Precipitating Factor

The PRECIPITATING FACTOR is the event that happens to an individual or family just before they enter active crisis.

It may represent a major change, or it may be just a microstressor.

Precipitating Factor

There are a number reasons why an individual or family may over-react to an insignificant event during the vulnerable state. These fall under three different points of view.

A. Problem solving viewpoint:

1. **Loss of Social Support** - The event represents a loss of the client's natural support system.

For Example: a family may tell one of its members to stop asking for money until that member gets his or her life back in order.

2. **New Coping Skill** - The event requires a coping response that is not in the client's coping repertoire.

For Example: in traumatic situations a client may feel totally overwhelmed and unable to cope with the tragic event

Precipitating Factor

B. PSYCHO-DYNAMIC VIEWPOINT

3. **Memories -** The event reminds the individual of an old instinctual conflict that has not been mastered.

For Example: the individual may have been shuffled from one foster family to another during her early life and is very sensitive to any event that even appears like a rejection.

C. STOCHASTIC PERSPECTIVE

4. **Final Straw -** There is no significance to the event itself except that the individual is carrying around so much stress that even a minor event is overwhelming at that point.

For Example: all individuals will crack if too many demands are placed on them.

Precipitating Factor

Though the Precipitating Factor is a minor event, for some clients it will have multiple meanings.

Case Example

On a Friday evening after a long and stressful exam week and learning that she is being laid off her part-time job, a single parent mother gets a call from her boyfriend saying that he has the flu and will not be able to go out with her that evening. The call is interpreted as a rejection; a lost chance to get support; and the final blow of a disastrous week. In response to the call, she takes an overdose of sleeping pills and crawls into bed.

(Moral: Before canceling a date, check it out with your partner!**)**

Precipitating Factor

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THE INTERVIEW

When interviewing a client in crisis, the counselor should discover the Precipitating Factor. This event is pivotal in the crisis situation and in many crises, individuals or families can be helped to quickly regain control of their lives by focusing on the precipitant.

CAVEAT - Most clients in crisis will have a hard time identifying the precipitant!



WHY DON'T CLIENTS SEE IT?

A. Many clients cannot recall the precipitating factor.

Example: "Nope, I can't think of anything that has changed in my life over the past three months" says a client who recently experienced a miscarriage.

B. Some clients cannot see a connection between the precipitant and how they feel.

Examples: "Lots of people lose their jobs! I can't see how that's important!"

"Well my dog was run over, but I can't believe that got me this upset."

C. In some crisis situations there is no minor event as a precipitant.

Example: "It just seemed harder and harder to go on. Everything just slowed down!"

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