



Crisis – Understanding the Problem

Overwhelm

Crisis is overwhelming. Sometimes we can't believe the situation we're in, and we're in shock. Other times we believe it alright, and it's all too familiar. Then we get overwhelmed by feelings of anger or sadness - and hopelessness that things are ever going to change.

It's hard to act or make decisions when we're overwhelmed; it feels like it takes every bit of energy we have just to survive. Sometimes every moment is so painful that we don't even feel like we want to survive.

If you're in this kind of place, give yourself permission not to do anything right now. You can do something in a little while; you can come back to learning once the crisis is over. Someone wise once said, *“If you're in a place that is completely dark, then LIE DOWN and be still until morning, until the sun comes up. Don't try to feel your way around in the dark. There's sharp things out there, and cliffs... Just lie down and do nothing for a short time. The sun comes up, and you'll be able to see what's around, where you could go...”*

It's more than taking a nap, but taking a nap won't hurt. And then, when you get up, here are a few ideas you might want to think about.

1. First of all, YOU ARE AMAZING for even trying to stay with your learning or with anything else - in your studies, in your job, taking care of those kids. You are coping with something so hard that lots of people would give up. And DOUBLE POINTS for reading something like this, and using this kit, when you feel this way. Many people would be under the bed, at the bar, or at least in front of the TV.
2. Second, when we have really tough times, old feelings tend to get all tangled up with the new ones. The current situation stirs up our heart and mind with bad feelings from old situations - we remember old hurts and feel them again, and we respond now how we responded back then.

Especially if we experienced violence as little ones, when we were really powerless, our reactions now can get very complicated. Learning to separate the old from the new is helpful so you can be with those feelings one at a time.

3. Third, when we separate out the old stuff, and try to deal with just the crisis that's happening NOW, we find we have resources today that we didn't have back then. As adults, we do have a bit of power. We can make choices now that we couldn't as children. We can take on a bit more. Strangely, what makes this possible is giving ourselves a break. A chance to breathe, eat, and sleep; to go outside and look at a tree.

You will be able to come back to learning. Things will change. You can do this.

How much to tell

When we are in crisis, or just going through really hard times, we often want - ***need*** - to share what's going on with others. But it can be hard to decide what to tell, when, and to whom. To read about how we can share our stories AND respect ourselves, our safety, and our privacy, click here:

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/violence/whattotell.htm>.

Supporting Others

Maybe someone you care about, or just someone you know, is in crisis right now and is coming to you with their problems. Supporting people who are going through a rough time is both important and complicated, so it's worth thinking and talking about a bit. Here are some things to consider if you're in this situation:

- Are you the right person, or the only person, for them to be telling about all this? If they're in danger, their safety is the first priority. You may need to point them to local services (see "Finding Services" in this section) like a shelter, or may want to encourage them to tell someone like a counsellor, teacher or elder.
- They may be asking you to keep it a secret, but think hard about this. They are telling you because they trust you. But if you don't feel comfortable keeping the secret, if it feels dangerous or scary, you might decide you need to share it with someone else. If you choose this, TELL THEM. Let them know that you are going to speak to a teacher, counsellor, or elder - any helper you trust - and ask them if they want to come. But don't go behind their back.
- Even if the situation is not so tricky, we still need to be careful about how to support. Maybe you're not the right person for them to tell because what they are going through reminds you of stuff that YOU have gone through. It might make you feel nervous, guilty, spacey, too sad or angry, or just plain weird to listen to their story. That's okay. If you don't feel strong enough to hear it, or to hear the details, you don't have to. It doesn't make you a bad friend. But again, TELL THEM why. If you just hang up, walk away, or avoid them, they might feel ashamed and like they're bad or wrong because they freaked you out. It is hard enough not to feel shame and embarrassment when in crisis, so just tell them: "It's not you, it's my stuff", and help them find someone else to talk to.

- If you decide that both you and the person are safe for now, and that they can talk to you, all you have to do is listen. Very often, people having rotten experiences just want someone to hear and see them. To help you listen more deeply, you can reflect back some of what they are saying to them. Words like "yes, that sounds hard", or, "that must hurt so much" can be powerful. If you have the kind of relationship with them where you can hold their hand, pat them, or hug and cuddle them, great. If not, just be there. Try to avoid telling them what they should do. They will be able to figure that out for themselves when they have been listened to well. Try to help them stay away from shame, reminding them that someone hurting them is never their fault. Show them other stuff from this kit.
- Be good to yourself. You are doing something hard and precious. After you listen to other people's stories, make sure you take time to do things that are fun and relaxing for you, and get any support you may need. It might be enough just to tell another friend "Hey I've been supporting someone and it's hard - I could use a laugh..." or whatever, without sharing the details.