The Strengths-based Crisis Counseling Model

When crisis hits, just remember your vowels: AEIOU!

A  Assess & Acknowledge
-  Assess: Counselor’s responsibility to recognize the risk of crisis for clients
-  Upon identification of crisis, acknowledge the crisis with the client, and acknowledge the courage and strength it takes to talk about crisis.

E  Empathize
-  Our central job as counselors is to listen to our clients. Times of crisis are no different! Allow the client to tell their story, and demonstrate empathy of the struggle the client is going through.

I  Inform
-  Be transparent with the client about your concerns and intentions. When possible, inform them of any decision to break confidentiality: your client deserves that.
-  Inform them about the process, including the positive outcomes you intend and wish for.
  (Continue to empathize and acknowledge their reactions to your decisions.)

O  Ownership
-  Help the client to own this process in their life. There has been much research supporting autonomy and self-regulation as important factors of resilience (Masten, 2001, Walsh, 1996). Where possible, empower the client by providing appropriate choices in this process. Examples include having the client call, or participate in a call, to other responders.

U  Utilize
-  Utilize client and counselor strengths. Clients may be using strengths as coping mechanisms to get themselves through crisis. Though sometimes not healthy (Masten, 2001, Walsh, 1996), consider and discuss ways you can draw on each other’s strengths to increase client’s hope, collaboration, and buy-in.
-  Your advocacy skills are strengths to utilize as you interact with other responders.

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**Tips for Teaching and Supervising on the Model**

1. Provide informed consent about your expectations for how to handle emotional reactions (e.g., self-regulation, immediate and ongoing self-care) and disagreements in and outside of class/supervision. Co-establish ground rules for group discussion.

2. Begin by exploring beliefs about crisis and the specific crisis situation (e.g., suicide, child abuse). Address the importance of awareness of one’s beliefs and their potential impact on counseling a client in crisis.

3. Set the foundation for the lesson/supervision session to include core counseling elements of unconditional positive regard, genuineness, and empathy; growth and wellness; client advocacy; and ethics.

4. Discuss and practice empathizing first and throughout. Build empathy in CITs related to a specific crisis situation. Model it yourself: empathize with students’ fears, uncertainties, etc.

5. Discuss and practice developing and maintaining a therapeutic alliance, including rupture repair and the ethics and logistics of sustaining the alliance through intervention involving other responders.

6. Explain and explore roles in multi-disciplinary responses to crisis.

7. Use examples and resources that are concrete, local, and realistic. Examples:
   a. the abuse/neglect reporting form from the on-campus clinic vs. that from the local department of human services
   b. safety plans from different counseling environments (school, outpatient, college/university, etc.)
   c. a handout of terminology used in your state and/or recognized nationally

8. Set up clear expectations regarding client crisis during supervision. Examples:
   a. Check that supervisees arrive to counseling sessions with cheat sheets for reference, as needed.
   b. Explain how the supervisor will learn a crisis is occurring, when/how a supervisor may decide to intervene, and how s/he will do so.

9. Coordinate with and include local resources to support students’ learning. Examples:
   a. After setting the foundation in class, invite guest lectures/panelists from emergency rooms, disaster relief offices, etc.
   b. Make an in-class practice call to a crisis line. Collaborate with a crisis representative on planning, and follow up with in-class processing discussion.

**Selected References**


