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# Introduction to Crisis Intervention and the Role of Communication

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# Disclaimer

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- The content of this training should not be relied upon for diagnosis or treatment of a mental health condition.
- Resources listed in this document do not constitute an endorsement, nor are these resources exhaustive. Nothing is implied by inclusion or when a resource is not referenced.

# Training Goals

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- Define Crisis Intervention.
- Discuss the importance of Communication Skills in Crisis Management
- Do's and Don'ts in Crisis Intervention / Communications



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# Crisis Intervention

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# Definition of Crisis Intervention (Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders)

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**Crisis intervention** refers to the methods used to offer immediate, short-term help to individuals who experience an event that produces emotional, mental, physical and/or behavioral distress or problems.

A **crisis** can refer to any situation in which the individual perceives a sudden loss of his or her ability to use effective problem-solving and coping skills (i.e., natural disasters, criminal victimization, medical illness, mental illness, thoughts of **suicide** or homicide and loss or drastic changes in relationships such as death of a loved one or divorce).

# Description

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Individuals are more open to receiving help during crises. A person may have experienced the crisis within the last 24 hours or within a few weeks before seeking help.

Crisis intervention is conducted in a supportive manner.

The length of time for crisis intervention may range from one session to several weeks, with the average time being four weeks. (Crisis interventions for children may be provided for 7 days with built in options for additional time—generally not more than 14 days total).

Crisis intervention is not sufficient for individuals with long-standing problems. Session length may range from 20 minutes to two or more hours.

# Description

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Crisis intervention is appropriate for children, adolescents, and adults.

It can take place in a range of settings, such as hospital emergency rooms, crisis centers, counseling centers, mental health clinics, schools, correctional facilities, and other social service agencies. It may also take place in the family's home setting and families should be afforded this option if they so desire.

Local and national telephone hotlines are available to address crises related to suicide, domestic violence, sexual assault, and other concerns. They are usually available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



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# Crisis Communications

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Communication-PMAB 4<sup>th</sup> ed. 05/27/07





# Why are communication skills important?

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Communications skills are the most powerful tools employees have for preventing aggressive behavior.

What staff communicate and the way they communicate will help shape an environment of mutual respect and cooperation.

Effective communication reduces the need for physical management of aggression and creates a safer environment for the person served and staff alike.

# Communication Messages

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How much of a message is conveyed in each way?

Words 10%

Tone 20%

Body Language 70%

# Words 10%

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Communication is more than just saying words. Studies show that only about 10% of the message we get from people comes from the words they use.

# Tone 20%

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Almost 20% of the message comes from the way people say things.

- Tone of voice
- Volume
- Rate of speech

Can change the meanings of words we say

# Body Language 70%

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Body language consists of:

- Facial Expressions (color, tension)
- Eyes (red, watery, glassy)
- Neck and Shoulders (raised, relaxed, tense)
- Hands and Arms (crossed, fists clenched, relaxed, wringing, fidgeting, tapping)
- Feet (pacing, planted, shifting, tapping)

# Body Language 70%

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As powerful and as important as the words we use and how we say them are, the greatest part of our message comes from what we express with our body.

We literally believe more of what we see than what we hear.

For people with acute mental illness or profound mental retardation, body language may be practically the only part of your message received.

With people who have limited ability to communicate, you must make a clear, non-threatening statement with your body that you are there to help.

# Summary

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For messages to be clear, the meaning of the words must match the tone of voice and body language.

The right words said without sincerity can make things worse.

The right words said with genuine concern for another person are your most powerful tools for preventing aggressive behavior.

# Common Elements of Crisis

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A person in crisis is not thinking clearly

S/he is focused only on feelings

Only after these feelings have lost some of their intensity can a person become calm and think of positive ways of dealing with the situation



## 3 ways to communicate that are beneficial when someone is in crisis

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- 1) Provide reassurance and comfort
- 2) Avoid trying to fix the person's problem
- 3) Develop trust by modeling trustworthy behavior

# Reassure and Comfort

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## Reassure and Comfort

- Show a willingness to listen
- Encourage the person to talk about their feelings which takes the intensity out of the feelings and gets the person past the sense of isolation often felt during crisis.

# Avoid Trying to Fix the Problem

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## Avoid Trying to Fix the Person's Problem

- This takes power away from the person
  - Give power and control by helping the person consider all the options.
  - Give the person knowledge and skills to select an option that meets their needs which fosters independence.

# Develop Trust

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Develop trust by modeling trustworthy behavior.

- Be calm, aware and respectful
- Listen to the other person
- Make supportive instead of critical statements
- Accept the person's feeling as valid for him/her whether or not you agree with them

# Ways of communicating that are **NOT** beneficial when someone is in crisis

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## ) **Crowding** (May increase aggressive behavior)

- Establish a safe distance

## ) **Talking Down** (Don't patronize)

- Show that the person's feelings are important and taken seriously

## ) **Arguing** (Creates emotional distance)

- Listen to all points of view and clarify the differences

## Ways of communicating that are **NOT** beneficial when someone is in crisis

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### **Bribing** (Don't reward aggression)

- Be consistent and fair

### **Threatening** (Implies aggression is acceptable and is abusive)

- Describe expectations and consequences of the person's behavior in a way that gives the person a choice to do the right thing

# References

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Read more:

<http://www.minddisorders.com/Br-Del/Crisis-intervention.html#ixzz1YmotKglx>