

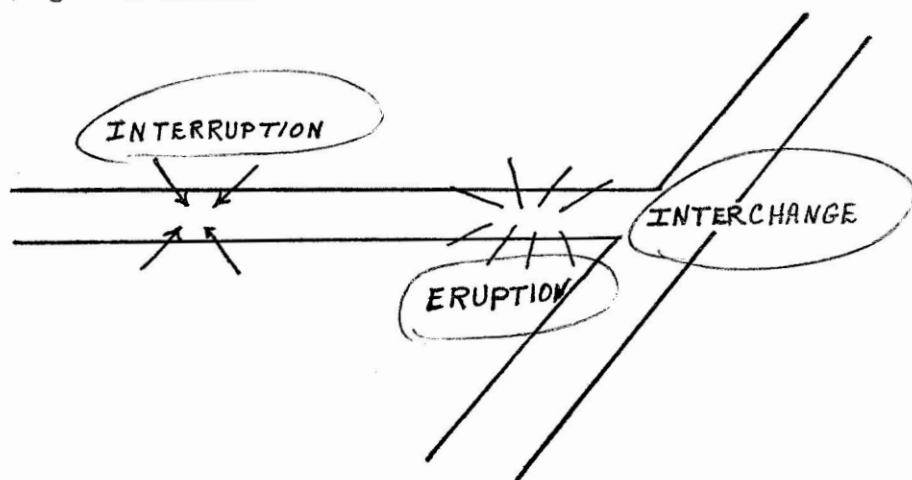
Crisis Counseling

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I would suggest to you that as I talk about *Crisis Intervention* it would be helpful to you to think of two things. With one ear, remember back to any time when you have undergone a crisis, remember what happened inside you as you went through that crisis. Also remember what happened between you and any other individual that you either sought out or who took initiative for you to work with you in that crisis. This will probably make more real some of the things that we talk about.

Secondly, and I guess this would be almost impossible not to do, think about some of the crisis intervention that you have done just in the last year. Think about those students that have wandered into your office, or perhaps *run* into your office, or that have been carried into your office, and occasionally those to whom you have been called out to go, and meet, in the midst of a crisis.

I want to try and describe what a crisis is, and give you my own definition for what a crisis is. The profound sentence that I would like to suggest to you is that a crisis is either an interruption, an eruption, or an interchange in life's flow. I have drawn a little diagram to describe this.



The road represents life's flow, and I have marked here with heavy arrows what I consider to be the interruption. That is, something usually external, comes in and interrupts life's flow. You will

realize some of the obvious overlap when I say this, but here's a student who's just flunked a test, or here's a student that's been seduced. Both of these things may be happening for the first time. Or here's a student whose father died. These are interruptions that seem to come externally, and they are an interruption in life's flow. They are unexpected. They are often traumatic and chaotic. So, an interruption in life's flow creates a crisis.

Further down the road, I have what's supposed to be what a land mine looks like when it goes off—that's an eruption. Here I am talking about something that happened internally to a student or within a student; usually something we would term perhaps an emotional response. Suddenly with a tremendous amount of loneliness—overwhelmed by loneliness—they come to your office, being stricken with depression, suddenly being overwhelmed by guilt. This is an interruption in life's flow that comes internally.

Then thirdly, this road moves into an interchange with another, perhaps larger road, to show how life's flow, of a given individual, moves into a new state—to another highway. I call that the interchange. Life has moved into a different level. There's not much choice about whether to make that interchange and get off on another road, or not. I didn't make a cloverleaf that you can choose to get off because, although some would suggest that is possible, when that does happen it usually leads to pathology. I am suggesting for the folks we work with, an interchange is necessary. For example, using developmental stages, a student usually moves in his/her life flow into a new experience with independence. They're away at college, and experiencing the crisis of a new level of independence. They are experiencing new levels of intimacy. They are going through becoming adult and that's a new level. And that interchange in itself is a crisis.

There are other words that you could lay on these things. The interruption might be called a "situational crisis," or an "external crisis." The eruption could be called an emotional crisis, or an internal crisis, and the interchange might be called a developmental crisis.

Now this is a brief overview of the definition of crisis, and the three major types of crisis, and I think it helps us to make an immediate evaluation of what kind of crisis a person is going through. It will be obvious to you because of what you have already seen that often a crisis you're dealing with has components of two

or three of these—one will probably be more outstanding and you'll have to deal with it first before you can get to what elements in the crisis might represent these other two things.

Now, if I could, I would like to suggest to you nine components of crisis intervention. We would even call this the "Process of Crisis Intervention." These are the rules of thumb that I try to keep in mind that I think might be helpful for you to keep in mind when you run up on any one of these types of crisis.

First, and most obvious, is the establishment of relationship. I recognize that for many people that you deal with in crisis, the relationship is already established; you have known them because you have been related to them as a campus minister. Fine! We can probably assume that the relationship is fairly solid, although sometimes you will work with someone who has been only in your peripheral vision. It then becomes important for you in the first actual few minutes of crisis intervention to relate to them in such a way that they can begin to trust you even further than the trust that's implicit in the fact that they sought you out anyway. But this becomes more important if you are related to a student who has been brought to you by people you do know, and they are trusting you through other people; or, for someone you've been called to who does not know you very well. It becomes important in those first few minutes of contact, in a critical situation, for you to establish a relationship.

One of the things that should happen in establishing a trusting relationship, is to demonstrate obvious interest and concern. Another would be a willingness to responsively listen to folks. Your actual willingness to listen to them communicates your interest and concern and that you can be trusted. Now the reason that's important is, if you go into the crisis, anxious yourself, it is very easy to fill up silence with your own words, and to become a speaker instead of a listener, even in a crisis. Again, it becomes important for you to try and communicate being non-threatened by a crisis someone else is going through. The experience level of this group seems fairly high to me. This means that you have been through enough crises with students that you probably are not threatened when one comes your way. You will communicate that to students, and they will pick it up; that you're at ease with a crisis, and yet not yarning, "Ah, here's another one..." Your at-easeness with crises doesn't change the fact that you can get quite involved and emphathetic

with what it is they're going through. Communicating some active empathy with what they're going through becomes important.

② The second thing to have as a rule of thumb is to as quickly as possible allow the student to identify the presenting problem, or the precipitating event. Allow the student as quickly as possible to identify what has just happened and what is going on in their mind. Quick questions about "what's happened?", "what has brought you to me?", "what has caused the emotional upheaval that you're obviously experiencing?", "tell me what you have just been through," or "what are you up against?", can elicit from the student fairly quickly what they've been through. Let it be said that sometimes a student feels a crisis, particularly of the eruption sort, internally, when they don't have the ability to conceptualize to you what's going on. They just know they're upset or hurt, and that may be all they can express at that moment. But often, particularly when it is a situational crisis, they might be able to describe that to you. One reason it's important to do that fairly quickly is that if the student is in your presence for a period of time, and they have not identified the crisis and they have not felt you moving to invite them to, then they might change their mind about whether or not to share it with you. It gets harder sometimes, as a student sits there, to bring up what's going on. The reverse of that is also true. Sometimes a student will have to sit with you for half an hour before they can get around to saying, "Well, let me tell you what I've just been through." Sometimes a student will sit down with you, and the fact that they're in a crisis is not apparent. Having your radar out is important, because sometimes a student may cruise into your office, sit down, and you actively participate in denial by talking about weather and the Little League game, and the committee, and the program for tomorrow, and miss the signals. And when a student wanders into your office, remember that potentially, they have come to talk seriously with you. I kind of make it a rule of thumb when a student drops around, happens to come by my office, or stops me in the hall, even if their first question is about an assignment, or committee meeting, if I am able, given the schedule, to say, "What's going on with you?" Let a little bit of silence happen; it might enable them to say, "I want to talk with you about something that happened to me last week..." But anyway, identifying the presenting problem when a person is in obvious crisis becomes important, and I'm saying on the side, give students a chance to identify a crisis that's not obvious, when they're with you.

③ A third rule of thumb, or a third way-station in the process of crisis intervention becomes the facilitation of emotion—the allowance for the ventilation of the feeling that is going on in the crisis. There are very few crises—I am tempted to say none—in which there is not some emotive response. When you can facilitate the expression of that emotion on the part of the student, it can lead to a kind of catharsis of emotion which really allows you to go on with the process of crisis intervention. You will notice that when a student describes a crisis to you, but they are unwilling to deal with the emotive effect of that crisis, then you notice that it's very difficult to move on with the process of crisis intervention. And often, if the emotion cannot be expressed, which sometimes happens, there's often a halt with the identifying crisis, and nothing more gets done of significance. That's very frustrating. By helping a person know: "Gee, I feel how angry you are about the situation; there must be a tremendous amount of anger that you feel," you facilitate, and say, in a sense it's permissible to have emotion and feeling about that. To say, "Look, you're using up a lot of energy, just trying to keep from crying, and I want you to know that this is a safe place to cry," or "There's some Kleenex right beside you," you *permit* someone to go ahead and feel what it is that's down in there eating up their insides. There are a lot of ways in which we can facilitate and give permission, and say, "Hey, it's okay. If I were in your situation, I'd be really hurting." You might even be able to identify with it. "You know, I've been in situations like that, and I know how much pain that you're feeling." Now when that happens, give support to it so they are able to express the emotive feeling of pain or hurt, and the anger, the grief, or whatever. Your support and empathy with that emotion are communicating a sense of "See, we can get on with this." First, communicate that there is hope. Often a kind of affirmation that says, "Thank you for finding me a trustworthy enough person that you can share that with me," and then move on to step 4.

I am a little concerned that this sounds a bit lock-step. Keep in mind that this all happens in a kind of dynamic flow. When I'm talking about steps I am not talking about locking ourselves into "everything has to happen in this order." But these are things I try to keep in mind to facilitate if they don't happen spontaneously another way.

The fourth thing I try to keep in mind is, that after particularly the emotion's been expressed and the critical thing is brought out,

4 the relationship established and we've got some private time, then I move to fill out my understanding of the breadth and the depth of the situation. That's when I feel they have relaxed a little and sat back in the chair. I ask questions that get them to fill it out: "How did this get started?" or "Tell me more about that relationship," or "Fill me in on the rest of the people involved in that"; "How did you all first meet?" or something to give me a broader picture of the context in which this has happened. I begin to collect data and information. At that time, I also in my own mind am bringing data from my understanding of the behavioral sciences. I am bringing my understanding of what I understand about particular kinds of crisis to my mind, which is hopefully helping me understand and interpret the data that they are sharing with me.

5 Then, a fifth rule of thumb that I follow is to identify the primary threat. What is the primary threat? Let's just identify what it is that has created the most anxiety for you. When a crisis erupts or encounters, or any kind of crisis happens, the self usually experiences threat. One of the things about a crisis is that a threat is not always discernible. I might be first aware of a tremendous amount of anxiety; or even some immediate thing that's happened, such as: my girl friend told me tonight that she doesn't want to see me any more; or I had my first experience of sexual intercourse last night, and I'm frightened out of my mind; or I've been on drugs, and last night I had a vision. Even as you get all these stories the threat is not always clearly identified. You have to thresh that out. But after you've explored the whole context, then you can lead the student to ask, "What is most threatening?" It could be that my moral self is most threatened; I've been involved in action which threatens my perception of myself. My relationship might be threatened; my self-perception. The relationship is broken, and she's going the other way. What is the threat? The threat is that maybe I'm not as loveable a person as I thought I was. I've experienced rejection. I may have to re-evaluate my perception of myself. So the threat comes from any number of places, but identifying it becomes important. Sometimes the threat is internal; sometimes it's external. In fact the theorists of crisis intervention have pointed out something I might elaborate on here. They point out that in most crises the threat is not an external one in this sense. If we put all of us in a similar situation, some of us would experience anxiety and crisis in that situation and others would not. Why? The crisis intervention theorists suggest that what makes an event or a situation

a crisis is that it reminds us of previous crises—I have been in some situation in my life before, some crisis has happened before that was not resolved well, that created anxiety. The crisis I am in now elicits the same anxiety and that is what causes a sense of crisis in the present situation. So, identifying the threat becomes important.

The sixth rule of thumb I try and keep in mind (I am thinking now of a time when you have heard the student out, the problem is on the table, you've been able to fill out your understanding of the context, the crisis nature of it has been in some sense diffused a little bit, the anxiety has been lowered by your willingness to hear it out, you might have identified some particular threat, you have been able to in a sense evaluate whether or not you need to bring in some outside help), is to check out and evaluate the resources that are available in this crisis. (6)

What are the resources available? I mention three of them. First of all, you may think of referral sources. You may need to help the student get in touch with a medical doctor, a psychiatrist, a counselor, an admissions officer, a vocational counselor, someone in the housing authority, or a financial aid person. There could be any number of people that you might need to get them in touch with to deal with this particular crisis. At this time it's also important to find out what is the community of the student in crisis. Is there a close friend or a sub-group that they are related to that you can make sure you've got a hook into?

Secondly, there are the internal resources; that is finding out what the student has internally to help him deal with this crisis. Two ways I most often use to do this are: to ask them to elaborate on the last time they felt they were in a crisis like unto the one they are in. I might ask like "Can you tell me the last time in your life you felt this anxious—or this upset? Can you remember back to the last time?" And then I ask, "How did you handle that crisis? What happened to solve that?" And as they tell me, I might pick up the strengths they had in that crisis and say, "Well, can you learn anything from how you handled that crisis, and let's apply it to today?" A second word that I often find helpful to find out a student's internal resources is: to ask them about people they admire. "Are there any other students on campus or are there any adults in your life in the last four or five years that you find you really admire and respect?" I am looking for their models—maybe even their heroes. When they identify some, and I ask

a little bit about how they know them, what they feel about them, I might say, "If you were that person, how do you think you would handle this crisis? What would you do next?" I let them pull from their models or their heroes fantasies about how those people would handle crises.

The third resource I would want to know is the religious and the theological resources. What is the student's faith system, or religious experience or perceptions of their own Christianity they bring into play in this crisis. What do they believe about God? What do they believe about the nature of their relationship to the Christian faith? Do they believe that God is a God of love, or of hate? Do they believe that God is a God of mercy, or a God of getting even? Do they believe in forgiveness? How do you believe in forgiveness? What do you believe God does when people have sinned? Find out what resources they can bring from their faith and at the same time in my own mind I am bringing up not only the clinical data I have brought up before, but now I am bringing up my own theological commitments and data. What is there within my perception, my theological understanding of God, man and universe that I can bring into understanding this situation and perhaps use for support?

⑦ The seventh thing I mention is that I then move to discuss the alternatives and the decision-making process. We have all these resources in mind now. We know what the situation is. So my comment to the student is usually, "Okay, what now? What next step do you want to take?" And I usually share what next steps I think I can take, as I might be riding shotgun with him. In a recent crisis, the next step of the student I was dealing with was to call his wife and child whom he had sent to his home in another state because of a crisis of depression. His next step was to call his wife, describe our conversation, our decision that his depression was serious enough that he needed to get a psychiatrist evaluation, and perhaps hospitalization. Then he was to call me later that evening and tell me what was happening. My next step was to get in touch with a psychiatrist friend of mine and arrange some way for him to get a psychiatric evaluation the next day. So his next step and my next step were clear to both of us when he left the office.

⑧ The eighth thing I mention is: to build community. I would say that in most crises that you deal with and that I deal with,

one of the ways we respond is to try and get that person to fuel up on the relationships they have available to them. Or, if they do not have relationships, then we begin to build a community around them. Who do you have as campus ministers in your spiritual group whom you can call, maybe from the office, to say, "I need some help. I need you to spend an hour with somebody." Make sure that the person uses the community he already has. "Who is a friend that you can leave here and go see?" "Tell me who the friend is you think you could talk to before dinner or before you go to bed tonight? Will you promise me you'll see that friend?" Or, if there is no one, I might call in someone and say, "I want you to involve yourself with this person."

⑨ Lastly, I mention as the ninth rule of thumb the attempt to be able to express some hope to the student about the fact that you and he or she can work through this crisis. I most often will make an attempt to do a brief teaching about what a crisis can mean in life. We usually discuss the fact that the word crisis, though often thought of negatively, is not a negative term, or it doesn't have to be. For example, my understanding is that the symbols that the Chinese use to discuss the word crisis is two symbols. One that means danger, and the other that means opportunity. The crisis is dangerous, things can happen. You know an interchange, an interruption, an eruption, can be dangerous. Lives can be messed up by crises. But it is also an opportunity to gain in strength, to gain in character, to experience a new level of life, a new experience of depth in our religious life. Sometimes it helps to describe that to the student and then show him a little excitement about it. "You know, there's no telling what good things can come out of this crisis, and I want you to know I'll be riding shotgun with you through it." Some expression of hope, and that we'll not only survive it, but we'll make use of it is important.

I have tried to share with you a definition of crisis; that they are situational, emotional, and developmental. They interrupt life, or erupt in life, or become an interchange in development: I have suggested nine things that at least I try to keep in mind when dealing with a crisis, and in trying to facilitate the process of going through a crisis. I believe that we need to think of crisis as a process; that is, that we work with people to help them work through the process of going through a crisis, much like you help someone work through the process of grief, or of learning, or understanding. That's what my attempt has been.