

Recognizing, Addressing, and Evaluating Crises in TMH

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DISCLAIMER

I am a counselor and I/O psychologist -- not an attorney, physician, or information technology specialist. The information I present is my best attempt to bring you timely and relevant information in a rapidly evolving area. I therefore make no warranty, guarantee, or representation as to the accuracy or sufficiency of the information contained in any training. The goal is **educational only**. You are encouraged to seek specific advice related to your circumstance from your qualified authorities.

14 January 1964

Come gather 'round people wherever you
roam

And admit that the waters around you have
grown

And accept it that soon you'll be drenched to
the bone

If your time to you is worth savin'

Then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink
like a stone

For the times, they are a-changin'

LEGISLATION & OTHER TOPICS EFFECTING TMH

- Affordable Care Act
- Open Notes Law
- Collaborative/Concurrent Documentation
- 21st Century Cures Act
- No Surprises Law/Billing Transparency
- TMH Improvement Act
- Counseling Compact
- Licensure Portability

OPEN NOTES LAW

Psychotherapy notes are exempt, and the clinician can engage in “information blocking” if he or she feels that denying access to the information will “substantially reduce the risk of harm” — meaning, physical harm to the patient or another person or if there is a privacy exception.¹ All licensed health care professionals, not only mental health professionals, can decide what constitutes a “substantial risk” when they are working “in the context of a current or prior clinician-patient relationship.”¹ Examples of this might be domestic violence, child abuse, or elder abuse situations.

21st Century Cures Act - OCT 22

How can sharing mental health notes help folks?

HIPAA grants patients the right to receive and review their full medical records, including psychotherapy notes in electronic records that contain documentation of encounters and are used to bill for services. Only psychotherapy notes held separately can be kept from patients without their permission, and such rules vary state by state.

CURES ACT (con't)

As of April 5, 2021, all U.S. healthcare systems are required to electronically share clinicians' visit notes with patients at no charge. This is required as part of the [21st Century Cures Act](#). **Sharing mental health notes is not required by this rule,** however, many health systems are choosing to share mental health notes at this time.

[OPENNOTES.org/mental-health-professionals](https://opennotes.org/mental-health-professionals)

INTRO THOUGHTS

- Do you suspect that your client is facing a mental health crisis? Their mental state can also dictate their relationship with their family and friends. Since the dawn of time, there's been a direct connection with one's [mind, body, and spirit](#).
- These three parts of life work together, and when one is off-balance, it can throw everything off. Mental breakdowns happen every day because life is a challenge. There may be many triggers that put a person's mental condition in a poor state.

INTRODUCTION

A mental health crisis is when someone is acting in a manner that puts not only themselves but possibly others at risk. They may not act, think, or speak the same. Thankfully, there are usually indicators when someone is in distress, and there are steps you need to take to help.

INTERVENTION

- We are familiar with the signs of a mental crisis. Keep in mind that the triggers and the severity of the issues can vary significantly among people. However, when you learn the signs that something is amiss and learn how to handle it, you can intervene before things escalate.
- Sadly, many people don't know they're mentally heading for a breakdown, so we need to make sure we can identify troubling signs. Here are the most common symptoms that someone is having a mental crisis.

Stress, anxiety and depression
are caused when we are living
to please others.

— Paulo Coelho

Lessons
LEARNED
wise



CUMULATIVE STRESS

Cumulative stress is a common experience for people who work in chronically stressful situations. It results from an accumulation of various **stress** factors such as heavy workload, poor communications, multiple frustrations, coping with situations in which you feel powerless, and the inability to rest or relax. Previous traumas accumulate if not addressed and may manifest in burnout or compassion fatigue. Past traumas can also be activated.

ALL behavior has the goal of meeting a need or desire. Our role is to help folks understand and address their behavior.

In a crises we deal with safety first and then work toward the desired behavior or outcomes.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

ALL behavior is communication

The message we send is the behavior we get-
satisfied people don't change.

ALL words have meaning – say what you mean.

Abnormal reactions to abnormal events is NORMAL
– Viktor Frankl

Remember that crisis observations and
interventions must be documented in assessments,
recovery plans, and progress/process notes



When we are no longer able to
change a situation – we are
challenged to change ourselves.

Viktor E. Frankl

Mood Swings

Mood swings are good indication that something is off. A person who is suffering mentally can go from extreme highs to extreme lows in minutes. Not all mood swings are dangerous, and you need to learn to differentiate between the two.

Dangerous mood swings are those that include:

- Threatening or initiating violence towards others
- Extreme anger where they're breaking items
- Being overjoyed and giddy over the smallest of things
- Feeling the urge to harm themselves

It's hard to deal with violent mood swings, but you must remember that this person doesn't realize that they're having these fluctuations.

Irritability

Irritability and mood swings are similar, yet they're different. Someone irritable is grouchy, touchy, and seems to be on edge. They may be hard to deal with because they will 'snap your head off'. While irritability alone is not a sign of a breakdown, if it accompanies any of the other signs, then it's troublesome.

Hallucinations or Delusions

- Have you ever heard or seen things that no one else does? Commonly, people going through a mental breakdown will hear someone calling their name, yet there will be no one there. Hallucinations or delusions cause people to hear, see, or believe things cannot be validated.
- It's like the feeling of someone who has consumed too much of a hard drug, and they are in a dazed and confused state. Someone who is mentally breaking often loses touch with reality, and hallucinations are commonplace.
- A real psychotic break can affect your reasoning skills as well as bodily sensations. When you see any of these signs, it's imperative to get help immediately.

Paranoia

Paranoid feelings are often observed with conditions like Schizophrenia, but it can also be displayed during a mental crisis. Being paranoid means that a person becomes very distrustful of everything around them.

For example, an individual experiencing a break may not trust the food they're served for fear that someone poisoned it. Paranoia is a huge red flag that something is mentally incorrect.

Depression

Many things can cause depression, including a chemical imbalance in the brain or by circumstances, according to [Harvard Health Publishing](#). The key is to find and treat the underlying issues. When someone is in a constant state of depression and losing interest in things they love, then it can be a sign that they're heading for a significant mental health crisis.

Neglecting Responsibilities

If a person forgets to go to work, leaves the kids at school, or fails to turn the water off in the bathroom, then these are all signs that something is off. A person who is in crisis will often forget to do the things that they always do. Their routine is messed up, and they can't remember what comes next.

Restlessness

Restlessness is like anxiety, and it may even be caused by anxiousness. A restless person may pace the floor, act like they're on edge, and this behavior may be accompanied by irritability and moodiness too.

Isolation

Humans are social beings that thrive when they're around others. When someone wants to lock themselves away from the world, they will isolate themselves. [Isolation is a troubling sign](#) because it means that a person's mental state is deteriorating. It doesn't always mean that they're losing touch with reality, but it can be caused by anxiety, depression, and many other things. If your client can no longer interact with others from a deteriorating mental state, then something is amiss.

Suicidal Ideations

When life's troubles get so heavy, an individual may experience a mental crisis and wish to die. Some don't see a reason to get up in the morning, which would fall into the depression category. However, someone who thinks and plans a way to kill themselves has suicidal ideations.

Hygiene Issues

- One of the first ways you can tell if someone is having mental health issues is their hygiene. A person who is always well-kempt that suddenly has a not so fresh smell or appears disheveled may be in trouble.
- When people don't feel like themselves, they will let essential things like hygiene fall. They don't want to smell that way, but they might truthfully forget to bathe or even care if they didn't.

Dissociative Amnesia

While a person may forget to get the kids at school, there is another type of forgetfulness that is more concerning. It's the inability to recall dates, times, or events in their life. There is dissociative amnesia that is a coping skill the mind uses to keep it from further harm. According to the [Cleveland Clinic](#), these episodes are categorized as localized, generalized, or fugue.

Obsessed with Medical Symptoms

Many people get on the internet to research any symptoms they're having. While it's okay to do that occasionally, it can get to the point of an obsession. Someone who is suffering from hypochondria is continually fearing something wrong with them, and they are trying to get to the bottom of it.

They may have numerous tests run, and while they show nothing amiss, they will still insist it's not in their head. While hypochondria is a separate mental health diagnosis, it can also indicate that someone is starting to break mentally.

Appetite Changes

Weight fluctuations in either direction can be a sign of trouble. If a person loses or gains more than 10 pounds in a short period, then it's cause for alarm. A person suffering from a mental health crisis may gorge on foods or avoid them altogether. Extreme changes in eating habits must be evaluated.

Sleeping Too Much or Too Little

- Sleeping habits are another thing that links to mental health. Thus, sleeping too much or too little can be due to a mental health issue. Insomnia can accompany problems with mental health as well as wanting to sleep too much.
- These can also be signs of depression, which can be part of a breakdown or a diagnosis independently.

Anxiety and Fear

- A person that once was full of life and could do anything may now be fearful of leaving home. They may be unable to get behind the wheel of the car or even go to the grocery store. [Anxiety and fear](#) can do a number on someone, and it's enough to make them shut down.
- A mental health crisis isn't always someone wanting to kill themselves or others; sometimes, it causes a person to want to shut the door and make the world go away.

Six-Step Crisis Intervention Model

Step 1: Ensure the Individual's Safety

Step 2: Define the Problem

Step 3: Provide Support

Step 4: Explore Alternatives

Step 5: Make Plans

Step 6: Obtain Commitment

USING THIS MODEL

- **Accurate assessments:** This strategy is based on the results of your assessments. They must be accurate. Crisis workers must remember that every person and situation is unique. Generalizations can lead to dangerous errors that divert the treatment plan. Robust assessment tools can be particularly useful in the six-step strategy.
- **Empowerment:** Crises occur when a person loses control and feels unsafe. The six-step model focuses on restoring that power through collaboration. The crisis worker should maintain an open mind when problem-solving and look for routes that help the person regain control. A heavy-handed approach might be necessary for some patients, but they should contribute to the best of their ability.
- **Action-oriented strategizing:** Crisis intervention is focused on action and the situation at hand. Crisis workers should recognize the impacts of the situation, anticipate its effects and help the client create a plan. Each step in the process should be geared toward that end goal.
- **Focus on the present:** Similarly, crisis intervention offers immediate support. Unlike long-term solutions like psychotherapy, the crisis worker must provide immediate support, like coping skills that the patient can use right away or access to resources that they can use to quickly return to the pre-crisis state.
- **A holistic view of the client:** The crisis worker needs to maintain their holistic view of the client, considering the whole person instead of separating them from their cognitive and emotional functioning.

It's the moments that I
stopped just to be, rather
than do, that have given
me true happiness.

Sir Richard Branson