

Second Edition

**CRISIS INTERVENTION
IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE/
SOCIAL SERVICE**

JAMES E. HENDRICKS, PH.D.

BRYAN BYERS, PH.D.



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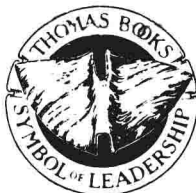
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INTRODUCTION

The collection of original works presented herein is intended for pre-service and in-service criminal justice and social service crisis interveners. Intervenors are those persons who come into contact with victims of domestic violence/spouse abuse, child abuse and neglect, elder abuse and neglect, rape and sexual assault, loss of a loved one or any other type of crisis. Intervenors come in many forms—they are firefighters, police officers, social workers, child care caseworkers, correctional personnel, probation/parole officers, clergy, emergency medical personnel, victim advocates, shelter care personnel, psychological counselors, and professionals from many other criminal justice and social service areas.

The purpose of this book, in particular, is to provide theoretical, analytical, and practical knowledge for first responders. Face-to-face interaction with the client/victim is part of the comprehensive approach advocated by this book, which requires intervenors to assess the nature of a crisis, and the condition of the victim, in order to determine the appropriate course of action.

For the victim, a crisis can be a crossroads of danger and opportunity. Intervenors must recognize and respond to that opportunity, providing the necessary support to the victim, who is often in a heightened state of anxiety. Effective communication skills, along with adequate training and preparation for intervention, are the key to much quality interaction between the intervener and the client/victim.

Each chapter in this book offers a theoretical overview of a particular facet of intervention, as well as models and methods for applying crisis theory to crisis situations faced by intervenors. Although crisis situations are composed of similar elements, each crisis is unique within the personal domain due to individual diversity. The comprehensive balance of theory and practice presented in this volume should enable the intervener in coupling his/her general knowledge of human psychology and emotional crisis with the specific and novel characteristics of various crisis situations.

This volume represents the Second Edition of *Crisis Intervention in Criminal Justice/Social Service*. Seven of the nine chapters from the first edition were retained for this edition and extensively revised. In addition, this

edition contains five new chapters on various topics and issues important to the crisis intervener. New areas represented include ethics in crisis intervention practice, addressing the crises of children with the use of bibliotherapy, and future directions for the field. Two substantive areas found in the first edition are represented by new chapters. These include suicide intervention and stress and burnout in crisis intervention practice. Taken together, the present volume retains important information, in a revised format, from the first edition while adding important and timely topics. It is our hope that the reader will find the information valuable in the delivery of crisis intervention within the domains of criminal justice and social services.

James E. Hendricks
Bryan Byers

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J.E.H.
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**CRISIS INTERVENTION
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Chapter 1

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

JAMES E. HENDRICKS AND MICHAEL W. THOMAS

The concept of crisis intervention has existed since people have needed assistance. All individuals experience crises in life in response to personal and societal events, and these crises often call for the attention of concerned others. Until recently, our society was composed largely of tightly knit families, and assistance was provided from within these families when crises arose. The greater mobility potential of later generations, however, caused the ties that held families together to unravel. Thus, family members were denied immediate and, many times, long-term contact with supportive persons they had depended on in the past. Therefore, crisis intervention expanded beyond the domain of the family unit becoming professional in nature.

Professionals responded accordingly to the growing demand of crisis related issues in society and individual responses. The already-established fields of psychology and medicine supplied the earliest forms of assistance. Later, social service and criminal justice agencies assumed the bulk of assistance given in this country. Today, criminal justice agencies are important conduits to crisis intervention. These agencies, of which law enforcement is an important part in terms of providing initial response to crisis situations, are often the first encountered by persons in need of help. Indeed, throughout the entire litigation process, persons seeking crisis intervention are likely to deal with many criminal justice personnel—from police to parole officers. Thus, it is important to map the historical and theoretical course of crisis intervention as it pertains to criminal justice.

DEFINING CRISES

Since crisis intervention has been shown to be effective in countering many types of dangerous emotional and mental reactions, professionals require a sound definition of what a “crisis” is in order to determine when, and where, assistance is needed. *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1988) defines a crisis as the “turning point for better or worse” and “an

unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending" (p. 307). Past research seems to support this definition. Both Caplan (1964) and Quierdo (1968) observed the instability of persons in times of crisis. Also, Aguilera, Messick, and Farrell (1970) defined a person in crisis as one who has reached a turning point in his or her life. Repeatedly, these definitions surface, in one form or another, throughout the literature.

Rapoport (1962) and Lindemann (1944) each noted that crisis usually involves change. Likewise, Erickson (1959) recognized that crisis entails the unexpected, but he extended this definition to include changes that take place naturally during the human growth and aging cycle. Noting the common elements in these definitions, Hendricks (1985) and Hendricks and McKean (1995) derived the following elements that may precede, accompany, or follow a crisis:

- Anxiety and stress produce a hazardous event (crisis).
- The event occurs suddenly and unexpectedly.
- The event may be one single event or a number of events.
- Stress mounts as the person is unable to effectively cope or solve the problem.
- As a result of overwhelming stress and failure to adequately cope with stress, maladaptive behavior ensues.
- The crisis gains momentum and personality fragmentation occurs.
- As this crisis is occurring, there is increased likelihood that another crisis will occur (a common crisis-producing event is the feeling that "I have failed to cope adequately").
- The crisis victim/survivor moves toward specific types of maladaptive behavior, including criminal behavior.
- If effective intervention does not occur, the crisis victim/survivor reaches a physical and psychological breaking point and permanent damage is likely. (p. 8)

These authors also list the characteristics of those who may be particularly prone to a crisis as a result of unexpected external events or amplified reactions to developmental changes found in life. The reader might bear in mind that these are potential, common social and individual characteristics of those who may experience a crisis, are not necessarily exhaustive, and may be present in those who do not experience crises or hazardous events. The following traits may be referred to as *crisis risk factors*:

- Unemployment, underemployment, or dissatisfaction with their present occupation or position.
- Drug abuse (including alcohol).
- Difficulty coping with minor problems, i.e., problems encountered by the general population on a daily basis.

- Low self-esteem, persistent feelings of insecurity.
- History of unresolved crises or emotional disorders.
- Under utilization of support systems and minimal access to support systems (personal, family, social).
- Few permanent relationships (lack of social integration with others).
- Feelings of alienation from others (family, friends, society).
- Demonstrates impulsiveness and an uncaring attitude.
- History of frequent personal injuries and/or frequent involvement in property damage incidents.

(Hendricks, 1985; p. 8; Hendricks & McKean, 1995; p. 9)

While the aforementioned characteristics or traits of a person prone to crisis span the individual, his/her relationships, and his/her place within society and in social groups, there have been additional efforts to determine the individual characteristics of those experiencing a crisis event. Therefore, and related to these characteristics, other have found that those experiencing crisis have certain commonalities. For instance, Brockopp (1973; p. 93) identified what he termed "personality characteristics" of those in crisis and are as follows:

- A lowered span of attention, focusing on the foreground images with a restricting of the background or setting within which the problem occurs.
- A ruminative, introspective stance. He [she] looks inside himself [herself] for possible reasons for the occurrence of the crisis situation or explanations as to how he [she] can resolve it. As the same time he [she] shows a great deal on anguish, fear and both internal and external distress.
- An emotional reaching out for help and support and a seeming inability to control his [her] emotional responses.
- A great deal of testing behavior, much of which is impulsive and unproductive.
- A change in his [her] relationship to people.
- Reduction in orienting attitudes and a lack of perspective about himself [herself] as a person in time, space and in community.
- A great deal of searching behavior in an attempt to solve his [her] problem by looking for usable features of his [her] environment which may help in the resolution.
- Having a large fund of information available to him [her] relative to the problem with which he [she] is confronted, but this is usually in a very disorganized state and therefore not useful to him [her].

Others have also identified various crisis event elements. Romano (1990) lists dimensions or characteristics common to crisis events which further aid

one in defining the traits of crisis situations. As she notes, crises may involve:

- (a) *Need for action*: It [the crisis] is a situation in which the requirements for actions are high among participants, yet the ability to cope with the event is lowered.
- (b) *Goals and objectives*: It [the crisis] usually threatens the goals and objectives of those involved and is followed by an outcome whose consequences shape the future of the participants.
- (c) *Loss of control*: Once caught in crisis, reduced control over the events and the effects of these events as well as heightened urgency often produce stress.
- (d) *Time element*: The crisis is acute rather than chronic, although its [the crisis] length is usually unspecified and limited.
- (e) *Perception of crisis*: There may be some difficulty in identifying and defining a crisis because what is a crisis event to one person may not be experienced as such to another.
- (f) *Coping ability*: Overall, a crisis is any event that reduces an individual's ability to cope with a given situation.
- (g) *Opportunity*: Crisis may also consist of a convergence of events that result in a new set of circumstances presenting an opportunity for change and growth.

(Romano, 1990; p. 13)

From the aforementioned, one may move closer to a clearer definition of *crisis*. First, it is clear that a crisis may be the result of an expected (or what most would expect such as the onset of major life changes) or an unanticipated *event*. The onset of the original event, in turn, produces a hazardous event when the original event is defined as unpleasant, disruptive, and traumatizing and coupled with inappropriate or inadequate coping mechanisms. Second, it seems rather clear that a crisis often involves others. This may be the case in the event of interpersonal conflict or the death of a loved one, just to name two possible instances where accidental crises may occur. In terms of developmental crises, the interpersonal dimension is more distant but an element. That is, the individual always operates within the context of others and social groups, whether it be responding to the onset of retirement or some other type of life change. The involvement of others in the formation of a crisis emphasizes their *interpersonal* dimension. Finally, one must recognize that a potential crisis producing event may be experienced by individuals differently. That is, the same event may produce a crisis for some, while not others. Moreover, an event may produce varying degrees of crisis reaction for various individuals. Given the potentially unique feature of the crisis situation, one must emphasize the *intrapersonal* nature of crisis situations.