

# ***Crisis Intervention and De-escalation Techniques***

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—  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

## Definitions of Crisis

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A time of intense difficulty, trouble or danger

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A life event that an individual *perceives* as stressful to the extent that normal coping mechanisms are insufficient

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A state of disequilibrium in which an individual's typical level of functioning is disrupted

**Crises develop when coping resources are not sufficient for handling the stressors people are experiencing**

Coping resources > life stress = balance

Life stress > coping resources = crisis

As life stressors mount, coping resources must be sufficient or the individual may experience a crisis. The same stressor can affect people differently depending on their coping resources.



**The crisis may not be life threatening, but the person feels a sense of hopelessness in their ability to cope.**

# Elements of a Crisis



UNEXPECTED



SUBJECTIVE



VIEWED AS A  
THREAT



ANXIETY  
PROVOKING



BRIEF



A TURNING  
POINT



When written in Chinese, the word  
'crisis' is composed of two  
characters. One represents danger  
and the other represents  
opportunity.

— *John F. Kennedy* —

AZ QUOTES

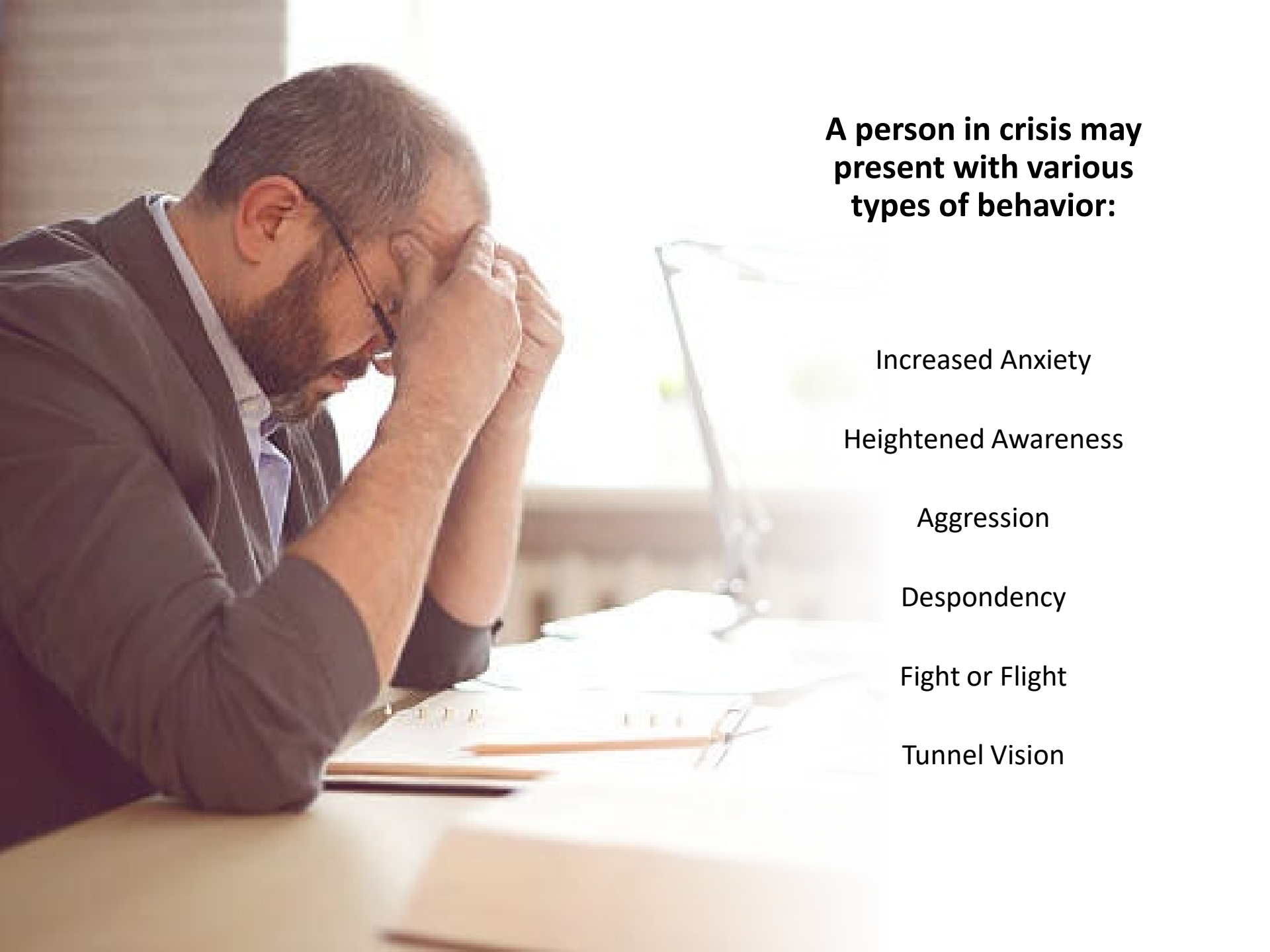


# Stages of Crisis

Prodromal or Pre-Crisis  
(prevention and preparation to  
reduce possible risks)

Acute or Crisis  
(the impact stage)

Resolution or Post-Crisis  
(creation of a new normal)



**A person in crisis may present with various types of behavior:**

Increased Anxiety

Heightened Awareness

Aggression

Despondency

Fight or Flight

Tunnel Vision





How Do You Know When Someone is In a State of Crisis?



## *What Picture Comes to Your Mind of a Person in Crisis?*

*How is the person:*

*Behaving*

*Thinking*

*Feeling*

*Verbalizing*

# Factors to Consider

Mental Health History

Substance Use

History of Suicidal or  
Homicidal Ideation

Perception of Support  
Systems

# Possible Outcomes of Crisis

Additional Crises

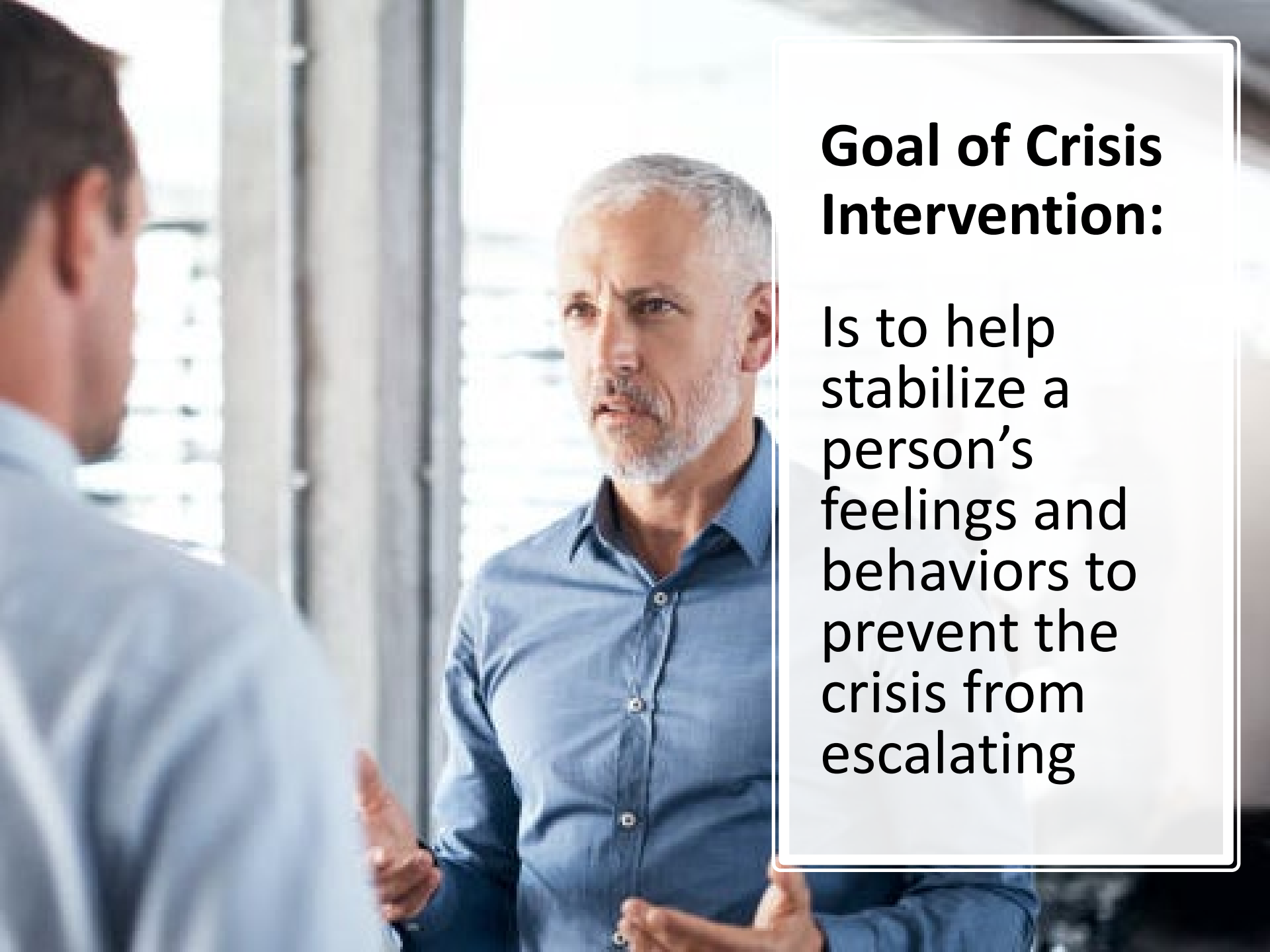
Relapse

Abuse

Suicidal or Homicidal Ideation

Resolution (return to a state of equilibrium)

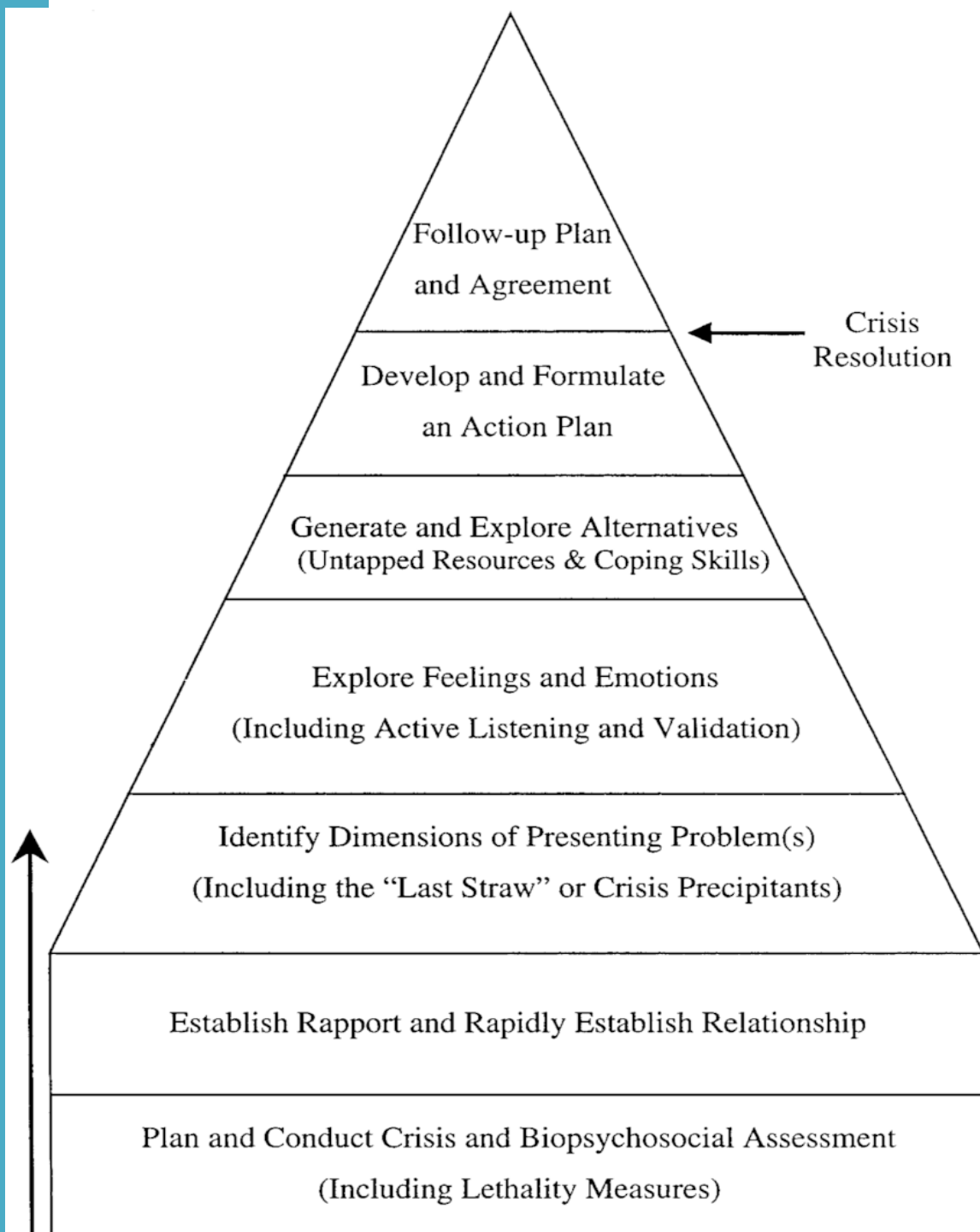




## **Goal of Crisis Intervention:**

Is to help stabilize a person's feelings and behaviors to prevent the crisis from escalating

# Roberts Seven Stage Crisis Intervention Model



Within the first three  
minutes demonstrate

Compassion

Respect

Confidence



# De-escalation Techniques

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- Establishing rapport is an essential step that must occur early
- Convey empathy and an understanding of the situation from the other person's perspective
- Demonstrate respect while trying to engage the individual in a collaborative working alliance




# Validation

Is critical for effective crisis management

Begins with accepting the person's emotions as legitimate and reflecting an understanding of their perspective of the situation

Even if you disagree with the person's perspective, you can convey validation by considering what the situation may feel like for them



**Validation** doesn't necessarily mean that you agree with someone's thoughts or behaviors, it **means that you can recognize their feelings.**



@MYSIGNATURENUTRITION

# Examples of Validating Statements

I see how important this is for you

I understand this is a difficult time

This feels overwhelming

## Find a point on which you can agree

By identifying at least one element in what the person is saying in which you can agree, you can communicate this agreement to help the person feel heard. This enhances rapport and helps the person de-escalate.

*“I agree many people are upset due to the accommodations being asked of them during the pandemic”.*

# Verbal de-escalation

Interventions that can be used to help a person in crisis regain control over their emotional reactions

Techniques to help avoid situations where we may inadvertently escalate a crisis by coming across in ways that are intimidating or that otherwise provoke the person in crisis

# Verbal de-escalation involves the following steps



Use a low, calm tone of voice



Listen with empathy



Validate by responding to some aspect of their communication with an understanding of how the other person feels



Make a clear request, but in a non-confrontational manner



Listen to the reply, repeating the process

## Non-verbal Communication

- Respect personal space; maintain at least two arm's lengths of distance
- Monitor your body language to ensure you are not coming across as intimidating
  - Keep arms relaxed by your side
  - Hands should be visible and not clenched
  - Maintain a neutral facial expression

# Avoid overwhelming the person in crisis



Try to identify a place to sit; if the other person wants to stand, stand



Find a somewhat quiet location to reduce excessive stimulation



Use short sentences with simple words



Repeat information as needed



Ensure you have access to an exit while not blocking the path of the other person to leave



# Validate before problem solving

It can be tempting to work with the person to problem solve immediately. However, doing so can lead a person to escalate if they believe you did not adequately hear them or validate their thoughts and feelings.

# How to de-escalate someone

## **Step 1: Validation – Acknowledge how the person feels**

*“We need to validate others until they actually feel validated”.*

## **Step 2: Help People Find Options – Explore Options and Consequences**

*“It’s easier to see the bigger picture when you’re not emotionally involved”.*

## **Step 3: Allow for Choice – Explore rational choices**

**Dr. Christian Conte, Counselor**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qsfBCatgX8>



# Help the person to re-establish control

Restore a sense of equilibrium through techniques that help the individual regulate their emotional reactions

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graph TD; A[Restore a sense of equilibrium through techniques that help the individual regulate their emotional reactions] --> B[Empower the person so that they believe the crisis can be resolved]; B --> C[Problem solve to develop a plan];
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Empower the person so that they believe the crisis can be resolved

Problem solve to develop a plan

Set limits  
but offer  
reasonable  
choices



Establish clear limits for behaviors that will not be tolerated



*“I will listen as long as we can have a discussion”.*

Signs  
someone  
may be  
losing  
control

Tensing of the jaw

Clenching fists

Sweating

Rapid breathing

Active/fidgety posture

## A person in crisis may

Express agitation as an effort to regain a sense of personal safety or to avoid perceived threats

Quickly escalate to a point where there is a risk of harm to others



# How to Talk to Angry People

## **Acknowledge their anger**

*"I'm sorry to see how this is affecting you".*

## **Don't take it personally**

*Anger is not about you. It has everything to do with the person's view of the situation.*

## **Understand that anger really stems from pain**

*When people are angry, they are hurt.*

**-Dr. Christian Conte**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jYO7EFfYV8&t=176s>



## How to talk to angry people

*“Understand that anger comes from a place of hurt”.*

*“When you shift the way you see someone who is angry, it will change the way you approach them”.*

Dr. Christian Conte, Counselor



***Learning how to be in a crisis situation is just as important as knowing what to say***

Think of the last power struggle you experienced. What led up to this? How did you respond? What do you believe influenced the other person's actions?

How might you respond differently if you are faced with a similar situation?

Breakout Groups for Role Play

# Case Scenarios

Single mother with two children aged three and five years has 21 days to secure a new place to live. Client denies support from extended family and friends. Client reports having called United Way 211 and was informed Catholic Charities will be able to help her locate housing. Client begins to raise her voice as you inform her of ways Catholic Charities may be of help and offer referrals for other agencies.

Thirty-year young nurse arrives for counseling. He says he can't return to the hospital. He reports not being able to sleep, eat, and is working in excess of sixty hours each week. He appears exhausted and expressionless. He can barely find the words to express how he feels. He sits, motionless, staring at the floor.

Forty-seven-year young male appears agitated as he arrives for counseling mandated by his employer. He paces in the waiting room and refuses to sit. He questions how much longer he will have to wait.

Grandmother of a 16-year young male reports she is overwhelmed. Grandson is using substances (type unknown to Grandmother). Grandmother states he comes home high anytime of the day or night. Grandmother received a call from DFS after the school initiated a hotline due to number of days Grandson is absent. Grandmother reports lack of support from other family members as they do not want to "deal" with him. Grandmother denies ability of Grandson to return to Marygrove or St. Vincent's due to history of elopement.



# When managing a crisis

It is important to consider your safety as well as the safety of others



If a person is threatening or very agitated, you may need additional supports



Know the emergency plan if a person's behavior becomes out of control that you cannot safely manage the situation?



# Alarm Reaction

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- A survival mechanism programmed in us that may lead to an adrenaline rush when we feel threatened.
- When our alarm response is activated, our survival mechanisms may override our rational brain
- The alarm reaction may lead to a good response in a survival situation but may be a deterrent when we have to *think* our way out of a situation.

# Safety Considerations

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Who knows where you are?

Where do you park?

What steps do you take to protect your personal privacy?

Try to avoid wearing accessories or hair style in a manner that someone could grab

Have conversations in an area where you can identify exits and others coming into the room

Have keys in hand as you walk to your car

Drive to another location to complete paperwork

# Promoting your safety

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1

Gain knowledge of previous interactions with the client.

2

Develop a statement you can use to respectfully leave the setting *“Let me make a phone call to learn what I can do for you”*.

3

Know the policy on when law enforcement may need to be present to ensure safety

# After a Threatening Encounter



Contact your  
supervisor to  
debrief



Incident report



Resetting your  
emotions/self-care

The first  
step in  
managing  
others is  
to first  
manage  
ourselves

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Ultimately, we cannot  
control others, we can only  
control ourselves

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As we change our  
behaviors, we influence the  
outcome of the situation.

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What helps you manage  
your emotions in a crisis  
situation?



# *Self Care Plan*

*(to Maintain My Emotional and Physical Health)*

My Wellness  
Toolbox

*Activities that promote my  
mental and physical health*

My Daily  
Maintenance Plan

*What I do on a daily basis to  
promote health and  
wellbeing*

My Triggers

*External circumstances that  
may provoke negative  
emotions and behaviors*



# Early Warning Signs

*Internal, subtle signs that let me know I am beginning to feel triggered*

# Breaking Down

*Emotions and behaviors that let me know I am not my best*

# Crisis Plan

*Coping skills, social and professional supports that promote a healthy response to crisis*



## Will the counselors relate to what I am going through?

Yes! We are mothers, wives, fathers, husbands, grandparents. We have friends and family, and we live in the same communities where we serve. We have experienced the joys in life, and we have experienced sadness, heartbreaks and hurt. We have dedicated our lives to helping others. We are LCSW or LPC counselors who want you to experience the best version of yourself.

## Setting up an EAP appointment is easy.

To **schedule an EAP appointment** with a **Saint Louis Counseling licensed counselor** for you or your family member, **please call 888.629.3835** or **one of our seven offices** or visit our website: **SaintLouisCounseling.org**.

### South Office

9200 Watson Road, G-101  
St. Louis, MO 63126  
**314.544.3800**

### Union Office

Franklin Co. Family Resource Center  
500 Clark Ave. | Union, MO 63084  
**636.583.1800**

### Herculaneum Office

1349 McNutt Street  
Herculaneum, MO 63048  
**636.638.2203**

### O'Fallon Office

311 South Main, Suite 100  
O'Fallon, MO 63366  
**636.281.1990**

### Florissant Office

1385 Harkee Drive  
Florissant, MO 63031  
**314.831.1533**

### Bellefontaine Neighbors Office

10235 Ashbrook Drive  
St. Louis, MO 63137  
**314.831.1533**

### Troy Office

#140 Professional Pkwy  
Troy, MO 63379  
**636.528.5911**

**SaintLouisCounseling.org** | **314.544.3800** | **1.888.629.3835** (24-hour line)



## Archdiocese of St. Louis Employee Assistance Program (EAP)



*Confidential, professional counseling that helps you  
and your family experience the best versions of yourselves.*

## What is an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

The **Archdiocese of St. Louis Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** is an internal program that provides **confidential, short-term mental-health and work/life management for you and your family**, if needed, at absolutely **no cost to you**.

**All EAP counselors are licensed mental-health professionals**, who have master's degrees or higher as well as extensive training in problem assessment, treatment and referral. The Archdiocese of St. Louis has contracted with **Saint Louis Counseling** (a federated agency of Catholic Charities of St. Louis) to provide comprehensive, professional, high-quality mental-health benefits to employees, their spouses and dependents.

## How does the Archdiocesan EAP work?

By **simply making a confidential call to our 24-hour line: 888.629.3835** or any of our Saint Louis Counseling offices (see back of brochure), an eligible employee or household family member can access the following services:

### Crisis Service

After listening to your needs, the representative will schedule an appointment with a Saint Louis Counseling EAP counselor, or in urgent situations, will connect you with the crisis counselor.

### Assessment

Your EAP counselor will assess the nature of the problem and will develop a plan of action with you to best resolve it.

### Counseling

The EAP **provides up to ten (10) free, confidential sessions of counseling per problem, per year with a Saint Louis Counseling licensed therapist**. In many cases, this counseling is all that is needed to resolve the problem.

### Referral Services

There may be times when your EAP counselor may determine that a longer term or more specialized care is necessary and will refer you to an outside therapist, treatment center or hospital that meets the requirements of your medical plan. Your EAP counselor will remain with both you and the provider to assure that you continue to receive quality care.

## What types of problems do EAP counselors address?

EAP counselors help employees and their families deal with a **wide range of emotional- or mental-health issues**. Some of the most common include:

*Family Problems*

*Parenting Issues*

*Marital/Relationship Conflicts*

*Emotional Concerns: Stress, Grief*

*Mental-health Conditions: Anxiety, Depression, ADHD, Bipolar Disorder, etc.*

*Work-related Problems*

*Referral for Alcohol/Drug Problems*

*Referral for Financial or Legal Issues*

## Who is eligible to use the Archdiocesan EAP services?

All EAP services are available to **employees of the Archdiocese of St. Louis who work 1,000 hours or more per year or educators who work half-time or more**. The services offered through the EAP are **available to all eligible employees, employees' spouses and dependent children**, who may use these services with or without the employee's participation. *Catholic Charities employees should check with your agency for eligibility requirements.*

## How confidential is the EAP?

**Confidentiality is totally assured for you and your family members.** The staff of Saint Louis Counseling adhere to all federal and state guidelines regarding confidentiality and HIPAA laws. **Your employer and the Archdiocese will not be informed of your participation.** Information will only be released, if you choose, with your written permission, or in a life-threatening situation, or child abuse.

## Where do I go for EAP services?

EAP services are provided at our seven **Saint Louis Counseling offices throughout the Greater St. Louis area**. See the back page for office locations.



OUR MISSION: *Guided by the teachings of Jesus Christ, Saint Louis Counseling supports healing and improved mental health for individuals and families of all backgrounds through professional counseling and psychiatric services.*

*The Archdiocese of St. Louis Employee Assistance Program provides confidential, short-term mental-health and work/life management for you and your family, when needed, at absolutely no cost to you.*



# Additional Resources

Behavioral Health Response  
(BHR) 314-469-6644

Life Crisis Services  
314-647-4357

United Way 211

Youth Connection Helpline  
314-819-8802