2

Step Number Two: Take Action

D. Consider a Facilitative or a Directive Role.

Questions to be asked before taking action in a Directive Role.

1. Is this something the person could do for themselves?
2. What will this accomplish?
3. How long will I need to be involved in a Directive Role?
4. Are there any risks in doing this? If so, what are they?
5. How could this person be helped in a different manner?

The answers to these questions will determine if a Directive Role must be assumed. Otherwise, assume a Facilitative Role (a helper role). In this role, you will advise new thinking, new approaches, and new actions for the person in crisis.

In either role, listening and encouraging are the primary tasks.

E. Consider Alternative Action.

Since the person feels so helpless, they may be aided by suggesting alternative solutions.

Consider obstacles to these potential solutions.

Have the client do as much of the work as possible.

Next Week: Steps Three and Four in Crisis Intervention

Week #18

Steps Three and Four in Crisis Intervention

Step Number Three: Restore Balance

This third step in crisis intervention is to start achieving the limited goal of crisis counseling, which is to avert catastrophe and to restore the person to a state of balance.

This is not a time to attempt personality changes.

It is a time to help the client achieve limited goals.

Step Number Four: Foster Hope and Positive Expectations.

The person must borrow from your hope and faith until theirs returns.

You expect the crisis to be resolved in some way at some time, and you expect them to work and be able to solve problems. The use of the problem-solving approach - rather than giving false assurances - is a positive step.

As anxiety decreases, the client becomes more objective and is able to examine choices and consequences.

NEXT WEEK: Step Number Five in Crisis Intervention

Week #19

Step Number Five In Crisis Intervention

Step Number Five: Provide Support

A. Telephone calls

Sometimes just being available to talk by phone is a good source of support.

Return “urgent” phone calls promptly, but not necessarily immediately. This fosters dependence.

At some point, once the person is better able to cope, there may be a need to set limits on the number of phone calls, or time limits on each call.

B. Support System

The best way to support the person in crisis is to expand the support system as soon as possible. This decreases the demands on any one individual and helps the person deal with the crisis now.

More and more churches are training and equipping lay people to become involved in counseling. Since crisis counseling is short-term, this is a great area to prepare these people for. It is counseling that assists, supports, helps with funeral arrangements, and so on.

As the person in crisis becomes stabilized, gradually withdraw support. We do not want those in crisis to become dependent upon others to live their lives for them.

Next Week: Step Six In Crisis Intervention

Week #20

Step Six In Crisis Intervention

Step Number Six: Focus on Problem-Solving

This is the backbone of crisis counseling!

1. Set goals.

This must involve the person in crisis. It increases the chances of follow-through and helps develop self-reliance. Locate resources and brainstorm solutions.

2. Be sensitive to current values.

Help the person look at the consequences of each action and be sure the consequences are consistent with existing values.

3. Select a course of action.

If there is resistance, ask for a commitment in writing, complete with details. It is important not to make the problems or the solutions overly simple.

4. Face the problem.

Help the person face the pain but do so gradually so they are not overwhelmed. If the client responds emotionally, take a step back and re-evaluate the situation to identify the underlying message.

5. Monitor feelings.

Regulate the level of anxiety the person is experiencing. Some anxiety serves as motivation; too much anxiety causes overwhelm. In crisis counseling, there are no shortcuts. Feelings must be dealt with before real problem-solving can take place. Once again, feelings are best managed by good listening. On the flip side are those who are not experiencing grief when grief should be the normal response. An appropriate statement might be, "There will be a time when you feel the hurt and loss and you will probably weep. Maybe this is not the time, but that time will come."

Next Week: Step Seven In Crisis Intervention

Week #21

Step Seven In Crisis Intervention

Step Number Seven: Understand and assess self-image.

The goal is to protect and enhance the person's self-image. Treat them with respect and courtesy. Do not be condescending.

Symptoms of low self-esteem:

1. Anger at other people, or even at you, the helper.
2. Desperation that involves demanding help.
3. Passivity that involves sitting back and waiting for help to arrive.

Be aware of the person's tendency to blame in order to protect their self-image. This is usually accompanied by anger because anger gives a sense of control. It is irrational but feels better than hopelessness.

Expect negative feelings and see them for what they are - a camouflage against the pain of the situation and about oneself.

The Christian mindset:

Many Christians believe that they should be able to handle anything and if they had more faith or a stronger relationship with God, they would not be floundering.

This mind-set produces more guilt, bad feelings and lower self-esteem.

Hopefully, during the recovery phase, people in crisis will be able to recall that many of the people God used in the Scriptures went through troubled times as well.

Next Week: Step Eight In Crisis Intervention

Week #22

Step Eight In Crisis Intervention

Step Number Eight: Instill self-reliance.

Remember, a person in crisis is at the end of their rope. Their desire is to be rescued and healed instantaneously by you. It will not be helpful to respond to this expectation.

To prevent over-reliance on you, the helper, make it clear that you don't have all the answers. Let them know that you expect effort from them.

Do nothing for the person that they can successfully do for themselves.

Deal with the emotions at hand, recognizing that negative emotions are part of the healing process. Do not take them personally.

Because of the upheaval of the crisis, the person may be thrust into a new, less than satisfactory role. This involves acceptance and learning to live with being less than satisfied until the new solution is stabilized.

It all comes down to this: You are the helper God has called to walk with this person through these transitions.

NEXT WEEK: When To Refer

Week #23

Referrals

It is unreasonable to expect every helper to be able to assist in every situation. Sometimes the best advice that you can give is to make a referral.

How to know when to refer:

Refer when a different area of specialization is needed.

Refer if there are indications of a serious risk that is beyond your training or expertise.

Refer when the person prefers a different approach to being helped.

Refer if a crisis has been managed, but long-term therapy is needed.

In order to make a successful referral, it is important **not** to convey the message that the problem is so radical or severe that you must refer.

Avoid sending the message that you don't like the person. This makes the person feel rejected.

Your care and sensitivity must be evident here.

Next Week: Conclusion

Week #24

Conclusion

Over the last 23 weeks, we have examined how to best help those in crisis. Our stated goal was to equip church members to better handle their own crises, and to help them assist others in crisis. Recognizing that a major hindrance to becoming involved in the lives of others was a feeling of inadequacy (not knowing what to say or do), this became an opportunity to educate ourselves for when we will be called to serve God by ministering to someone in crisis.

Along the way, we defined a crisis, looked at God's role in suffering, and listed the stages of a crisis. Giving verbal first aid is a skill that can make a significant difference in the life of one who is suffering and can honor God in the process.

Finally, we examined the 8 steps in crisis intervention. Although these steps are very comprehensive, it is my hope that each of you will have this information at hand as you encounter your next crisis, or you meet someone else who is suffering.

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