CRISIS INTERVENTION: A POLICE MODEL FOR DISPUTE SETTLEMENT

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I. Introduction

Definition of Crisis Intervention

Crisis Intervention is not a totally new approach in police work; it is essentially a definition of the methods and techniques that peace officers have been employing on the streets when attempting to quell disturbance calls. Since these methods and techniques have been proven in the field, Crisis Intervention is an attempt at systemetizing the procedures involved in disturbance calls and thereby enhance the security as well as success of the responding officers.

The innovative approach employed in crisis intervention revolves around the specific procedures for handling the "415-Disturbance" call and decreasing the possibility of returning to the same scene and re-involve the police. This is not to imply that all situations can be handled or resolved by the police; the point is that many disturbance calls can be settled if handled properly. If the officers recognize that the situation cannot be handled by them, then either a referral to a more specialized agency (i.e., family counseling, drug programs, etc.) can be made or, as a last resort, the disputants can be separated and/or arrested. This latter procedure of arresting is a final alternative that does not solve the problem

but merely forestalls the possibility of violence.

II. The Concept Of Crisis

What Is a Crisis?

A crisis is a state:

> . . . provoked when a person faces an obstacle to important life goals that is, for a time, insurmountable through the utilization of customary methods of problem-solving. A period of disorganization ensues, a period of upset, during which many different abortive attempts at solution are made. Eventually some kind of adaptation is achieved which may or may not be in the best interest of that person and his fellows (Caplan 1961, in Parker and Meier 1975:185).

A crisis is essentially a period of dis-equilibrium that arrises when an individual is confronted with a problem that cannot be solved by that individual's normal range of problem solving mechanisms (Parad and Caplan 1960).

Parker and Meier (1975:186) point out that a crisis is an individual's response to a precipitating event and not the event itself. Frustration arrises when the individual is unable to provide a means by which a problem can be resolved. Caplan (1964) has found that individuals facing a particular crisis will initially employ traditional mechanisms to cope with a problem. These traditional mechanisms may range from psychologically rationalizing the cause and effect of a problem to subconsciously ignoring the existance of a problem.

If the traditional defenses and response mechanisms are ineffectual, then the individual will enter a phase of genuine emotional upset (Caplan 1964).

Schwartz (1971, in Parker and Meier 1975:188) proposes specific procedural principles that will enable a mediator (such as a police officer responding to a disturbance call) to properly handle a crisis situation:

1. Help the individual to face the crisis.
2. Assist the individual to face the crisis in manageable doses.
3. Assist fact finding - help the individual examine the problem in a reality-based frame of reference.
4. Avoid false reassurance - everything may not turn out all right. Reassurance in the individual's ability to handle the crisis is of value.
5. Discourage projection - blaming of others is not of therapeutic value to the individual.
6. Help the individual to accept help; use of family or other social resources can assist in restoring equilibrium.
7. Assist with everyday tasks; arrange for babysitting, cleaning, a homemaker, etc.

Communication Theory

The basis of crisis intervention theory is the means by which a mediator is able to communicate with a disputant. With respects to training criminal justice personnel in crisis intervention, the focus is on the ". . . interpersonal nature of communication, rather than on the psycho-social development or other aspects of the individual's behavior" (Parker and Meier 1975:25).

This "interpersonal nature of communication" revolves around the ability of the mediator (i.e., the police officer) to facilitate communication by way of empathizing with the disputant. Empathizing does not necessarily give insight into the nature of a particular problem but rather, it encourages ". . . the exploration of feeling so that the recipient can better understand his own choices" (Parker and Meier 1975:31).

Carkhuff and Berenson (1967) have proposed a continuum of empathic responses that are employed by mediators; this continuum ranges from

"High Empathy", whereby the communicator (i.e., the police officer) shows sensitivity to underlying feeling, as well as to surface expressed emotion, to "Low Empathy" where the communicator ignores or grossly misunderstands the feelings of the other:

1. Low Empathy - The communicator shows little or no understanding of the most basic part of what the other has communicated. He seems out of touch with what the other has said, and responds only from his own frame of reference. In "Low Empathy" the first person subtracts from the interpersonal encounter.

2. Moderate Empathy - The communicator shows that he has grasped at least the essential part of the message. His message fits well with what the other is saying and is essentially interchangeable. The communicator shares with the other his understanding of at least the surface feelings and main content of the message. He has not completely "missed the point" as in Low Empathy, where there may not be even the slightest acknowledgment of what the person has communicated.

3. High Empathy - In deep empathy there is a consistent communication on the part of the communicator that indicates that he not only hears the surface message, but is able to sense the underlying feelings and concerns which are barely hinted at in the overt communication of the second person. In High Empathy, the communicator's responses are additive or expand on what the person has started, and thus allow him to explore his feelings. In deep empathy, the recipient has a feeling of being able to elaborate on his discussion; he feels truly understood and communication is opened up; there is an air of excitement about really being heard by the other. This is most important when the police officer or corrections counselor must communicate with distressed persons, as they are most often required to do in their daily work (Parker and Meier 1975:27).

An example of this continuum of empathic responses would be:

Wife: "My husband just sits around all day and gets drunk."

Low Empathy: "How much does he drink?"

Moderate Empathy: "Perhaps your husband needs help."

High Empathy: "I can see that you are frustrated, so how can you help to solve this problem?"

Communicating with these types of empathic responses may not necessarily

solve a problem but it may reduce hostility among disputants and provide a more cordial atmosphere for discussing a problem (Parker and Meier 1975).

Carkhuff (1969, in Parker and Meier 1975:32) proposes the following guidlines for formulating empathic responses:

1. The helper will find that he is most effective in communicating an empathic understanding when he concentrates with intensity upon the helpee's experiences, both verbal and non-verbal.
2. The helper will find that initially he is most effective in communicating empathic understanding when he concentrates upon responses that are interchangeable withthose of the helpee.
3. The helper will find that he is most effective in communicating empathic understanding when he formulates his responses in language that is most attuned to the helpee.
4. The helper will find that he is most effective in communicating empathic understanding when he responds in a feeling tone similar to that communicated by the helpee.
5. The helper will find that he is most effective in communicating empathic understanding when he is most responsive.
6. The helper will find that he is most effective in communicating empathic understanding when, having established an interchangeable base of communication, he moves tentatively toward expanding and clarifying the helpee's experiences at higher levels.
7. The helper will find that he is most effective in communicating empathic understanding when he concentrates upon what is not being expressed by the helpee.
8. The helper will find that he is most effective in communicating empathic understanding when he employs the helpee's behavior as the best guideline in assessing the effectiveness of his responses.

III. The Bard Crisis Intervention Model

During the early 1970's, Dr. Morton Bard, in conjunction with the New York Police Department, conducted an experimental program in crisis intervention training for police officers (Bard 1970, 1975).

Bard's methodology in training consisted of classroom instruction in police-relevant material in the behavioral and social sciences and specific human conflict and management techniques (Zacker and Bard 1973).

The Bard study outlined the following procedural steps in crisis intervention:

1. Prevent violence by separating the disputants.
2. Allow only one person to talk at a time.
3. Take the disputants into separate rooms.
4. Switch officers so that the stories can be checked out.
5. In listening to the stories, try to find out in each case what each individual contributed to the conflict.
6. If one of the disputants hold himself to blame, find out in what ways the other shares the blame.
7. Ask questions so as to get the details as clear as possible.
8. Find out if there has been a previous history of this kind of behavior.
9. See if the history goes back to before the marriage to other relationships or similar relationships in the present.
10. Give each person the opportunity to speak in detail.
11. Bring the couple togeather to tell their stories to each other. Again, make sure only one person speaks at a time.
12. Point out similarities and discrepancies in the stories.
13. Point out the part that each is playing.
14. Get a reaction from both about what the officers say they see is going on.
15. Ask what the couple plan to do in response to what has transpired and to the officers' reactions. If they seem to understand and say they want to try to work it out, accept it.
16. If you disagree with their response, suggest that they seek other help. If necessary, make the referral.
17. While noting that there will be further difficulties, assure them that if they sit down and talk at least they can come out in the open and try to resolve it.
18. If not in the beginning, then before you leave, make sure that they know your name (Bard 1970:19).

In applying the Bard model to actual domestic disturbance calls, this author has found some minor points of disagreement.

In step number 3, Bard suggests that the disputants should be placed in separate rooms. The disadvantage in this procedure is that both disputants become more anxious to know what the other disputant is saying. In essence, a problem cannot be solved or even discussed unless both disputants confront eachother and relate their version of the problem. Also, the officers' safety and security is compromised if the two officers are separated; both officers must be present in case of mutual assistance.

In step number 4, it is not necessary to switch the interviewing officers, especially when one officer has already established rapport with the disputants. It is only necessary to switch officers when one officer is having difficulty with communicating with one or both of the disputants.

IV. Role Perceptions

Types of Responses

The methods employed by police officers when confronted with a disturbance call are ultimately reflected in the officers' perception of his or her role as a law enforcement officer.

One type of officer may perceive his or her role as a basic "keeper of the peace" and thereby consider disturbance calls as a violation of the law, regardless of the circumstances surrounding the nature of the disturbance. This type of officer does not perceive his or her role as a "social worker" and is not concerned with solving the particular problem. A typical response by this type of officer would be to enter the disturbance scene (i.e., a home in a family dispute), separate the disputants and then advise the disputants that they are in violation of the law and must cease.

otherwise, they will be arrested. The officer will usually warn the disputants that if he or she must return to the scene that an arrest will be made. This type of officer is attempting to "solve the problem" by the use of fear and authority. Since the reasons for the argument have not been resolved then it is probable that the officer will have to return.

A second type of officer will respond to the scene and, as an example, in the case of a druken husband, become somewhat envolved by escourting the husband to a motel or home of a friend of the husband. This officer's primary concern is to avert violence. Since the husband is perceived as the antagonist then, the officer merely removes the husband from the scene. Again, the nature of the problem may not be discussed and the use of fear and authority may be employed by the officer.

A third type of officer, in the same situation, may employ the crisis intervention model in the hopes of achieving a resolution to the problem. This type of officer perceives his or her role as a mediator (but not a "social worker") performing, in essence, a service. This officer will spend more time at the scene and will have to become envolved as a mediator. This type of officer may even find it necessary to refer the family to an agency specializing in counseling or alcoholism. Or perhaps, the drinking was a symptom of an even greater problem such as unemployment. The officer may refer the husband to a social service or employment agency, making sure to advise the family what costs are envolved and what procedures must be followed. This type of officer may dislike disturbance calls just as much as the first and second officer but finds it more advantageous and efficient to "solve a problem" rather than allow it to fester and possibly end in tragedy.

V. Crisis Intervention Training

As an instructor in crisis intervention at a local police academy, this author has found that the primary problem with training recruits is that the recruits have differing role perceptions of how they should perform their law enforcement duties. As stated previously, police officers do not want to become "social workers." Some recruits feel that in applying the crisis model, they are losing their "detachment" as professional officers and are actively becoming envolved in family problems. This author confronts the problem by emphasizing that over 50% of all police calls involve personal and interpersonal matters (Cumming et. al. 1965). By increasing the officers' ability to cope with basic interpersonal communication, the officer will become more proficient in his or her duties.

A second problem envolving crisis intervention training revolves around the matter of officer safety and security. If the goals of crisis intervention training are not clearly stated, then the trainees may feel that they are being told what to do, even in potentially dangerous situations. As stated by one recruit: "I am not going to sit down and talk to some guy if he is coming at me with a kitchen knife." Zacker and Bard (1973) have found the same type of response from their trainees: "As it was, communication was maintained subsequent to a clarification of goals and an explanation that there was no intention to tell anyone what they ought to do" (Zacker and Bard 1973:48).

This author has found that trainees have a tendency to feel that crisis intervention training and methods will compromise their own safety and security. Once it is clearly stated that safety and security is paramount and must always be maintained, then the trainees are more receptive to the program.

Summary

Crisis intervention as a procedural method of dispute settlement is gradually becoming accepted throughout the nation. Various police officers have been employing many of the procedural steps as outlined by Bard (1970) without even recognizing that they are following a systematic model. To a police officer, his or her defined procedures and behaviors have survival value; they change their methods of approach when they perceive an enhancement of this survival value.

It is also a fallacy to assume that just because an officer is a "veteran" that this officer will be resistant to change. This veteran officer changes his or her procedures and behaviors when the credibility of a new concept, such as crisis intervention, is proven to work "in the streets."

Actually, the concept of crisis intervention training appears to be more difficult when applying the training program to recruit officers. The recruit has little or no frame of reference to base a judgment on "what works" when handling a disturbance call. Many of these recruits have been attracted to the law enforcement profession by strongly identifying with the more commercial (i.e., mass media) stereotype of "what is a cop." In some cases, the recruit is actually disillusioned when he or she is told that they must perform a service in response to the needs of the community; this type of officer feels that the reverse is true, whereby the response to the community is based upon personal perceptions and not the needs of the community.

In summary, crisis intervention is a model to be applied by police officers because of its survival value to the officers and because of its more "humanistic" approach to resolving disputes.

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