

The ABC Model of Crisis Intervention

A – Developing and Maintaining Contact

Building rapport –a state of understanding and comfort– between the counselor and client is the foundation of the therapeutic encounter. This phase is critical in establishing trust with the client. The client will have difficulty being open until he or she feels understood and accepted by the counselor. The counselor needs to be empathetic, present, nonjudgmental, and genuine to help the client move into the next phase of the model. Key processes in this phase include: active listening, pertinent questioning, paraphrasing for understanding, reflection of feelings (empathy), and summarization.

B – Identifying the Problem and Therapeutic Interaction

This is defined as the most important phase. Because crisis intervention is brief and time limited, the counselor needs to identify and focus on why the client is seeking help at this particular time. The counselor needs to stay focused while keeping the client focused on the crisis issue. Distracting issues will confuse the crisis issue along with depleting the client's need for coping energy. Identifying perspectives, subjective distress, and current and previous functioning takes up most of this phase. Counselors use the key processes used in Phase A to collect information necessary to understanding the nature of the crisis and then provide new ways for the client to think about, perceive, and cognitively process the situation.

C – Coping

In this last phase, the client and the counselor explore new techniques and coping methods together. The counselor encourages the client to examine ways of coping and then presents his or her own suggestions. Part of this process includes the counselor getting a commitment from the client to follow through with the recommendation, which is part of the reason for having the client develop the coping plan. Sometimes this commitment even involves a written contract.