

Crisis Intervention with Children, Adolescents and Their Families

Things to Remember:

1. The child may be the identified “person in crisis,” but he/she may come with a family that is equally in crisis – and chaotic. All facets of the situation will require your attention.
2. It is important to try and understand the precipitating event. Has the situation been “brewing,” or is the crisis sudden in onset?
3. How has the family utilized community resources before?
4. Multiple-problem families may present with a sense of crisis at several levels. Focus on one to four critical issues.
5. It is better to help families with children in crisis identify steps to a goal, rather Than promise an ideal solution.
6. As a caring adult, you can accept the child, but may not accept his/her behaviors. Set firm, but gentle limits.

Seven Steps to Consider When a Child is in Crisis:

1. **Establish a Constructive Relationship:** This means listening before offering solutions. Adolescents, in particular, are often crying out to “be heard.” They may be upset over something that would be minor to an adult.
2. **Encourage Expression of Painful Feelings:** Use simple language without “talking down” to the child. Help them focus on the present issues, rather than issues in the past. The present crisis may be exacerbated by long-standing problems, but the focus is on the present crisis.
3. **Discuss the Precipitating Event:** Try to understand the family’s and child’s perception of the situation, the chain of events leading up to the crisis, and the problem that “blew the top off.”
4. **Asses the Child’s and Family’s Strengths and Needs:** Which family member can best be mobilized to assist with problem solving? Certain family members will immediately reveal themselves as unsupportive or as provocative to the child/adolescent. Extended family members, neighbors and acquaintances may be more helpful than the immediately family.
5. **Identify the Child’s Priorities, as well as the Family’s:** sometimes the priority may be medical treatment for the child who is suicidal, or a “cooling off” of tensions via an alternative place to stay for the child that allows the family some respite. Help the family be realistic in their goals. If “better behavior/compliance” is what the parents want, this may not be achieved overnight. It is something the family can work toward with the child.
6. **Help Identify Alternatives for Resolving the Crisis:** What are the reasonable solutions toward which the family is willing to work?
7. **Identify Community Resources for the Family and the Child:** This may mean immediate use of resources, such as hospitalization, or use of counseling, etc. Contracting for safety or for boundaries may be appropriate.