

Crisis Intervention in our Community: How JFS Can Help

We all experience crisis in our lifetimes, whether that is something expected or something unexpected and tragic. In the midst of it, we feel overwhelmed and temporarily unable to cope. But for many people, with time and support the crisis resolves.



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LMSW, CDP

For some though, that chaotic time of crisis is processed inside our brains and bodies as trauma, and that can disrupt our lives for much longer. While every trauma has a reaction to a very stressful crisis at its root, not every crisis has to be processed as a trauma. Why does this matter?

WHEN AN EVENT IS PROCESSED AS TRAUMA

When we experience a crisis in our own lives, or see, hear or learn about an event that is deeply disturbing, shocking and totally outside our normal experience, we feel unsafe. And the danger can be reinforced each time we read about it on social media, causing us

to feel overwhelmed and helpless, triggering our built-in physiologic response to stress, which can vary tremendously from person to person. This can impact us in a variety of ways, ranging from disrupted sleep, anxiety, agitation, shallow breathing and a pounding heart, to difficulty processing or remembering information, confusion, irritation, increased sadness and uncontrollable crying as examples.

This stress response is *a normal reaction to an abnormal event*. We are biologically hardwired to respond to stressful events in this way in order to act swiftly to keep ourselves

safe and out of harm's way. In short, stress isn't just an emotion we feel, but it's something that lives in our bodies.

For many, these symptoms resolve on their own, but, for some, symptoms can persist. These lingering signs of acute stress are *not* a sign of mental illness, but if unaddressed they can leave us more vulnerable to developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The good news is that a single conversation with a trained crisis intervention first responder can help people return to their normal baseline functioning much sooner and reduce the likelihood of developing

PTSD. Luckily, help is readily available in the community.

The JFS Crisis Support Team has been intervening when requested for the past two years and has begun training others in hopes that there will be enough trained interventionists that no community member will experience a crisis alone.

Typically, interventions happen as a one-time appointment and last no more than an hour. During that time, the interventionist follows a model specifically designed to help people return to baseline functioning. Ideally, this takes place in the first 48 hours following a crisis but can still be helpful if that 48-hour window has passed.

WHEN DO I CALL FOR THIS TYPE OF CRISIS SUPPORT?

JFS Crisis Support interventions are for life crises in which we struggle to shut down our physiologic response to stress. That means that an event occurs that triggers the physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioral symptoms described above, and these symptoms do not resolve



within a few hours, but instead continue to disrupt our ability to function as we normally would.

Some examples of interventions appropriate for JFS Crisis Support include the immediate aftermath of a life-changing crisis such as the sudden, unexpected death of a family member, an antisemitic incident, a violent attack such as the shooting at MSU, in the wake of a natural disaster, or in a workplace following the unexpected death of a colleague.

These are only a few examples, but the critical factors are the timing, which is very soon after a crisis, and the presence of uncontrolled symptoms of a physiologic response to stress.

This is very different from unfortunate everyday situations where we may feel intense emotions but are still able to function, such as after a bad breakup, where we can get help by talking to a good friend or calling a therapist.

It is also different from the ongoing grief from a loss suffered a few months ago, again, where despite our grief, we can function and may get help from a grief support group, therapist or rabbi.

HOW CAN I GET HELP?

When someone is struggling with stress symptoms following a crisis, and an intervention from the Crisis Support Team

would be helpful, call our new dedicated phone line (248) 592-3980, to schedule a crisis intervention. This line will be answered during business hours by a member of our Resource Center team and will be forwarded to the agency's answering service on evenings, weekends and holidays and triaged appropriately.

NEED DIFFERENT HELP?

It is very important to understand that contacting JFS for an intervention is not the right call for someone in the midst of an unsafe situation who needs help dispatched immediately, which would necessitate a call


to 911. It is also not for someone who feels actively suicidal, which would mean a call to 988, the National Suicide Hotline, which has specially trained staff who can provide immediate assistance 24/7.

The JFS Crisis Support Team is overseen by this author (Lynn Breuer LMSW, CDP, senior director of Community Outreach & Wellness); Yuliya Gaydayenko MA, LMSW, chief program officer, Older Adult Services; and Dini Peterson LMSW, chief program officer, Mental Health & Safety Net Services.

You do not need to be a mental health professional to learn how to provide this invaluable support in the community. Reach out to JFS to be trained. ☎


If you or a loved one needs support in the immediate aftermath of a crisis, please contact JFS at (248) 592-3980.

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