

Responding to a Family Crisis as a Child Welfare Worker



If you work in child protective services, a domestic violence shelter, or within any other system that exists to respond to family crises, this is a significant part of your job. You probably don't encounter very many families who aren't in crisis.

As you have probably seen in your work, a family in crisis that does not get support can easily fall into another problem over and over again. Your supportive, empathic response to the situation that brings them into contact with you - and any other challenge they are dealing with at that time - can help get them out of crisis mode sooner.

STEPS FOR RESPONDING TO A FAMILY CRISIS



OBSERVE - By observing children and other family members, you can see how they handle their situation and what support they might need. Please help them to notice the strengths you see in them. Be on the lookout for early signs of other crises.

ASK QUESTIONS - Ask what led to their current crisis, what support they need, what their strengths are, who may have helped them in the past, and how you can help.



BE KNOWLEDGEABLE - Know the resources that are available in your community. The better your knowledge of what services are available, the better you will be able to link families in crisis to organizations that will be able to meet their needs.

PROVIDE RESOURCES - Some programs maintain an emergency fund to assist families in crisis. Sometimes a small sum can make the difference between a crisis that escalates and one that is resolved quickly. Respite care and other resources are also valuable in a crisis.



BE AVAILABLE - Make it easy for parents to approach you when they are ready to discuss their situation. Let them know when you are in your office and available to talk and how best to reach you.

MAKE SURE YOU ARE BEING SUPPORTED - When you are helping families through their crises, you can become overwhelmed. It is important that you and your colleagues are able to get the support you need to work through the situation.



Bringing the Protective Factors Framework
to Life in Your Work

Responding to a Family Crisis as a Early Childhood Educator or Family Support Worker

If you work in early care and education or family support, depending on the families you work with, you may not see family crises very often. However, all families face emergencies from time to time, and it is important to be prepared to respond when they arise.

Even families that appear to be strong and stable can go through difficult times. Illness, job loss, substance abuse, financial problems, separation and divorce, and other problems happen in all families. If not dealt with appropriately, these issues can threaten the safety and well-being of the children and the family. Staff members can offer timely, sympathetic, and confidential support at these times. From lending a listening ear to connecting families with needed resources and services, a trusted staff member can help a parent weather a crisis.



Supportive relationships between parents and staff are strengthened by staff members' responsiveness and ability to be helpful to parents when they need it.

STEPS FOR RESPONDING TO A FAMILY CRISIS



OBSERVE - By observing children and families, you will be able to notice changes in behavior, and then you can address any concerns with the family. Please help them to notice their strengths. Observation also means listening without being judgmental.

ASK QUESTIONS - In the context of a supportive relationship with a family, you can ask whether anything is wrong and whether you can provide support or can refer the family to someone who can support them during this crisis.



BE KNOWLEDGEABLE - Know the resources that are available in your community. By having the knowledge of what services are available, you can be an immediate resource for families in crisis to come to for helpful and useful information.

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