

# Crisis management and intervention

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# Objectives:

- ▶ Examine current trends/themes in how children, families experience crisis in the community, and how services respond
- ▶ Identify key points of crisis theory and their implications for service design and provision
- ▶ Outline several strategies for crisis management and intervention

# Section 1:

The state of the union



# Who is in crisis and what drives the crisis

- Most children/families are already known to child serving systems (already receiving some service)
- The most common driving factor in crisis is family conflict
  - ▶ Even when there are psychiatric issues present
- Some crises are truly unexpected (car accident); however, most crises have developed over time
  - ▶ Many times children/families don't recognize it or don't know what to do
  - ▶ Many times helpers "see it coming"

# Characteristics of typical crisis response

- ▶ Many crisis services are from within the MH system
  - Predisposes response (if what you have is a hammer...)
- ▶ Some crisis service systems are hospital based
  - Makes connection to community services more complex
  - Perpetuates fragmentation

# Characteristics of crisis response (con)

- ▶ Much of the response is fragmented:
  - Crisis is seen as a discreet event, disconnected from context
    - ▶ Family context
    - ▶ Other circumstances (school, dating, etc)
  - Crisis often defined in terms of a child's behavior, as opposed to patterns of interaction with context
  - Crisis services (ex. hospitalization) often separate child from the context (both the context of the "problem" and the context of potential solutions)
  - Crisis services often separate the crisis response from the ongoing services being offered
    - ▶ Often means an interruption of a therapeutic process
    - ▶ Once immediate event is calmer, crisis is "over", not connected back to treatment

# Section 2:

Overview of key concepts,  
implications for services

# Crisis definitions

- ▶ A time of great danger or difficulty
- ▶ A sudden, unforeseen event
- ▶ A point of no return
- ▶ A crucial stage or turning point

# Definitions: Crisis

- ▶ A response condition (to a stressor) where:
  - 1) Psychological homeostasis has been disrupted
  - 2) The usual coping mechanisms aren't working
  - 3) The stress of this has impaired functioning
- ▶ The stressor is a "critical incident"
  - The straw that breaks the camel's back  
(Flannery & Everly, 2000)

Close scrutiny will show that  
most crisis situations are  
opportunities to either  
advance,

Or stay where you are

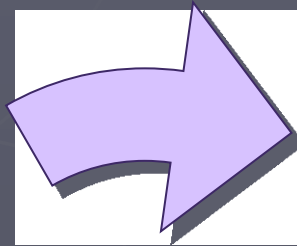
–Maxwell Maltz

# #1: Crisis is an opportunity

- ▶ Chinese character (weiji)
  - Danger and opportunity coming together @ same time
- ▶ English from Greek (krinein)
  - Means "to decide"
- ▶ If crisis can be an opportunity:
  - Staff can look at motivation to change
  - Crisis can be a unifying factor
  - Requires reframing of event
    - ▶ Staff think differently
    - ▶ Help family think differently
    - ▶ Help child view self differently
  - Staff need to help sustain momentum

# #2: Crisis is a cycle

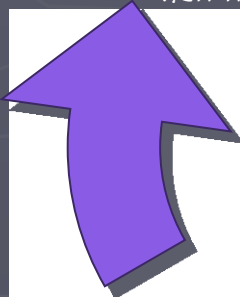
Fast trigger,  
critical incident



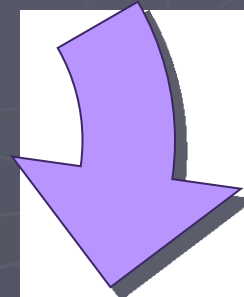
Crisis response  
Seeking help  
Readiness for  
change

Setting events  
Old patterns  
Resurface  
Escalation

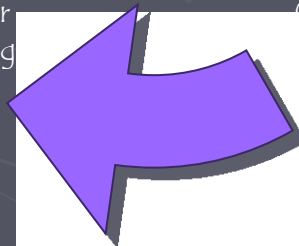
Opportunity to cope in  
new ways



Things return  
to "normal"  
Opportunity for  
growth, planning



crisis diminishes  
Sense of relief  
Opportunity for  
change  
reevaluate



# The cycle of crisis

- ▶ The cycle of crisis:
  - Setting events create a context (left side of the cycle)
  - Fast trigger is the immediate situation that generates crisis
  - Even sudden, seemingly unforeseen events are often building over time (something is going to give, we just don't know what exactly)
  - Crisis event triggers request for help, response
    - ▶ Crisis event creates opportunity, motivation for change
  - As crisis event is resolved, motivation reduces (things are "back to normal")

# #3: Episodic or developmental?

- ▶ Episodic crisis is sudden, unpredictable
  - Car accident
- ▶ Developmental crisis has been building over time
  - People see something coming
- ▶ Sometimes what is understood as episodic is actually developmental (or has an influencing context)
  - Car accident in context of increased risk taking, new friends/negative influence, and drug use

# #4: Crisis happens in context

- ▶ Family context
  - Interactions, roles, changing circumstances, “ripple effect from other family members
- ▶ Resiliency concepts
  - Risk factors vs. protective factors, amount of support, internal/external assets
- ▶ Broader community context
  - School, YMCA, other groups
- ▶ Crisis can be driven by many factors

# Section 3:

Strategies for intervention and  
management



# Crisis Intervention

- ▶ Stabilizing immediate situation
  - Safety, calm it down, concrete action for the next hour, 2 hours, 24 hours
- ▶ Resolving the current episode
  - Restoring of functioning
  - Focus on problem solving
  - Encourage self reliance
- ▶ Short term
  - Transitional
  - Connecting to other services/supports

# Strategy #1: develop crisis intervention capacity

- ▶ Staff training
  - De-escalation
  - Good old fashion helping skills
    - ▶ Engaging, reframing, reflective listening etc
- ▶ Make resources available
  - [www.crisiscounseling.com](http://www.crisiscounseling.com), [www.about.com](http://www.about.com)
  - Warm lines, web sites
    - ▶ Teenlineonline.org
- ▶ Alternative community based responses
  - Respite services, hotlines, crisis outreach

# Crisis management

- ▶ Seeks to expand capacity of family to manage crisis better over time
- ▶ Creates a plan that:
  - Understands the context of crisis
  - Identifies patterns of crisis response
  - Anticipates triggers/stressors
  - Outlines specific action to take before, during, after

# Strategy #2: enhance best practice in providing services

- ▶ A resiliency based service system
  - Asset inventorying/building
- ▶ Strong use of peer support/mentoring
  - Teen to teen, parent support
- ▶ Family and system oriented treatment models

# Treatments that are family systems based

- ▶ Functional Family Therapy
- ▶ Brief Strategic Family Therapy
- ▶ Multisystemic Therapy
- ▶ Solution Focused Brief Therapy (Berg)
- ▶ Family Group Decision Making

# Common themes in family treatment

- ▶ Goal is to improve relationships:
  - Within the family
  - Between the family and other systems (school, peers)
- ▶ Individual behavior can only be understood by examining the context
- ▶ Interventions must be on the family level
- ▶ Attention is given to patterns of interaction

# Common themes, (con)

- ▶ Attention is given to process vs. content
  - Content is the meat of what happens (drug use)
  - Process is the nature of interaction (control)
- ▶ Intervention includes:
  - Lots of engaging
  - Diagnosis of interactional patterns
  - Reframing and restructuring
- ▶ Focus is on present situation, and is typically solution focused and practical

# Strategy #3: Good crisis planning

- ▶ Integrating crisis planning and treatment planning
- ▶ Including crisis management as an integral part of treatment service
- ▶ Having a well thought out crisis plan and document
  - More than protocol stating when to use on-call or call 911

# References/resources

- ▶ Michael Conner, [www.crisiscounseling.com](http://www.crisiscounseling.com)
- ▶ [www.mhsanctuary.com](http://www.mhsanctuary.com)
- ▶ [www.suicideassessment.com](http://www.suicideassessment.com) , Shawn Christopher Shea
- ▶ [www.sfbta.org](http://www.sfbta.org) , Insoo Kim Berg, "Family Based Services"
- ▶ Juvenile Justice Bulletins: FFT or MST
- ▶ [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

# Wrap up

Q&A



Crises and deadlocks when they occur  
have at least this advantage,

that they force us to think  
-Nehru