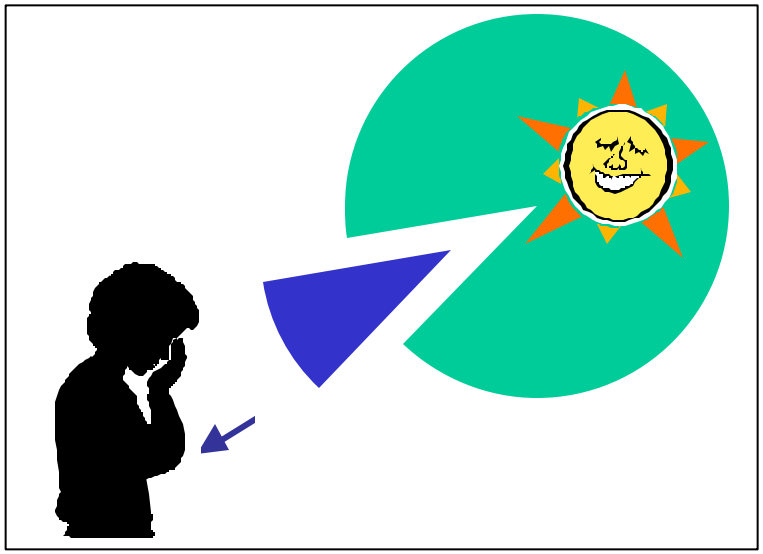
INTRODUCTION TO CRISIS THEORY

"crisis is not a pathological state; it may occur to anyone at any stage in his or her life span." (Golan, 1978)

Few of us will ever experience psychopathology first hand. Less than 20% of the population will have a clinically severe depression and less than 2% a psychotic episode. But we will all experience active crisis in our lives.



INTRODUCTION

Active **Crisis** is a normal part of living and represents a transient, time-limited state of disorganization.

Not only do **INDIVIDUALS** experience active crisis, but so do:



FAMILIES



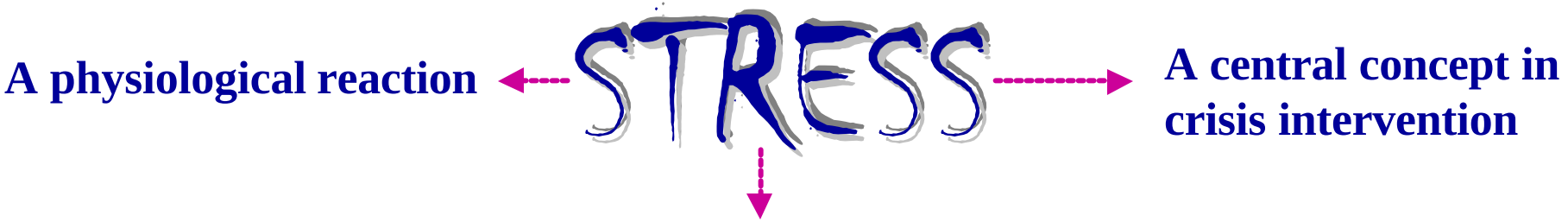
COMMUNITIES



ORGANIZATIONS

"When the load shifts or gets too heavy, we may slip or stumble off the path of life. Sometimes we need help getting back on our path or finding a new path and continuing our journey." **(Ancient Social Work Proverb)**

INTRODUCTION



An analysis of immediate and recent STRESSORS is central to understanding the origins of active crisis.

EVENTS

Sudden, short-lived, changes that happen to a system at a time and place. They have an immediate impact like an accident, an earthquake or a holiday.

CONDITIONS

Conditions exist over a period of time and represent a state of being. Conditions describe interpersonal and physical environments of the organism.

STRESSFUL CONDITIONS

ENVIRONMENTAL

Typical environmental stressors might include:

noise, crowding,

pollution,

lack of material resources,

danger, etc.

INTERPERSONAL

Typical interpersonal stressors would involve:

excessive role strains and demands,

conflicts with others,

lack of opportunities,

abusive or harassing situations, etc.

EVENTS vs CONDITIONS

Events → may produce → **conditions:**

Car accident →	Disability/Handicap
Plant closing →	Chronic unemployment

STRESSFUL EVENTS are salient

Clients are usually aware of the stressful events in their lives; though often they do not see the connection between these events and the distress they may be experiencing.

STRESSFUL CONDITIONS are subtle

Because stressful conditions are continuously experienced, clients accommodate to them and may even take them for granted. Clients are often unaware of the stressful conditions in their lives.

PRACTICE CASE EXAMPLE

Mary is a 32 y.o. single mother of two children (ages 13 and 10). Two months ago her X - husband left the state and stopped paying child support. Mary is a computer clerk at a local bank. On some days she sits in front of her computer terminal for 8 hours. Her supervisor is the 24 y.o. son of the bank president. He has little experience with the bank's antiquated computer system which often breaks down. He refers to the women in the bank as "girls" and often makes sexual advances to Mary and other single women in the bank. Mary is crowded with seven other women into a small, basement room which has poor ventilation, fluorescent lighting, no windows, and a faulty thermostat.

Find two stressful events in this case.

Find nine stressful conditions.

ANSWERS TO PRACTICE CASE EXAMPLE

Stressful events are highlighted in blue.

Stressful conditions are highlighted in red.

Mary is a 32 y.o. single mother of two children (ages 13 and 10). Two months ago her X - husband left the state and stopped paying child support. Mary is a computer clerk at a local bank. On some days she sits in front of her computer terminal for 8 hours. Her supervisor is the 24 y.o. son of the bank president. He has little experience with the bank's antiquated computer system which often breaks down. He refers to the women in the bank as "girls" and often makes sexual advances to Mary and other single women in the bank. Mary is crowded with seven other women into a small, basement room which has poor ventilation, fluorescent lighting, no windows, and a faulty thermostat.

SUMMARY

•There is a difference between active crisis and mental illness.
•Crises can happen to any size system: individuals, families, small groups, organizations, etc.
•Stress is a “fuzzy” concept and it is easier to think of stressors.
•Some stressors (i.e. stressful events) happen suddenly.
•Some stressors (i.e. stressful conditions) exit over a period of time.
•Stressful conditions may exist in our physical environment and our interpersonal relationships.
•Stressful events are easier to recognize than stressful conditions.
•Stressful events sometime evolve into stressful conditions.

Return to Table of Contents

