

# Helping Teens and Adolescents in Crisis

## A Pastoral Care Response

### A Resource for Parents

By: Benjamin Darnell, M.Div.  
Edited by: Josh Engelfield, MSSA, LSW  
Edited by: Alicia Darnell, M.A. Theology

### Goals and Mission

The following “Pastoral Care Response” and “Resource for Parents” is not a comprehensive guide for diagnosing or treating any mental, cognitive, behavioral, substance related, psychotic, anxiety or mood, eating or sleeping, sexual / gender identity, or personality disorder of any kind, just to name a few. **Rather, this resource hopes to provide a pastoral care response to our teens and adolescents who may be in crisis.** Our hope is that this simple method of pastoral care will help parents and family members to listen and respond more effectively during times of crisis in the life of those teenagers and adolescents whom they love. Therefore, this basic resource has three overarching goals:

- 1) To provide some possible warning signs to parents and family members of teens and adolescents who may be in crisis. (“Warning signs” are typically characterized as any behavior which can indicate crisis, trouble, trauma, conflict or difficulties in the life of a young person.)
- 2) To give parents and family members of teens and adolescents empathetic, active listening skills so as to offer support and comfort to a young person who may be in crisis or trouble.
- 3) To provide some additional resources that could help parents and family members seek the option of professional help that is congruent with Catholic principles.

---

### How a Teen or Adolescent Crisis can Develop

#### What is a “Crisis”?

A teen or adolescent crisis can generally be defined as those experiences in which a young person suffers from any underlying negative cause or effect in their life that creates a difficulty in coping or managing feelings or moods; or that creates overwhelming feelings of anxiety, trauma or related struggles of conflict. Crisis can occur anytime in the life of a teen from internal or external sources.

#### Some examples of “crisis” could include:

Suicidal thinking  
Depression  
Stress  
Sexual activity  
Problems in managing friendships or relationships of any kind  
Peer or social pressure  
Mental, cognitive or behavioral disorder  
Serious trauma in the life of a teen such as the death of a loved one, a friend, or the divorce / separation of parents  
A major change in environment such as moving to a new school, city or home  
Substance use or abuse  
Falling victim to crime or participating in crime  
Experiencing physical or sexual abuse  
Teen pregnancy  
Abortion  
Addiction  
A car accident  
A natural disaster  
A school shooting

Various types of family conflict  
Lack of structured discipline or healthy, constructive rules  
An inadequate bond in the relationship between parents and child  
Or, any other type of similarly related critical situation

There could be numerous causes of crisis in the life of a teen or adolescent. Often these crisis experiences are felt more profoundly in teens than in adults due to their emotional, psychological, spiritual and physiological stages of development. Sometimes what an adult may label as a simple, easily resolved, conflict could trigger a crisis of epic proportions in the life of a teenager. On the contrary, when teens have suffered multiple crisis experiences, such as repetitive sexual abuse, they may not recognize the scope or magnitude of trauma that's affecting their life years after the abuse has occurred.

---

### **Resource:**

For further insight on this subject please listen to the following podcast from "Focus on the Family," regarding a parent's role in helping their teen children in crisis. This resource helps to differentiate between authentic crisis in the life of teens and adolescents versus "normal" teen and adolescent behavior. This podcast also provides insight on the nature of depression: [http://media.focusonthefamily.com/fotf/mp3/fof\\_daily\\_broadcast/ffd\\_2009/ffd\\_20090304.mp3](http://media.focusonthefamily.com/fotf/mp3/fof_daily_broadcast/ffd_2009/ffd_20090304.mp3) (Please note: "Focus on the Family" is a Biblically based Christian resource with the overarching goal of helping the foundation of society and culture – the family – to thrive by supporting all families worldwide, with special focus on healing broken family life. However, this resource is not strictly Catholic. Yet, since the Biblical foundation within the goals and mission of "Focus on the Family" are essentially grounded in the Catholic Church, which is the definitive source of Sacred Scripture passed down through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in an authoritative way, this resource can be included herein due to its successful, informative and highly developed web pages pertaining to youth in crisis.)

---

## **What to Offer Teens or Adolescents in Crisis**

Below are five important steps to implement in order to help teens and adolescents manage crisis situations in holy, healthy ways:

- 1) To provide a safe and secure place for the young person.**
  - 2) To offer, in the context of that safe and secure place, the opportunity to express any fears, frustrations, trauma, grief, sadness, or anxiety of any kind and to allow the teen to articulate these overwhelming feelings and emotions. Saying a prayer and invoking the Holy Spirit at this stage can be a wonderful invitation of God's grace, help and presence.**
  - 3) To offer a non-judgmental validation regarding the crisis. For example: "It seems like you're so upset about this right now that it's causing you lots of anxiety."**
  - 4) To give teens in crisis concrete empathetic, compassionate care in the form of time and attention as well as continued help to articulate their feelings.**
  - 5) To offer further support or referral to a professional(s).**
- 

## **A Pastoral Care Response** **What is "Pastoral Care"?**

Although parents may or may not consider themselves to be "pastoral" people, it is true that the Christian family "should be called a *domestic church*."<sup>1</sup> The Christian family "is a community of faith, hope and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church, as is evident in the New Testament."<sup>2</sup> Further, "the Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and

---

<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), §2204.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father's work of creation,<sup>33</sup> as well as the redemptive work of the Son, Jesus Christ, who is the Good Shepherd that gathers the lost sheep to himself (Jn. 10:11, 14). It was Jesus Christ who took on human flesh and entered into time to become a man in order to accomplish our salvation. For this reason, all pastoral care in a Catholic context is oriented toward redemption in Christ, heaven itself. Our principal goal and mission in the domestic church of the family is to get ourselves and our families to heaven.

Pastoral care certainly includes helping those among us who experience or suffer crisis. It also includes help and focus on freeing others from unhealthy choices, the negative effects of circumstances that have occurred in people's lives, even breaking possible cycles of addiction or sin in the life of those entrusted to our care. The ultimate vision of this type of care includes a faith based context, reception of the Sacraments as those signs of God's love that cause healing and redemption, as well as spiritual formation, prayer, and the healthy integration of our entire Catholic life.

For example, if a teenager is trapped in an unhealthy cycle of addiction to pornography which causes a crisis of identity or friendship or dating, the goal of pastoral care would not only hope to break the cycle of addiction but also to confront the sinfulness of the addiction as well, hoping to bring deeper freedom to love as a person created in God's image and likeness.

Finally, and in brief, our goals and mission of helping teens and adolescents in crisis necessarily include God, our Catholic identity and faith, as well as an adequate understanding of the sanctity of the human person.

This simple resource hopes to help parents and family members of teens or adolescents in crisis by providing a paradigm of pastoral care while keeping with the aforementioned goals and mission found above.

---

## **Goal #1:**

### **POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS OF TEENS AND ADOLESCENTS IN CRISIS**

Before moving forward with this segment entitled: "Warning Signs," let's consider that there are many different types of crisis situations that can occur in the life of teens and adolescents. Furthermore, certain types of crisis situations can be very different than other types of crisis situations. For example, there is a big difference between the loss of a friend due to a tragic car accident and the loss of innocence due to sexual abuse or assault. However, both scenarios will leave a mountain of grief for the young person to suffer. In the case of a tragic car accident that causes the death of a close friend, a teen could experience loneliness for a long period of time due to the absence of that friendship and the sadness of missing the friend. On the contrary, in the case of sexual abuse or assault, a teen may experience another type of loneliness that stems from an unhealthy distortion of his / her sexuality because of the victimization and crime inflicted. Those who experience sexual assault may remain lonely for a time because they are afraid to get close to "safe people" who claim to have their best interest at heart. This is especially true if the victim invested a lot of trust in the abuser, which is often the case.

These two brief examples from above can demonstrate that warning signs can be helpful to indicate something is wrong in the life of a teen or adolescent since different crisis events affect persons differently. In the above examples, the warning sign for both scenarios could be a variation of what a teenager describes as an experience of "loneliness." Unfortunately, warning signs alone are not enough to understand clearly the nature of pending crisis events. Open dialogue and disclosure are necessary in order to come to the full knowledge regarding the specific nature of the crisis your teen or adolescent may be experiencing. Therefore, it's helpful to know that the following warning signs can indicate that a crisis is occurring or has occurred in the life of a teen or adolescent. However, there's more work involved to discover the specific nature of the crisis itself.

### **The Signs to Warn us that Something is Wrong:**

Increase in aggression or anger  
Frequent acting out or disrupting behaviors  
Loss of appetite  
Being withdrawn or isolated

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. §2205.

Desires to be alone  
Sleep disturbances or change in healthy sleeping habits  
Nightmares  
Drastic changes in routine  
Experience of dramatic “loss of control or balance”  
Abnormal yelling and screaming, loss of temper  
Frequent and uncontrollable crying  
Numbness or shock that demonstrates the lack of feelings  
Overwhelming sadness that cannot be managed  
Joining a new group of friends who are not acceptable  
Dramatic drop or decline in attendance at school or extracurricular activities  
Drop in desire to be involved with the normal things the teen used to enjoy  
Refusal to be involved with family or to contribute to the family  
Lying or secretive behavior that seems to cover up the truth  
Denial  
Dramatic disregard for personal hygiene or self-care  
Evidence of drug use or drug paraphernalia  
Reckless behavior that’s self-destructive  
Sexual acting out  
Promiscuity  
Inappropriate sexual contact with siblings and friends  
Masturbation  
Threatening behavior  
Increase in violence to others or self  
Signs of self-harm  
Suicidal statements or behavior

---

### **Resource:**

Here’s an article that can help parents and adults understand the nature of crisis, additional warning signs and possible interventions: <http://www.crisiscounseling.com/Crisis/CrisisInterventionTeens.htm>

---

## **A Brief Statement on the Nature of Grief**

Grief is the human person’s response to loss of any kind. Loss in the day-to-day life of a teenager could consist of being late for school or a meeting, getting a flat tire, dropping his / her lunch on the floor, losing a basketball game, or failing a test. These situations can be qualified as typical experiences that all young people have to learn to cope with in healthy, mature ways. On the other hand, if a teen experiences the loss of a friend, a job and the death of a loved one in a short period of time, their experience of loss is more traumatic than the average examples from above. Therefore, their ability to cope with such loss will be even more challenging than normal. What happens when a young person, with fewer life experiences and developmental skills, experiences great loss in his or her life? Usually, above average and unforeseen loss results in some or many of the warning signs from above. It is very difficult for teens and adolescents to cope with traumatic loss in their life, and they usually do not have the necessary skills to grieve properly. In fact, teens and adults of all ages usually need help grieving the more traumatic losses in life since these types of losses typically affect us in very negative ways, especially if they are not dealt with through holy and healthy methods of coping, forgiveness, hope and redemption in Christ.

For example, when a teen has experienced domestic abuse or violence early in life, the grief of divorce or the effect of physical abuse, the results are far reaching and extremely negative. It’s common for teens who’ve experienced the unjust trauma of physical abuse to harm themselves (i.e.: cutting themselves, pulling out their hair, punching themselves or banging their head on the wall) in order to cope with the memories, pain, and anger toward those crimes committed against them and the people who committed these crimes. Since they don’t know how to grieve, process, or even attempt to understand why something evil like abuse could happen to them, victims attempt to rid themselves of the recurring painful memories, the feelings of disgust or unworthiness, and the anger they experience in any way they know how. Self-harm is considered to be a negative coping skill, since it causes additional harm to the person involved and offers an unhealthy attempt to cope with the pending crisis.

Naturally, there will be lots of grief in the life span of any human person. The human experience in a fallen world is an experience of loss, and the hope of redemption in Christ. Due to sin and sins effects, serious or traumatic loss can happen early in life or later in life. Many people never suffer the same degree of tragic loss as others. How can we explain this phenomenon? How can we cope with this phenomenon as Christian people?

It is natural and healthy to grieve the losses in our life. In fact, it can even be supernatural and holy to grieve those losses. Think of the late Holy Father, Blessed John Paul II, who visited his would be assassin in prison after healing from the traumatic wounds of being shot and offered forgiveness to the very person who attempted to kill him. Being shot multiple times would be a highly traumatic crisis experience. Forgiving a would be assassin could only be done with the help of God's grace and mercy.

Young people who suffer loss, whether highly traumatic and unjust experiences, or normal day-to-day experiences of failure, doubt and questioning, often need help in coping with those losses. Young people often need help in grieving properly in healthy, holy ways. Below is a method of empathetic, active listening that can assist adults in helping those teens they love who may be suffering grief or experiencing crisis.

---

### **Resource:**

Check out this great article from "Focus on the Family" regarding healthy grief and the process of grieving in the life of teens at: [http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/teen\\_booklets/healthy-grief.aspx](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/teen_booklets/healthy-grief.aspx)

---

### **Goal #2:**

## **EMPATHETIC, ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS THAT CAN BE OFFERED AS SUPPORT AND COMFORT TO A YOUNG PERSON WHO MAY BE IN CIRISIS**

Empathetic, active listening is typically a skill that seems counterintuitive at first glance. When we listen to other people in grief, we often desire to pass judgment or agree with their initial reaction. For example, imagine the following scenario and note the parental response (highlighted in the color red) that passes judgment, agrees, is quick to give advice and dictate in a negative, non-empathetic way:

Teen: "I am so tired of my boyfriend flirting with other girls. That just doesn't seem right, and I don't know what to do about it."

Parent: "I know, your boyfriend is a little punk, and I told you from the beginning that he was no good."

Teen: "He's not a little punk, I like him. But, I don't understand what's going on right now. You've been against him from the beginning!"

Parent: "Well, I'm tired of seeing you upset, and I think you need to get rid of him."

Now, imagine the following **empathetic or active listening response** and see what new doors it can open to continue this same conversation and really hear the underlying issue(s) that's causing a crisis for this teen:

Teen: "I am so tired of my boyfriend flirting with other girls. That just doesn't seem right, and I don't know what to do about it."

Parent: "**It sounds like you're really upset at Frank right now and this ongoing situation.**"

Teen: "Yes, I'm really feeling jealous that he's not paying attention to me, and that makes me mad! What am I supposed to do about this? It's just so weird."

Parent: "**I can tell this is causing you a lot of angst and questions about the relationship.**"

Teen: "I mean, maybe he's not the right guy for me after all... I don't know. He was so nice in the beginning, and now he just seems to forget about me all the time."

Parent: "**It seems to me his behavior is really making you feel forgotten or unwanted.**"

Teen: "That's right, I just don't feel like he likes me anymore. I so much wanted this to work out, but I just can't go on any more worrying about who he's going to flirt with next or how he'll forget to include me."

Parent: "**I'm really sorry it doesn't seem to be going the way you hoped.**"

Teen: “Me too, it’s so sad really. I have to break up with him tomorrow at school.”

Parent: **“That seems like a decision that could bring you a lot of peace right now. I’m proud of you, and I love you. Remember, God has a plan for your love life, even if Frank is not included.”**

Notice in the above empathetic / active listening response the parent is not the one who makes the decisions about the unhealthy relationship this teen is suffering. By listening with empathy, hoping to hear the underlying feelings the teen is experiencing, this wise parent simply affirms the crisis at hand and all the emotions involved in a non-judgmental way. There’s always plenty of time to offer advice later on, if that’s necessary at all. As parents, don’t we all desire to offer some kind of “fix it” advice that frees our children from making mistakes? *“If only they would listen to me,”* we think. Why don’t teens listen to their parents all the time? Perhaps it’s because parents pass judgment too often, give advice before hearing the underlying feelings and emotions involved, and fail to offer compassionate empathetic listening responses. That type of scenario often results in a model of “critical parenting” which can isolate and distance our teens by frustrating their desire to share anything with parents who are critical, judgmental or full of advice that comes without first being heard. Let’s try another example of an empathetic / active listening “pastoral care” response in a crisis situation:

This scenario includes a teen coming home at 6:00 pm after a long day in school followed by basketball practice. See if you can guess the real crisis affecting this teen before pre-judging what may initially seem to be the case:

Parent: “Hi sweetie, how was your day? It’s great to see you.”

Teen: “I don’t want to talk about it! It was the worst day of my life!” (Daughter then goes directly upstairs and slams the door to her room.)

Parent: (After following her daughter upstairs, this mother speaks through the door to her daughter.) “It sounds like it was a pretty day rough today.”

Teen: “I told you, I don’t want to talk about it. Go away!”

Parent: “That bad, huh? I’m sorry you had such a bad day today. I’ll be downstairs if you want to talk later.”

Teen: (As this mother walks away, she hears her daughter scream out one more time behind the closed door.) “Plus, you wouldn’t understand anyway because I hate myself!”

Parent: “Well, it’s true that I don’t hate you at all. I love you a lot. But, whatever is bothering you sounds bad. I’m really sorry you had such a horrible day.”

Teen: “Yeah, well, why don’t you tell God that he made me an idiot, and I should be a lot smarter, prettier and good at stuff!”

Parent: “It sounds like something happened today that made you feel like a fool.”

Teen: (Slowly opens the door, is crying, and continues face-to-face with her mother.) “Yes, well, I don’t know. I feel like this all the time. It’s not just today. I feel so stupid all the time, and today just put me over the top. I don’t know what’s going on any more, Mom.”

Parent: (Mom hugs her daughter.) “So, it’s not just today then. You seem to be having these feelings all the time.”

Teen: “Yes, I guess so. I just don’t feel worthy right now. I don’t feel good about myself at all.”

Parent: (Knowing already that her daughter is very gifted in school, carries a 4.0 GPA, is a starter on the basketball team, has a large and caring group of friends, was elected Home Coming Queen last month, and holds down a very rewarding part-time job on the weekends, the mother continues to listen with confusion and a bit of frustration at this conversation.) “That sounds like an awful feeling to have all the time.”

Teen: “It is. It’s horrible. I go on day-to-day smiling and laughing like nothing bothers me but today something happened and it just, it just ...” (silence)

Parent: “It sounds like something happened today that was hard to hide your true feelings about.”

Teen: “I just felt like everybody knew, because they were all making fun of me. They called me names and said that I was dirty.”

Parent: (At this moment, the mother’s heart begins to beat faster, and she becomes even more worried. She doesn’t know what to say or how to listen. *She simply remains silent.*)

Teen: “I didn’t mean for this to happen last year. I tried to forget, but I just can’t forget about it. I tried to get away. I tried to stop this, but he was too strong. He forced himself on me. I didn’t tell anyone. Now, everybody knows because he goes to my school, and he told everyone that I consented. But, I didn’t.”

As this conversation unfolds, notice some of the “behind the scenes” experienced by the mother. As the daughter discloses more and more of her feelings, her mother becomes more confused and frustrated at first. How easy it would be for a parent to express this confusion and frustration at this point by saying: *“You’re not making any sense to me right now. You’re just yelling a lot.”* The mother chose to go against her confusion and frustration by continuing to listen with empathy to her daughter, hoping to authentically hear some of her daughter’s true feelings and emotions. Toward the end of the

conversation, the mother becomes afraid for her daughter due to the nature of what her daughter was disclosing. Again, instead of expressing her fear, the mother, not knowing exactly what to say, remained silent allowing her daughter added space and time to express her feelings. The more her mother actively listened to her daughter in a non-judgmental, empathetic way – the more her daughter opened up to express the authentic nature of this crisis. Who would have guessed at the beginning of this traumatic conversation that this teenage daughter experienced a “trigger” today regarding some past abuse that she describes so vividly as happening against her will; having attempted to forget; having tried to get away; and having tried to prevent it from happening, but “he” was too strong, forcing himself on her?

## **When Your Teen is in Crisis – Try Empathetic / Active Listening to Help Him or Her:**

- 1) **Be empathetic and listen actively:** Empathy is the ability to place oneself in “the shoes” of another and attempt to imagine what it could be like to feel that way. If we witness someone crying, we could observe their experience and conclude they are sad, angry, distressed, traumatized or grieving, among other things. But, we can’t really know or understand the heart of the crisis based on observation and / or speculation. However, if we empathize with them by attempting to imagine what it could be like to feel that way, then actively listen to what they are saying, often times we can hear what they are feeling and articulate back to them some of the underlying emotions which may be causing the crisis at hand. This process is meant to allow a person in crisis to express themselves in authentic freedom. (**Note:** Empathy is distinctly different from *sympathy* and often these two experiences are confused. Sympathy is a type of identification to the experience of another after having experienced a similar situation oneself. For example, a divorced parent can “sympathize” with another divorced parent after having experienced a divorce themselves. A non-divorced parent cannot, however, sympathize with a divorced parent having never experienced a similar situation themselves. A non-divorced parent can, however, “empathize” with a divorced parent if he or she is willing to imagine what it could be like to feel or experience divorce, and then actively listen to the underlying feelings being expressed in a conversation with a divorced parent.)
- 2) **Listen to underlying feelings and emotions, but don’t attempt to solve the problem:** In the above example, notice how often this listening mother attempts to articulate the underlying feelings of her daughter, then articulate them back as simple observations, awaiting her daughters clarification or continued articulation of feelings.
- 3) **Speak briefly and allow the teen in crisis to lead the conversation:** Again, notice how little this listening mother says in the conversation. She generally listens, then empathizes with her daughter, articulates back what she thinks could be the underlying feelings and emotions associated. These sentences are brief and to the point and they attempt to capture the feelings and emotions instead of giving advice, solving problems or pre-judging the situation.
- 4) **When you don’t know what to say, don’t say anything at all:** Often, when someone in crisis expresses lots of emotions and feelings that are typically traumatic, the listener can become overwhelmed. If a parent listens and responds to an adolescent or teen in crisis but does not know what to say at certain times, it’s best to say nothing at all and to allow additional time and space for that young person to clarify or express more feelings. This will certainly feel awkward and is difficult to do comfortably, but the results can be priceless. Recall how the mother, in the above example, remains silent during the end of the conversation and continues to listen even when she did not know exactly what to do or say.
- 5) **When in doubt, focus on feelings:** This point *cannot* be overemphasized. Whatever a parent may be hearing from their children verbally or nonverbally, it’s best to remain focused on the actual feelings and emotions of the situation. Creating a space for teens in crisis to express their fears, anxiety, trauma, and other overwhelming feelings is key to this pastoral response of active, empathetic listening.
- 6) **Avoid giving advice and premature problem solving, suspend judgment:** When a young person expresses some crisis or traumatic event, we can feel almost obligated to solve the problem by offering sound advice. There is a place for sound advice, but not before the heart of the crisis is uncovered. The heart of the crisis includes all the overwhelming feelings and emotions that are very difficult to understand and express. Suspended judgment is essentially important to teens and adolescents in crisis, so they don’t feel judged. This

enables them to continue articulating their deep feelings around difficult topics without closing off the conversation and ceasing to communicate.

- 7) **Summarize, summarize, summarize:** The best way to actively listen with empathy is to summarize, summarize, summarize. This can be done by simply relating back to the teen in crisis what you experience them to be feeling. For example, *“It sounds like you are really stressed out right now.”* Verses another response that lacks summarization: *“You just need to get over it. This kind of thing happens all the time.”*
- 8) **Agreeing is not the same thing as empathy:** Be careful about agreeing with a teen or adolescent in crisis. For example, if a teen in crisis says, *“Those darn teachers, they really make me mad.”* It’s not good to respond by saying, *“Yes, that darn teacher obviously made a mistake.”* That may not be the case at all. Instead, offer a more empathetic response such as, *“It sounds like you’re really upset at those teachers.”*
- 9) **Positive thinking is often times not the best approach:** For example, when a teen in crisis says: *“I just can’t go on anymore, this is killing me.”* It’s not helpful to respond by saying, *“Well, think on the bright side of things, at least you’ll be done with high school in another three years.”* This often leads to further despair and causes the teen in crisis to cease communication. Try something more empathetic such as, *“This seems like an overwhelming task for you to continue right now.”* Then, allow the teen in crisis to express more feelings while remembering there is a time and place for positive encouragement and even helpful advice. But, that time doesn’t come until the authentic underlying feelings can be expressed, named and articulated.
- 10) **Try not to assume that you already know how someone in crisis is feeling:** Sometimes we adults who are listening to teens in crisis feel like we can name their underlying feelings with accuracy. However, empathy is different than prophecy. Empathy attempts to simply hear someone’s feelings and emotions, then articulate those feelings back to the person in crisis after we listen and observe. Here’s an example of assuming to know some underlying feelings and failing to listen with empathy:  
Teen: “I feel sad all the time. Nothing can make me smile. I just wish I could feel happy again.”  
Adult: “It sounds like you suffer from depression.”  
A better response could be as follows:  
Adult: “You seem to be experiencing an overwhelming sadness these days.”
- 11) **If you have to ask questions, keep them “open-ended”:** If you have to ask questions when listening actively, try to keep them open-ended. For example, *“How do you feel about that?”* Or, *“Can you give an example?”* Or, *“What do you mean?”* This can allow a teen in crisis to expound on their feelings as well as disclosing more of what they need to talk about.
- 12) **Encouraging someone in crisis to continue sharing information:** There are a variety of encouraging gestures that can be communicated when a teen or adolescent in crisis shares with you. These encouraging gestures can be verbal, such as: *“Tell me more”* or *“keep going”* or *“I see.”* These encouragements can also be non-verbal such as making and keeping eye contact, nodding your head or hand gestures.

---

### **Resource:**

Here is a great article from Life Teen entitled: *“Practical Advice for Helping Teens in Crisis”* (December 11, 2007). The link can be found at: <http://catholicyouthministry.com/practical-advice-for-helping-teens-in-crisis/>

---

### **Goal #3:**

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES THAT COULD HELP PARENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP THAT’S CONGRUENT WITH CATHOLIC PRINCIPLES**

a) **When should parents, or other safe adults, refer a teen in crisis to seek professional help?**

Generally speaking, the aforementioned critical question can be extremely perplexing for parents and safe adults who are involved in the lives of those teens or adolescents who may be in crisis. Often, a parent will consider the need for professional help in the life of their son or daughter but have no clear resource to help them discern this possibility. Furthermore, parents can often feel guilty for not being able to provide the help and assistance their teenager in crisis demands.

“What should we/I do?”

“How can we/I do it?”

Or, “How do we/I go about seeking professional help for my son/daughter?”

This third and final goal can sometimes be the most overwhelming and precarious decision for parents and safe adults to help guide an already suffering teen into a place of healing and professional mental help. **It is not our place to estimate for you, based on certain criteria or warning signs manifested in the lives of teens or adolescents, when a teenager is in need of professional help. However, professional mental health counselors can help you discern this need.** Therefore, we would like to include two local starting points that could provide some assistance and support to discern whether or not you and your family may be in need of a professional mental health counselor.

b) **Some additional resources:**

1) Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas:

Confidential Counseling Line: 913-422-2064

Counseling Resources: 913-433-2100

Leave a message on the Confidential Counseling Line for a mental health professional who will return your call within 24 hours. These local Archdiocesan Counselors will work to help you assess and discern your personal situation to determine if there is a need for professional mental help.

2) Focus on the Family Counseling Hotline Information:

<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/counseling/find-a-counselor.aspx>

As indicated on the website:

*“Speak with a Focus on the Family Counselor:*

*The Focus on the Family Help Center counselors are here to listen and pray with you, as well as provide initial guidance and resources to help you and your family thrive. Arrange to speak with a licensed Christian counselor at no cost by calling 1-855-771-HELP (4357) Monday through Friday between 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Mountain time. Due to high call volumes, you may be asked to leave your name and number for a counselor to return a call to you.”*

*“Note:*

*Although we don't know all these counselors personally, each one is licensed as a mental health professional in the state where he or she practices and has completed an application that has been reviewed by our staff. We believe that these are Christian counselors who will be counseling from a biblical perspective. Please contact the counselors' office directly, regarding fee and insurance information.”*

c) **Additional helpful websites that can be of assistance during times of teen or adolescent crisis:**

1) United States Conference of Catholic Bishops @: [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)

Also see: Marriage and Family Life on the USCCB website @:

<http://uscgb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/>

Also see: Cultural Diversity on the USCCB website @:

<http://uscgb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/>

Also see: Human Life and Dignity on the USCCB website @:

<http://uscgb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/>

Also see: For Your Marriage, a USCCB Initiative @:

<http://foryourmarriage.org/>

- 2) **Catholic Charities** @: <http://www.cdow.org/counseling.html>

- 3) **Focus on the Family** @: <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/>

*(Please note: "Focus on the Family" is a Biblically based Christian resource with the overarching goal of helping the foundation of society and culture – the family – to thrive by supporting all families worldwide, with special focus on healing broken family life. However, this resource is not strictly Catholic. Yet, since the Biblical foundation within the goals and mission of "Focus on the Family" are essentially grounded in the Catholic Church, which is the definitive source of Sacred Scripture passed down through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in an authoritative way, this resource can be included herein due to its successful, informative and highly developed web pages pertaining to youth in crisis.)*

Also see: Focus on the Family Counseling Hotline Information @:

<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/counseling/find-a-counselor.aspx>

Also see: Grief @:

[http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/teen\\_booklets/healthy-grief.aspx](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/teen_booklets/healthy-grief.aspx)

Also see: Crisis and Depression @:

[http://media.focusonthefamily.com/fotf/mp3/fof\\_daily\\_broadcast/ffd\\_2009/ffd\\_20090304.mp3](http://media.focusonthefamily.com/fotf/mp3/fof_daily_broadcast/ffd_2009/ffd_20090304.mp3)

Also see: Abuse and Addiction @:

[http://www.focusonthefamily.com/lifechallenges/abuse\\_and\\_addiction.aspx](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/lifechallenges/abuse_and_addiction.aspx)

Also see: Preparing for Adolescents

[http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/schoolage\\_children/preparing-for-adolescence.aspx](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/schoolage_children/preparing-for-adolescence.aspx)

Also see: Type in your topic on the Focus on the Family "search bar," and name your topic @:

<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/>

- 4) **Project Rachel, Hope after Abortion** @: <http://hopeafterabortion.com/>

- 5) **Life Teen Catholic Youth Ministry** @: <http://lifeteen.com/>

Also see: Practical Advice for Helping Teens in Crisis @:

<http://catholicyouthministry.com/practical-advice-for-helping-teens-in-crisis/>

- 6) **The My House Initiative at the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, Anti – Pornography Campaign** @: <http://www.loveisfaithful.com/>

- 7) **The National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry Website Resources for Suicide** @:

<http://www.ncpd.org/sites/default/files/National%20Federation%20for%20Catholic%20Youth%20Web%20Resources%20for%20Suicide.pdf>

- 8) **Kansas Department for Children and Families** @: <http://www.dcf.ks.gov/Pages/Default.aspx>

Also see: Child Protective Services Hotline and Reporting Information@:

<http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Pages/ChildProtectiveServices.aspx>

#### **d) Are there alternatives to Counseling?**

Many parents wonder if professional mental health counseling is the only answer for their teen or adolescent in crisis. Are there other methods of help, healing and recovery that are as effective as counseling? If so, what are these methods?

In short, there are additional methods of treatment for teens in crisis that can work in conjunction with professional mental health counseling to complete and inform a more comprehensive approach to the spiritual, psychological, emotional and pastoral care of teens in crisis. For example, consider a teen in crisis who suffers from alcohol or drug use and abuse. Substance Abuse Counselors are an effective means to provide care and recovery guidance. Family or Group Counseling for the parents and family members can also be an effective means to help family members cope and respond to this type of crisis at home. Programs of Youth Ministry and other healthy, holy communities of faith can support overall development for teens in crisis. Adventure Camp Programs such as Camp Tekakwitha here in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas can provide additional support and challenge to re-orient and re-focus teens in crisis (see: <http://www.archkck.org/page.aspx?pid=1763>). Naming effectively the crisis a teen is experiencing, and then applying a comprehensive approach is the best means for help and healing. If a teen suffers from some kind of sex addiction, for example, frequent Confession, spiritual direction and addiction counseling can be an effective strategy for healing and recovery. If a teen or adolescent suffers from a crisis of anger and self-abuse, a combination of professional mental health counseling, spiritual direction and intercessory prayer, among other things, can be an effective plan for help, healing and recovery.

e) **We are people of faith. Are there supernatural means for help, healing and recovery for our teens and adolescents in crisis?**

Since we are people of faith here in the Catholic Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, ultimately any healing, help and recovery is a grace that God provides. God provides the gift of effective, healthy and holy mental health professionals, as well as teachers, parents, youth ministry personnel, pastors, religious and clergy, coaches, and other safe adults that can contribute to a comprehensive plan of involvement and assistance to our teens and adolescents in crisis.

Being people of faith, we also believe in supernatural methods of help and healing founded in Christ's ministry through the Sacraments of the Church and in a devoted life of prayer. Our Lord Jesus Christ cured the sick, cast out demons and raised the dead during His public ministry on earth. He passed that gift to His Church and Jesus' healing ministry continues today. Today, God – who is complete Spirit – mediates His presence, grace and love to us through material and spiritual means. He gives us these means, these signs of His love and grace, in the Seven Sacraments of the Church. If there is a teen or adolescent in crisis, consider the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, for example, which is reserved for the physically and spiritually infirm. Active spiritual direction, coupled with frequent Confession, Eucharistic Adoration and faithful Mass attendance in addition to the Anointing of the Sick can be a powerful and effective means for healing, among other methods. Joining the gifts of the Sacraments with a network of prayer and sacrifice from friends and family members can provide a powerful means for healing, help and recovery to teens in crisis. Our supernatural means of help, healing and recovery coupled with professional mental health assistance and additional, pro-active support is considered to be the most effective plan for teens and adolescents in crisis.

It's very important to note here that, regarding a comprehensive approach to helping our teens and adolescents in crisis, the most effective means of healing and recovery occurs when a combination of the above methods of intervention are applied. God gives us prayer and the Sacraments, and He also provides qualified mental health professionals, as well as other wise, safe and caring adults in the life of our teens that are capable of listening, praying, giving encouragement, pastoral care and more. Let's use all the means God has given us for the safe and effective care of our teens and adolescents who may be experiencing crisis in their lives.

f) **Don't put this off!!!**

When it comes to crisis there are certain and specific crisis events that require our immediate response. But, generally speaking, it's imperative that parents and safe adults respond as quickly as possible when any crisis is observed or perceived in the lives of our teens and adolescents. The longer a crisis festers in the lives of our young people, the more harm that is caused to them and the more laborious their recovery will be.

Below are some crisis events that require parents and safe adults to respond immediately by stopping everything you are doing and urgently finding assistance for those teens and adolescents who disclose these crisis events to you or show signs of these crisis events in their lives:

- 1) **Child abuse that's physical or sexual – call Kansas Department for Children and Families (Child Services) immediately: 1-800-922-5330**  
See website @: <http://www.dcf.ks.gov/Pages/Report-Abuse-or-Neglect.aspx>
- 2) **Rape – call 911**  
(Note: This applies if a victim reports a rape having very recently occurred. However, if a victim of rape reports the crime having occurred long ago, then an emergency 911 call need not apply. In that case, other methods of crisis care management will be relevant and necessary.)
- 3) **Suicide Attempt or Intention – call 911**  
(Note: A clear example of suicidal intention could be: “I am going to kill myself tomorrow after school,” and this example would definitively merit a 911 emergency. An unclear, or ambiguous, example of suicidal intention could be: “I may end it all sometime during my Junior year,” which may not merit a 911 emergency, but would merit an immediate confrontation and intervention from parents, teachers, or other safe adults in the life of that teen.)