

Crisis Intervention

Kickstarter Guides for New
Social Workers Part 2



allena
COACHING + CONSULTING

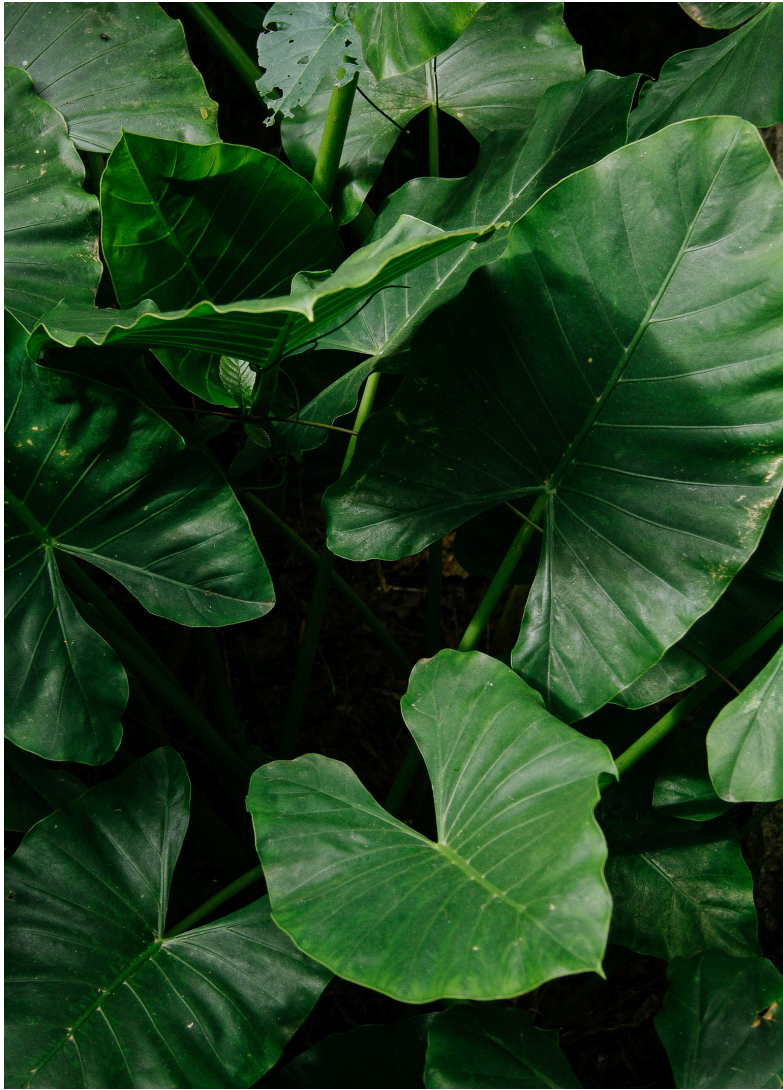


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Why keep reading?

Crisis intervention is required in many social work roles, even where it is not the focus of practice. It is a key intervention in child protection responses, emergency teams in health, mental health and social care settings. At some time all health and social care professionals will encounter and manage crisis situations. This Kickstarter Guide provides a practice framework for crisis intervention.

Theory - it matters ...

*Crisis Intervention and Support rests on two practical theoretical perspectives – **Problem – Solving and Task-Centred Practice. Trauma Informed Practice Principles** are also important.*



Problem-Solving

The phases of intervention (7) in crisis follow processes for non-crisis situations:

- **Engagement**
 - Inviting and encouraging participation
- **Assessment**
- **Intervention**
 - Active client-worker partnership
- **Evaluation**
 - Checking progress towards goals

Trauma Informed Practice Principles

The foundational concepts of trauma-informed practice are trauma awareness (noting that this does not require the client to disclose trauma), safety, choice and control. All of these are critical elements of crisis intervention. In practice this means **prioritizing building trust/relationship over giving information; listening more than talking; asking permission to share information; using clear, respectful language; checking understanding and providing the client with choice about services and supports** (2)

Task-Centred Practice

In crisis situations tasks are the primary change effort (1). Practice is action-oriented and focused on the **immediate situation and experience of the client**. **Previous** events or trauma are only relevant to the extent that they have an impact on the current situation. The concrete human needs of safety, medical care shelter, food and connection are frequently the starting point in this work.

Practice Points in Crisis Intervention

- *The client's autonomy is threatened*
 - *Your role is to create order*
 - *The focus of practice is now and intervention is time-limited and client-led*
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The client's autonomy is threatened

The primary impact of a crisis event is the sense of threat to personal autonomy. This is the most common element of the client experience. While it can seem practical to take action on behalf of someone who may seem disconnected and overwhelmed, this is not the most helpful response. A helpful response includes **supporting the client to recover as much autonomy as soon as is practical in whatever way is possible under the circumstances.**

Your role is to create a sense of order

Being present to the client in a calm and unhurried way is effective in assisting them to have a sense of order amongst the uncertainty. **Practicing the key listening and reflection skills is critical.** The intention is to engage clients at a time when they may be particularly sensitive to responses from the social worker which convey shock, distress or other negative emotion.

The focus of practice is now and intervention is time-limited

Crisis is commonly understood to be a 'difficult or dangerous situation that needs serious attention'(8). Consequently, the goal of social work practice in crisis intervention is to assist the client to be sufficiently present and connected to be able to express need; identify what will be helpful; create an action plan and begin to step forward through the crisis towards their identified goals.

The Crisis Intervention Model

This 7-stage crisis model (1) outlined in the attached Mindmap is a useful framework for social work intervention in various crisis situations and across a wide time-range.

PRESENT – FOCUSED

Crisis theory indicates that crises are short – term, lasting anywhere from a period of hours to 4 – 6 weeks. Intervention is entirely focused on the client in their immediate circumstances. Both needs and solutions are discussed only as they exist in the present.

CLIENT – LED

Safety, choice, control and collaboration are the keywords to remember to create an environment in which the client regains a sense of autonomy. Ask permission before providing information; check your understanding; and provide options rather directions.

BASIC PRACTICE PRINCIPLES OF CRISIS INTERVENTION

ACTION – ORIENTED

The action plan which develops out of the client's expression of needs and priorities should be clear, concise and achievable within the short – term. As the client regains a sense of control it will be important that change can be measured by the client.

SPECIFIC TO THE CRISIS

Tasks will include very specific items including attending to concrete needs such as physical safety, medical needs, food and shelter. Similarly, connection and communication will be directly related to the crisis event which has occurred.

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PHYSICAL SURVIVAL

Assess immediate threats to the person including physical and emotional hazards. The most important goal here is to establish whether the client (or a dependent other) is in imminent danger. Risk and lethality are the first considerations. Intervention is focused on safety.

EXPRESSION OF EMOTION

The primary tasks for the client in this stage include ventilation and exploration of his or her feelings about the crisis. The primary technique used by the crisis worker is active listening, which involves listening in an accepting and supportive way, in as private and safe a setting as possible (1).

CENTRAL TASKS OF CRISIS INTERVENTION

MAKING SENSE OF EVENTS

The client begins the process of developing a reality-based understanding of the crisis event by addressing any unfinished business, irrational thoughts, or fears and by adjusting their self-image/concept in regard to the crisis event and its impacts (1)

BEHAVIOURAL/INTERPERSONAL ADJUSTMENT

Here the client begins to consider the adjustments they may need to make (daily activities, relationships, life goals) as a result of the impact of the crisis event. This task is forward-looking and is typically part of the termination phase of intervention.



Key Skills

1 Listening

LISTENING IS THE MOST CRITICAL PART OF CRISIS INTERVENTION.

POINTS TO NOTE:

- 1. Be completely present to the crisis situation, no matter how dynamic, confusing or distressing, as a critical pre-cursor to effective listening in crisis situations.**
- 2. Listening is a whole-body experience – let your body language convey your inner presence. Consider eye-contact, proximity, touch – noting that these will be subject to the client’s cultural and individual preferences.**
- 3. Attending fully to the client is the foundation of connection and trust. In crisis response this needs to be built as quickly as possible.**
- 4. Effective listening aids the retention of information – clients should not have to repeat themselves. It is common in crisis situations for clients to be asked the same questions by multiple professionals and this may compound their distress.**
- 5. Listen for the client’s self-reported strengths. Crisis work is strengths-based – listening for and amplifying strengths will support the client’s survival and adjustment.**
- 6. Listen for the client’s expressions of needs and wants. This is critical to establishing or re-establishing the client’s autonomy.**
- 7. Where the client speaks more than the social worker, assumptions are less likely to be made.**
- 8. Do not underestimate the simple power of listening – in some situations it is all you can offer.**

Key skills

2 Reflection

THE OVERARCHING FUNCTION OF REFLECTION IS TO CONVEY EMPATHY

Reflection is the flip-side of listening ... **it communicates to your client that you have not only heard the words but that you have connected with the emotional context** and needs or wants being expressed.

Reflection can be:

- **Simple** – ‘I can see this is incredibly painful/distressing/overwhelming’
- **Summarising** – ‘it seems like there’s a lot you’re worried about right now’
- **Paraphrasing** – ‘it sounds like xxx, have I heard that correctly?’
- **Double-sided** – ‘on the one hand you are considering xxx but on the other side of things there’s xxx to think about’

3 Questions

SOME STRENGTHS-BASED QUESTIONS FOR CRISIS INTERVENTION

Resilience – How are you managing to survive given the things you have had to deal with? How are you able to rise to the challenges put before you? What is the mind-set that’s helping you right now? How have you managed difficult situations in the past? What was helpful?

Support – What people are able to give you understanding, support, and guidance? Who are the people on whom you can depend right now?

Possibility – What do you want out of this situation – for yourself and for your children? What do you hope will be an outcome? How can I help you achieve what you want for yourself/your kids/your family?

Resolution – How will you know when this situation is getting better – what will you notice about how will you be feeling, thinking, and acting? What steps will help you to get there from here?

What else matters?

Follow-up matters

Respectful practice includes continuity of care

You have connected with and supported them through one of the most trying situations they have experienced. **A brief follow up contact assists the client to build on the resilience and achievements of this crisis period.** This must only occur with **client permission and a strengths-focused approach is required** to ensure the contact extends the support already initiated.

Self-care matters

This is more than 'work-life balance'

When you attend to the whole of your well-being your clients will benefit. An ecological approach to self-care and well-being considers all of the domains of life as well as the interplay between them. It entails both **processes to support physical, emotional and relational wellbeing** as well as **goals to guide and drive self-care activity**. This may be something you want to discuss in supervision or with peers.

Supervision matters

Reflection and reflexivity supports good practice

While supervision commonly encompasses **reviewing interactions with clients (reflection)**, it is even more useful and constructive when you can step back from your practice and **consider the ways in which your own values, beliefs and experiences of power shape your interactions with clients (reflexivity)**.

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Practice Resource

Crisis Intervention Mind Map

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