

◇ Chapter 16
Coping with Crisis

Relationship Skills

FAMILY CRISES

Family crises occur when family members feel they cannot cope with new and challenging circumstances. What is a crisis for one family, however, may not be for another family. In general, three factors determine whether a particular situation becomes a family crisis: the hardships of the situation itself, the presence or absence of family resources to cope with the hardships, and the family's attitude toward the event.

Directions: Described below are potential crisis situations. Read each one and decide how it is a crisis for the family involved, based on the three factors listed above. Explain your answer on the lines following each description. Then answer the questions at the end of this activity.

Identifying the Crisis

Family #1: *Estella, age nineteen, is unmarried and works part-time at a minimum-wage job. Until recently, she lived with her parents and 12-year-old brother in the family home. However, when she told her parents that she was pregnant, they were very upset and told her they didn't have the room or the money needed for another child. In anger, they told her to leave and not come back. They also told her brother not to have any more contact with her.*

Family #2: *Gail and Charles have been married 14 years and have three school-age children. Charles drives a delivery truck. Gail works part-time as a restaurant hostess. Recently, Gail's widowed, seventy-eight-year-old father has begun having trouble taking care of himself. The couple have agreed that he should move in with them. They have some extra space, and his pension and Social Security payments will help cover expenses. Gail's father, however, is very much opposed to the idea. Also, one of the children is concerned about the proposed living arrangement.*

Family #3: *Eileen and Brent have been married eight years. They have a secure, stable relationship and run a small but prosperous business. Three months ago, Brent's younger brother came to live with them. He is an alcoholic who is supposed to be in recovery but who has trouble staying sober. He is also supposed to work off his room and board by helping with the business, but his drinking often interferes with the work. Eileen and Brent are losing customers because of him. Brent is beginning to resent his brother even though he feels a sense of responsibility. Eileen is beginning to resent them both.*

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Analyzing Crises

1. Give some examples of family resources that help families avoid crises.

2. What resources are available to families after a crisis occurs? _____

3. Which of the three factors do you think is most important in determining whether a situation becomes a family crisis? Explain your answer. _____

4. It has been said that crises bring out the best — and worst — in people. What factors do you think help determine whether a crisis draws a family together or drives it apart?

5. For each of the situations described on the previous page, some action needs to be taken to deal with the problem. What would you recommend for each family?

Family # 1: _____

Family #2: _____

Family #3: _____
