

## Case Studies/Activities

### **Chapter 18: Crisis intervention**

#### Case Study – Jean

##### Commentary

As with all interventions, the process begins with assessment. In the case of Jean, she has contacted you in a distressed state, stating that she believes everyone is watching her and the shop assistant is also speaking about her. Jean has contacted her mother for support, but as seems to be the normal response to Jean, her mother has put the phone down and refuses to help. The first steps you would take would be to assess if Jean is in a crisis or a perceived state of crisis, if she is a danger to herself or others and if she has a realistic perception of her current situation and her current mental health. Reference to Aguilera's (1994) example in the chapter would assist you at this stage of practice. In advance of engaging with the crisis model, consideration should be given to the following:

##### Assessment

- Has Jean got a realistic perception of the event? For Jean, this may be a crisis situation; others may consider her situation as her getting 'het up about nothing'. Consideration should be given to personal values and opinions as these may influence your assessment and those of others at this early stage. You should draw from psychological and sociological theory, perhaps Erikson's (1956) life stages to assess her developmental stage; Howe (1995) and Bowlby (1969) to consider her resilience factors; Bronfenbrenner (1979) to understand the relationship with her family and potential support networks and Freud to establish her ego state. It is of course of great importance to consider her diagnosis as at present she may be becoming unwell and require medical attention.
- What type of crisis may Jean be experiencing? The experience could be maturational – linked to her developmental stage, ego strength or perhaps 'mid-life crisis'; situational – linked to this event which is out of her control and threatens her psychological integrity ... or both as one can often trigger the other.
- Is Jean in immediate danger or risk? At this point you could refer to the agencies framework for assessing potential or actual risk. This will assist you to get a wider understanding of the current situation, the meaning of the situation for Jean and others around her and if she is at risk of harm to herself or others. It may also be helpful to refer to James and Gilliland (2001) to make use of the ABC model to determine the severity of the crisis and if Jean has become immobilised by her current situation; Jean's emotional status and her current cognitive functioning capabilities; her coping mechanisms and resources available to her.
- What is your working relationship and knowledge of Jean and her mental health? Although it is you who has answered the call, are you the best person to speak to Jean? Jean may have a longer working relationship with another member of staff; your knowledge of her diagnosis may be limited as you have just joined the team.

##### Intervention

As discussed in this chapter, there is no one single model of crisis intervention. For the purpose of this example Roberts and Ottens' (2005) seven stage model will be made use of to assist you to move from assessment to intervention.

Stage 1: Assessment of Jean's stressors, environment and risk factors, diagnosis and coping mechanisms. You would gauge the severity of the situation through a risk assessment, consider her present environment and support networks which may be available to her. It would seem that from Jean's perspective she is in a crisis situation and her internal coping mechanisms, which can be present at times, are not functioning at the moment. There is a lack of family support and at this time Jean would feel unable to ask for assistance in the shop.

Stage 2: Establishing a rapport and engaging Jean. If you have, from your assessment, decided that you are the most suitable person to work with Jean, you need to build up her trust in you and reassure her that you will speak to her and not put the phone down. As you cannot see her, your verbal communication skills at this time must project empathy, respect, patience; be at a level and pace suitable to Jean's situation; jargon free; non-judgemental; creative and accepting.

Stage 3: Identify the crisis precipitants. You need to focus on Jean's current situation from her perspective and to try and find out what triggered her negative response and contributed to her current distressed state. For example, has she been unwell recently, was there anything that upset her before she went to the shops? You would make use of open questions and use the exchange model (Smale and Tuson) as she has most knowledge of herself and potentially has the answers, even though she may not realise this at present. It may be possible at this stage to prioritise the presenting issues, for example, how important is it at present to complete her shopping?

Stage 4: Feelings and Emotions. At this stage you could encourage Jean to express her feelings and emotions at this time. You should use empathy; listening skills to pick up on any factors which Jean may not be aware of which have contributed to her current feelings of crisis and potential paranoia. At this stage you would initially use paraphrasing – taking on board what Jean is saying, use some of her words but changing them to begin to 'challenge' her perception of the event, offering a different view point of her 'crisis'. This will enable Jean to consider another perspective and perhaps consider a change in her response to her situation.

Stage 5: Exploration of alternative coping mechanisms and alternatives. At this stage the importance of trust in your working relationship is at its highest. You will be encouraging Jean to consider other ways of coping with her present situation. Consideration of her resilience factors and the coping strategies she was able to put in place in the past would be discussed. Hopefully at this stage you will have assisted Jean to re-establish some sort of emotional balance and she may be willing to listen to your suggestions. You would praise her for her ability to have coped in the past and reassure her that she still has these skills available to her and that this current situation can be resolved. It is important to work in partnership; it is not about you giving advice and your opinions. At this stage you would assist with her anxiety levels by perhaps suggesting that she does not have to complete her shopping at this moment, she could put her basket down, perhaps go and have a refreshment or short walk and come back later. To take some deep breaths, focus on the fact that you will speak to her until she feels better or more able to cope, to suggest she talks to a member of staff and share that she is feeling unwell and ask for assistance.

Stage 6: Develop an action plan. If as a result of your intervention Jean has now reached a stage where her 'crisis' level is at a manageable stage, it would be useful to discuss a concrete action plan. This will reassure Jean that even though she may feel more able to cope at this stage that there is an opportunity to meet with you, discuss the event and work towards putting a plan in place to assist her to manage the feelings of crisis in the future. This would be an opportunity for you to assist Jean to acknowledge her existing strengths and skills and work on ways to bring these into play when she next finds herself in the same situation. It may be at this point, with Jean's permission, you contact

her mother to establish if you could meet to explain Jean's experiences and how she may support her in the future. This may or may not be successful, however, and this should be considered.

Stage 7: Follow up and closure. As with any model or method of intervention, closure and the way this is addressed is vital so as to enable Jean to not only see a beginning and end to the event but also to see that there is an opportunity for her to meet again to assess how she is managing. Jean needs to see that she can learn from the experience and that the door is always open for further discussion or if she needs to call again. These suggestions are not exhaustive, but will give you an idea of how you can move from assessment to an appropriate model/method of intervention will assist Jean to draw from existing strengths to assist her now and in the future.