**Definition of Crisis**

*Taken from Effective Helping by Barbara F. Okun*

A crisis is a state that exists when a person is thrown completely off balanced emotionally by an unexpected and potentially harmful event, difficult developmental transition, or both. The major difference between stress and crisis is that a crisis is limited, whereas stress can be ongoing. Crises are not usually predictable or expected, and it is this unexpectedness that can intensify the reaction to crises.

When we are in crisis, we feel a loss of control and power over ourselves and our lives. Common crisis terms are *disequilibrium, disorientation, and disruption*. It is the intense emotional experience of these states that creates the crisis. Common feeling responses to crisis include apathy, depression, guilt, and loss of self-esteem. People in crisis find that the ways they solved problems and coped with difficulties in the past no longer work, and they become more and more upset and frightened.

When we talk about crisis, we are referring to people’s emotional reactions to a situation, *not* the situation itself. Therefore, crisis intervention helpers work with a person’s perceptions and judgments of the crisis, not with the event itself.

[example] If a person comes to you in crisis because of an accident, you deal with that person’s feelings and thoughts about the accident, not with the accident as an isolated event.