

# UNDERSTANDING CRISIS THEORY

Do you know someone who is going through a really hard time right now? Do you want to help, but you're not sure how?

The more you understand about what someone is going through when they are "in crisis," the easier it may be to find helpful things to say and do.

Below is the definition and approach to crisis that is used by counselors on our hotlines:

## Definition of Crisis

A crisis is any situation for which a person does not have adequate coping skills. Therefore, crisis is self-defined. What is a crisis for one person may not be a crisis for another person. Crises may range from seemingly minor situations, such as not being prepared for class, to major life changes, such as death or divorce. Crisis is environmentally based. What is now a crisis may not have been a crisis before or would not be a crisis in a different setting.

## The Crisis Process

Crises tend to have a specific pattern:

**Recognition:** The person realizes that they are not coping.

**Attempted Resolution:** The person struggles to solve the situation and may involve other people to try and help. Typically, a crisis person does not perceive others as fully understanding the crisis or supporting the crisis person in the crisis.

**Emotional Blockage:** Not being able to solve the crisis, the person is overwhelmed by emotions. Fear, anxiety, anger, confusion, inadequacy, guilt, and grief are common. From the sheer intensity of the emotions, the person becomes unable to deal rationally with the situation. Usual thought processes are disrupted by feelings, and "thinking about the problem" is not only difficult, but also frustrating and unproductive. This perceived inability to deal with what is going on leads to a loss of self-esteem and reinforces the panic of emotions surrounding the situation. A vicious cycle is formed; not coping lowers the self-esteem, and the lowered self-esteem lessens the ability to cope.

## How To Respond To Someone In Crisis

In order to help someone resolve their crisis, it is necessary to begin, not at the beginning with the situation, but at the end with the overwhelming emotions. In order to help someone in crisis, you must deal with the feelings. The emotions are blocking the person's abilities to think and cope. Spend time identifying and talking about feelings -- this is the most important part of how you can help someone who has a problem that they don't know how to cope with. Strive to understand and empathize.

You will not be able to respond effectively until you understand the problem from the crisis person's point of view. To be helpful you must understand what the situation means to the person involved. Encourage the person in crisis to identify the problem. By allowing the crisis person to explain what the situation means to them and by permitting the person to identify and explore the feelings, often the emotional blockage is reduced and the person can start to find their own answers.

### **Resolution**

Once the intense feelings have been processed and you feel as if you understand the problem from the crisis person's point of view, then you can begin to help them look for their own coping skills and alternatives. Try not to give advice or offer a solution. The person knows the situation and their own skills better than anyone else, even better than someone who has been through similar experiences. People in crisis are easily influenced. Having answers provided lowers the person's self-esteem further and can lead to dependency or resentment. By producing their own solutions, people in crisis are more likely to follow through with the plans and develop new coping skills.

From 211bigbend.org

<https://www.211bigbend.org/nationalsuicidepreventionlifeline>