Upskilling Course for Childcare Professionals

Training Materials

Module 3. Trauma: Teaching Unit 3.3.

INDEAR

Acknowledgment

Module 3: Trauma

Teaching unit 3.3. Understanding family in crisis

Theory Input

Crisis has short and long- term impacts upon the family. Previous experience in the handling of a similar type of crisis increases the family's ability to adjust to the new one. Had they try to adopt the same method of adjustment again and again, and if they had faced defeat, it would have led to demoralization and more sensitivity to future exposures (Sumathi, n.d.).

A family moves into a state of crisis when two or more of the four elements that contribute to a crisis interact:
- experiencing a stressful situation (Youth Crisis Center, 2019) (certain life situations or events that causes pressure and stress to grow within the family)
- incapability to manage: when a family is having a hard time accepting or dealing with the crisis, a breakdown of family dynamics occur. Family members may blame each other, become argumentative, feel overwhelmed or hopeless, or stop communicating altogether (Youth Center Crisis, 2019). It may also lead to feelings of loneliness, exhaustion, and other signs of distress.
- chronic difficulty meeting basic responsibilities: this could be anything from a parent not being present in their child's everyday life to being unable to provide basic needs to survive, like food, shelter, protection (Youth Center Crisis, 2019) or socialization.
- lacking apparent sources of support (lacking or not utilizing supports from friends, neighbours, cousins, etc. or formal resources such as counselling programs, social care supported.)

To identify and assess a crisis situation, **four critical questions** that address these factors should be considered (HEAD START / ECLKC, 2022):
- What specific event is causing the most stress for the family?
- What coping difficulties are evident within the family?
- Is the family struggling to meet its responsibilities?
- What support systems are available to the family?

A family crisis is usually characterized by **five phases** that may occur in order, overlap, and/or intertwine.

Phase 1: The Family Crisis is Triggered. When the crisis is triggered, it causes a change in the family's circumstances and an increase in stress and anxiety.

Phase 2: Seeing the Crisis as Threatening to the family's goals, security, or emotional ties.

Phase 3: Staging a Disorganized Response. The family becomes increasingly disorganized as the strategies and resources used before to solve family problems fail (HEAD START / ECLKC, 2022). Family members experience increasing feelings of vulnerability, helplessness, anxiety, and confusion. As a result, feelings of losing control and being unable to meet family responsibilities may become intensified and disabling to family members (HEAD START / ECLKC, 2022).

Phase 4: Searching for a Solution. In an attempt to deal with mounting tension, the family begins to involve friends, relatives, neighbors, and others in the crisis. Typically, each family member looks for someone to validate his/her own views about the crisis and its resolution. Conflicting opinions and advice can add to the family's confusion and instability. When the family is unable to find appropriate solutions to the crisis, a chain of events is set off, creating yet another crisis for the family. Rapid intervention is necessary to stop the chain of events from causing a complete breakdown in family functioning (HEAD START / ECLKC, 2022).

Phase 5: Adopting New Coping Strategies. When support for dealing with the crisis is available from a non-judgmental and skillful helper, this phase represents a turning point for the better for the family in crisis (HEAD START / ECLKC, 2022). It marks the beginning of the family's recovery. Family members are likely to welcome the sense of direction, security, and protection the helper brings to their situation (HEAD START / ECLKC, 2022).

With supportive intervention, the family discovers it can master and overcome the crisis or, at least acknowledge, accept, and adapt to the loss surrounding the crisis.

Family resilience

Often, families in crisis can only see their faults. Opening their cognitive boundary to view themselves as competent people can create a world of new solutions (Ed. Hecker, Ph L.L., Wetchler, J.L., 2003).

Family resilience refers to a family's ability to withstand and rebound from adversity, emerging stronger and more resourceful. It encompasses the potential for personal and relational transformation and growth, which can be overlooked during times of adversity. The family resilience perspective fundamentally alters the deficit-based lens from viewing struggling families as *damaged* and beyond repair to seeing them as *challenged* by life's adversities, with potential for fostering healing and growth in family members (Walsh, 2012).

According to Walsh (2012) a basic premise in this systemic view is that serious crises and persistent adversity have an impact on the whole family, and in turn, key family processes mediate the adaptation of all members and their relationships. Key processes in resilience

enable the family system to rally in troubled times to buffer stress, reduce the risk of dysfunction, and support optimal adaptation.

These key processes are:

Family Belief System: Family resilience is fostered by shared facilitative beliefs that increase effective functioning and options for problem solving, recovery, and growth. They help members make meaning of adverse situations; facilitate hopeful, positive outlook; and offer transcendent or spiritual values and connections.

Organizational patterns: Resilience is strengthened by flexible structure, connectedness and social and economic resources.

Communication processes facilitate resilience by bringing informational clarity to crisis situations, encouraging open emotional sharing, and fostering collaborative problem solving and preparedness. (Walsh, 2012).

Strengthening family resilience involves concentrating on key processes that reduce stress, encourage healing and growth, and empower families to overcome challenges.

Practice Guidelines to Strengthen Family Resilience (Walsh, 2012) include:

- Honour the dignity and worth of all family members.
- Convey conviction in their potential to overcome adversity through shared efforts.
- Use respectful language, framing to humanize and contextualize distress:
    - View as understandable, common in adverse situations (e.g., traumatic event—normal reactions to abnormal or extreme conditions).
    - Decrease shame, blame, stigma, pathologizing.
- Provide safe haven for sharing pain, concerns, and challenges.
    - Show compassion for suffering and struggle.
    - Build communication, empathy, mutual support among members.
- Identify and affirm strengths, resources alongside vulnerabilities, limitations.
- Draw out and build potential for mastery, healing, and growth.
- Tap into kin, community, and spiritual resources—lifelines—to deal with challenges.
- View a crisis as an opportunity for learning, change, and growth.
- Shift focus from problems to possibilities.
- Gain mastery, healing, and transformation out of adversity.
- Reorient future hopes and dreams.
- Integrate adverse experience—including resilience—into individual and relational life passage.

Resources for further reading

- Better Health Channel (2022) *Trauma and families.* Available at: [Trauma and families - Better Health Channel](#) (Accessed: 22 May 2024)
- Božić, A., et al. (2019) *Manual for Application of the Family Group Conference Model in educational institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. IN Fondacija. Published within UNICEF project "Justice for Every Child" with the support of Governments of Switzerland and Sweden. Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina.
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- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2017). *Family Resilience and Traumatic Stress.* Available at: [Family Resilience and Traumatic Stress: A Guide for Mental Health Providers | The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (nctsn.org)](#) (Accessed: 22 May 2024)
- The University of Delaware (n.d.) *Surviving a Family Crisis*. Available at: https://www.udel.edu/canr/cooperative-extension/fact-sheets/surviving-family-crisis/ (Accessed: 22 May 2024)
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Activity resources

3.3.1. Activity name	Family Fun (Lot, L., Nelson, J., 2008)
Purpose of the activity	The activity will help to plan quality time within family and make a commitment to schedule quality time both for self and for family.
Learning outcomes	● Engage children and families in open, non-judgmental, and culturally responsive conversations, building rapport and trust. ● Value the input and perspectives of children and families in crisis, actively involving them in decision-making processes regarding their well-being.
Interactive method/technique	☐ Individual work ☐ Work in pairs ☒ Work in small groups ☐ Group work	☐ Brainstorm ☐ Presentation ☐ Demonstration ☒ Discussion ☐ Debate ☐ Story ☐ Round table ☐ Problem solving	☐ Case study ☐ Role playing ☐ Questioner/quiz ☐ Guided fantasy ☐ Somatic exercise ☐ Play ☐ Other _____
Timeframe for activity	30 minutes
Resources required	Flipchart, Markers/crayons, Pencils, Paper (A4 for each participant)

Instructions

1. Pass out paper to each participant and have them fold paper into fourths.

2. In the **upper left quadrant**, have participants write down what they like to do or would like to do for fun by themselves that doesn't cost money. If they can't think of anything, they could think of what they liked to do as a kid for fun and write that down.

3. In the **upper right quadrant**, have participants write down what they like to do or would like to do themselves that costs money.

4. In the lower **left quadrant**, have participants write down fun things they like to do or would like to do with their family that doesn't cost money.

5. In the **lower right** have participants write down fun things they like to do or would like to do with their family that cost money.

6. Have participants form groups of four and share what they wrote in their **lower left quadrant** (what they like to do with their family that doesn't cost money). Have them comment on what they notice about similarities and differences on this list.

7. If any group member heard something on another participant's list that they would like to add to their list, have them do so.

8. Ask each group to decide on one thing they would like to put on their family fun calendar to do the next week.

9. Process by asking if anyone would like to share what they learned from this activity.

10. Ask how many would be willing to make a commitment to do this activity with their families at home.

Comments	The process of sharing can be repeated with the lists for other quadrants. The flipchart can be used by a trainer or by each group representative for listing the similar and/or different fun things.

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PROJECT COORDINATOR:

Volkshochschule im Landkreis Cham e. V., Germany

PARTNERS:

Fachakademie für Sozialpädagogik Furth im Wald, Germany

Berufsfachschule für Kinderpflege Furth im Wald, Germany

Udruzenje Prijateljice obrazovanja – Amica Educa, Bosnia and Herzegovina

CEIP Flor de Azahar, Spain

Leonardo Progetti Sociali, Italy

Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Lodzi, Poland

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