

“What Do I Do Now?” What To Do When Your Mentee Experiences a Crisis

- Author:** Maija Ryan
- Duration:** 2 hours (allowing for a 10-minute break)
- Preparation:** Gather a list of referrals for agencies in your community. Get copies of your agency policies regarding confidentiality, mandated reporting, and mentor supervision
- Materials:** Chalkboard or newsprint, chalk or markers
- Handouts:** “What Are Some Difficult Issues?”
“Are You Prepared?”
“Ten Hints for Helping Someone in Crisis”
“Talking With Your Mentee About Staying Safe”
“Role-Play Scenarios”
- A/V:** Overhead optional, transparencies of the above handouts
- Room set-up:** Place chairs in U shape facing the chalkboard or newsprint
- Description:** One of the biggest fears a mentor has is not knowing what to do if the mentee has experienced some sort of crisis. This session helps participants better understand the mentor’s role, how to assess a crisis and decide what procedure to follow, and how to find support for mentor and mentee.
- Session goals:** By the end of the session, participants will:
- Understand how to assess levels of crisis and take appropriate action
 - Understand program-mandated reporting policies
 - Learn how to talk with your mentee about staying safe
 - Learn about community resources and referrals
 - Understand the importance of self-care and how to find support when dealing with mentees in crisis

Agenda & instructions:

1. Introductions

5 minutes

Have the participants introduce themselves and tell the group how long they have been matched with their mentees.

2. Brainstorming Activity: “What is a crisis?”

30 minutes

Ask participants to think of situations that they would consider a crisis. Write these on the board or newsprint. Make sure that the list includes crises such as:

- Loss of family member or friend
- Divorce
- Loss of home
- Domestic violence
- Child abuse
- Severe violence
- Physical or mental illness
- Suicidality
- Drug-related problems
- Legal problems or incarceration
- Other traumas or losses

Ask participants to circle which crises they feel should be discussed with their match coordinator. Distribute and display the overhead Handout 1: “What Are Some Difficult Issues?” Discuss what differentiates a situation as an *issue of concern* from a *crisis requiring intervention*. Often this brings up the fact that “it depends” on the severity or the specific details of the situation. It also depends on the resources available to the mentee and his or her family. A family with adequate resources has more options than a family with fewer resources and, therefore, a minor problem to one person may be more severe to another. Key indicators of a “crisis requiring intervention” would be a situation in which someone (particularly the child) is or has been in danger and/or involved in unlawful activities.

Hand out or place on overhead projector a copy of your agency’s policies and procedures regarding confidentiality and supervision. Review your state’s mandatory reporting laws. Review your agency’s policies regarding what must be shared with a supervisor and how and when to report suspected child endangerment, neglect, or abuse. Your agency should have specific policy around what action to take when informed that a mentee has experienced a crisis. Procedures should be in place specifying when to inform the mentee’s family, and when to involve other agencies and institutions (child welfare, police, etc). For further reference, see Handout 2: “Are You Prepared?”

3. Visualization: “How can I be helpful?”

20 minutes

Ask your mentors to think back to a time when they were really stressed out or were experiencing some sort of crisis. Ask them to think of how they coped with the situation. Questions and phrases to help mentors remember what helped them can include:

- What helped you to remain calm or to become more relaxed during this stressful time?
- Were there any people in your life during that time who helped you?
- Imagine the tone of voice of the person(s) who was helpful.
- What did the person(s) say or do that helped?
- What kind of physical surroundings made you feel better (e.g., indoors, outdoors, quiet, surrounded by people, alone)?
- What activities or actions did you take that helped you to cope (including counseling, sports, music, hobbies, etc.)?

Ask mentors to share some of their thoughts and ideas of what helped them to cope with a crisis. Write the responses on the chalkboard or newsprint and title the list “Coping With Crisis.” Ask mentors which of the coping mechanisms listed during the visualization would be appropriate for a mentor to do with a mentee and circle these.

Remind the mentors that their role is to build a trusting relationship with the youth, and being able to listen supportively is key. It is often scary for a young person to share difficult issues with an adult. Sometimes the youth may only drop hints about what has or is happening to see if the mentor is someone who can be trusted. Provide the handout “Ten Hints for Helping Someone in Crisis” and discuss.

10-minute break

4. Talking With Your Mentee About Safety

10 minutes

Start the discussion about mentee safety with the following information:

Sometimes when the youth has experienced a crisis, it is not a specific incident that occurred once and is over. Often young people live in situations in which mental illness, abuse, or violence surround them and they may confront dangerous situations repeatedly. In these cases, it is helpful to explore with the young person ways in which to protect himself (or herself) or stay safe if facing a dangerous situation. A mentor can help a young person plan ahead by discussing safety and helping him identify people and places he can access if he is in danger.

Distribute and review Handout 4: “Talking With Your Mentee About Staying Safe.”

The mentor can introduce the topic by talking to the youth about thinking ahead about staying safe at home and in the community. For example,

“I want to help you to think of places to go to be safe and people in your life that can help you. Last week you told me you were afraid of some of the older boys in your neighborhood who have been threatening you. It is a good idea for people to have a plan ahead of time, so you will know what to do if something happens.”

5. *Putting It All Together: Role Play*

30 minutes

Distribute appropriate role-play scenarios from Handout 5: “Role Play Scenarios.”

Explain to the participants that this exercise will give them the opportunity to practice all of the components discussed in this session including the behaviors listed on the “Coping With Crisis” chart, the reporting policies that come into play, and talking with youth about staying safe. Have participants get into groups of three and decide who will play the mentor and mentee and a third party if needed. The “third party” might be a community resource person, program staff member, or someone the mentee identified as an emergency contact. The key is to get mentors to think about who else they need to ask for assistance.

Allow 15 minutes for the role play. Discuss in the whole group how it felt as the mentor and the mentee and who the mentee identified as an emergency contact. Bring up the following discussion points:

- How did the mentor react to the situation?
- Was this situation considered “An Issue of Concern” or “Crisis Requiring Intervention”? (Can be dependent on how the role play was enacted—was the child home last night or present during any of the physical fights? What are your state’s reporting laws?)
- Who did the mentor talk to (if anyone) about this situation? Was a report made to child welfare? How was your agency involved? How was the family involved?
- Who did the mentee identify as an emergency contact?
- What role might this person play?

- What role(s) did the “third party” person enact? Why was that role(s) chosen?

6. Self-Care

10 minutes

It takes a lot of emotional energy to be an active listener and support person for someone in crisis. It can break our hearts to hear about a child suffering in any way. For these reasons, it is imperative that mentors find support for themselves as well.

Refer to the "Coping With Crisis" list. Ask which items on the list are things that mentors can do for themselves after dealing with their mentee in crisis. Ask for any additions to the list.

Encourage mentors to call the program coordinator any time to get support around any issue with their mentee.

7. Final Questions & Closing

5 minutes

Ask participants for any final questions or comments about what was just covered. Pass out a session evaluation form. Remind folks about other upcoming events/trainings as they leave.

What are some difficult issues?

Delicate Topics

- Sex
- Peer pressure
- Hygiene
- Behavior
- Alcohol and drugs
- School performance
- Self-image/personal insecurities
- Class/cultural identity
- Others: _____

DELICATE TOPICS are likely to come up during discussions between mentors and mentees, and therefore mentors should be trained to handle these topics directly with youth. Caution needs to be taken, however, since these topics can be touchy and strongly affect the relationship. Generally speaking, delicate topics should be discussed only when initiated by the mentee, and confidentiality takes on greater importance. While mentors should be adequately trained to deal with these topics on their own, they should be encouraged to seek support and feedback from supervisors and other mentors when these issues come up.

Issues of Concern

- Unsafe sex
- Fist fighting
- Minor delinquent behavior
- Gang affiliation
- Drug and alcohol use
- Others: _____

ISSUES OF CONCERN may have significant implications for the life of the mentee, and therefore mentors need to report these concerns to the agency. However, these issues do not necessarily require direct intervention. Many of these issues are ongoing conditions that mentees face, and mentors may need to be trained and supported to accept these aspects of the mentees' lives without judgment. It is important that mentors and programs do not focus too heavily on changing behavior when these issues arise; however, they should be aware of the challenges their mentees face, and over time they may be able to help mentees to ameliorate them.

Crises Requiring Intervention

- Child abuse and neglect
- Abusive relationships
- Pregnancy and STDs
- Health problems
- Drug and alcohol abuse/chemical dependency
- Severe violence
- Arrest/extensive delinquency
- Depression/suicidality
- Mental illness
- Other trauma
- Others: _____

CRISES are of grave concern and may require direct and immediate intervention—mentors should never be expected to handle crises alone! Some, like child abuse and neglect, are mandated by law to be reported to the county; others may require a referral or a direct intervention by the mentor program. Many of these situations will require collaboration with families of mentees and this should be handled by the mentor program manager.

Responsible Mentoring: Talking About Drugs, Sex and Other Difficult Issues, by D. North (Folsom, CA: EMT Associates, 2002). <http://emt.org/userfiles/RespMentoringBooklet.pdf>, p. 1

HANDOUT 2

Are You Prepared?

A CHECKLIST FOR MENTORING PROGRAMS

To be prepared for delicate issues and crisis situations, agencies should:

- Have adequate resources and personnel, including access to a human relations expert.
- Provide adequate training for mentors about youth issues, communication skills, and the boundaries of confidentiality.
- Provide clearly stated agency values and positions on trust.
- Provide action plans and policies for every type of crisis.*
 - What can be handled by mentor alone?
 - What requires supervisor support?
 - What requires family involvement?
 - What requires agency intervention?
 - What requires referral?
 - What requires reporting?
- Provide adequate monitoring and supervision of mentors that includes careful delineation of what issues mentors can handle alone versus those that require agency support and/or intervention.
- Develop strong relationships between agency staff and mentees (and families when possible).
- Develop relationships with referral agencies.
 - Know what services they provide
 - Check their references and visit their facilities
 - Maintain regular contact
 - Follow up on any referrals
 - Continue to network and expand base of available agencies
 - Participate in mentor program networks and coalitions

*NOTE: While we have discussed basic guidelines for types of issues that mentors can handle alone, each agency needs to determine its own exact policies for how various issues will be handled.

Responsible Mentoring: Talking About Drugs, Sex and Other Difficult Issues, by D. North (Folsom, CA: EMT Associates, 2002). <http://emt.org/userfiles/RespMentoringBooklet.pdf>, p. 6

Ten Hints for Helping Someone in Crisis

1. Sitting at eye level with the young person.
2. Not acting surprised or shocked or angry when hearing about the crisis, but at the same time being honest and understanding that it is a difficult situation.
3. Remaining calm and compassionate about the child's experience.
4. Don't pressure the youth to tell more than she is comfortable telling but instead use "open-ended" questions (questions that won't elicit only "yes" or "no" responses) to allow the youth to continue if she is comfortable.
5. Don't make judgmental statements about the situation (e.g., "How could they . . .")
6. Acknowledge that the youth trusted you enough to tell you.
7. Reflect back to the youth what feelings she is expressing ("That sounds scary.")
8. Affirm the youth for using her coping skills and surviving.
9. Be honest about what you need to do with the information.
10. Brainstorm her options with the youth and offer appropriate resources.

Talking With Your Mentee About Staying Safe

Use the following talking points to help your mentee create a mental plan for staying safe. If possible, have the mentee write down important phone numbers on a small card to carry with him/her.

1. Let's think of people you can call for help.

(List name and phone number. If the youth has a cell phone ask him/her to enter the numbers in his/her phone.)

911 for emergencies

Other important names and phone numbers:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

2. If you feel unsafe in your neighborhood, where can you go to ask for help or to use the phone?
3. If you feel unsafe at school, who can you talk to? (Identify at least two people.)
4. If you ever feel unsafe at home, where can you go in the house to stay safe? (Identify at least two places.)

If you can leave the house, where will you go to use the phone?

Remind your mentee that she (or he) can talk to you or program staff if she ever feels afraid but that if she is in immediate danger, she should call 911.

Role Play Scenarios

Mentor

You call your mentee to set up a time to get together. You hear yelling and a baby crying in the background and something that sounds like dishes breaking. A few days later you pick your mentee up for an outing and notice he/she is quieter than usual.

Point to consider:

You can decide who the "third party" will be; that person can role play more than one person.

-----Cut paper in half here-----

Mentee

Your mom and stepfather have been fighting a lot lately. They got into a loud physical fight last night and the police came and took your stepfather to jail.

HANDOUT 5 (cont.)

Mentor

You come into the school where you meet your mentee and her teacher pulls you aside. The teacher tells you that she is worried about your mentee, who has been crying all day. You go into the lunch room and see your mentee sitting by herself with her lunch untouched.

Point to consider:

You can decide who the “third party” will be; that person can role play more than one person.

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Mentee

Your mom has a new boyfriend that you don't like. He has been staying the night at your house and you don't feel comfortable around him. You don't want him to date your mother.

HANDOUT 5 (cont.)

Mentor

You haven't been able to reach your mentee for a few weeks, and usually you meet weekly. After leaving several messages, he finally calls back and says that he would like you to come by after school later this week to see him, but he is staying at his aunt's house. You wonder what has been going on with him.

Point to consider:

You can decide who the "third party" will be, that person can role play more than one person.

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Mentee

Your mom decided to enter drug rehab after the state threatened to take her kids away because of her substance use. You are worried about your mom, are not sure what drug rehab is, and wonder when you will see her again. You don't like having to share a room with your cousins.

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RESOURCES

Foster Youth Mentorship Training for Program Managers, by D. North and B. Ingram (Folsom, CA: EMT Associates, 2003).

<http://www.emt.org/userfiles/FosterYouthSeries5.pdf>

Generic Mentoring Program Policy and Procedure Manual, by L. Ballasy, M. Fulop, and D. St. Amour (Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, National Mentoring Center, 2003).

http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/policy_manual.html

Mentor Guide for People Working With Children of Promise, (Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 2004).

<http://store.yahoo.com/mcgruff/meguforpewow.html>

Reaching and Serving Teen Victims: A Practical Handbook, by J. Whitman (Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 2005).

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/pdffxt/ncj211701.pdf>

Responsible Mentoring: Talking About Drugs, Sex and Other Difficult Issues, by D. North (Folsom, CA: EMT Associates, 2002).

<http://emt.org/userfiles/RespMentoringBooklet.pdf>

Volunteer Education and Development Manual, (Philadelphia, PA: Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, 1991).

<http://www.bbbsa.org>

When Stakes Are High: Research-Based Mentoring for Youth With Multiple Risk Factors, by B. Ingram, D. Johnston, and D. North (Folsom, CA: EMT Associates, 2003).

<http://emt.org/userfiles/WhenStakesAreHigh.pdf>