

# CRISIS CARE WORKERS CORE COMPETENCIES



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Behavioral Health Training Partnership

(07/2024)

Core competencies are the capacity to effectively perform a role or function, often described as clusters of knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Community crisis care workers require a specific set of core competencies to effectively address and manage their work. While specific competencies may vary based upon the nature of a case, the following characteristics related to engagement, assessment, and intervention define many of the key qualities necessary for success in the field of mental health and substance use crisis care. The term crisis is used in this document to refer to both mental health and substance use crisis situations.

The core competencies listed in this document were developed by a committee of people who have experienced mental health and substance use crisis situations and the services provided by Wisconsin's crisis system of care, county crisis workers, county crisis supervisors, staff with the Behavioral Health Training Partnership at UW-Green Bay, and staff with Wisconsin Department of Health Services. They are intended to serve as a best practice guide for effective responses to a mental health and substance use emergencies. They can be used to inform job descriptions and hiring decisions, as well as staff training.

Supervisors may use information in this document to evaluate the performance of staff, and staff can use the information in this document to assess their own performance and set action plans for professional development.

It is understood that additional knowledge, skills, and abilities are needed beyond what is listed in this document. This includes knowledge, skills, and abilities on local policies and procedures related to legal issues, billing, paperwork, and record-keeping.

The core competencies may vary for staff who work in collaborative mobile crisis teams or similar models.

The information listed in this document will evolve as the demands of crisis care workers and the work of their agencies change.

There are eight key principles or values for crisis care workers:

- Person-centered care
- Recovery-oriented care
- Trauma-informed care
- Self-awareness and stress management
- Culturally responsiveness
- Safety planning
- Safety intervention
- Collaborative teaming

Each key principle or value has at least one competency. Each competency has a set of knowledge, skills, and abilities to be successful.

## Person-centered care

### Competency

#### 1.1 Centering the voice and choice of the individual (and parent/guardian where applicable) in decision-making

### Knowledge, skills, and abilities

- Demonstrates flexibility and a collaborative approach to decision-making, focusing on helping individuals experiencing a crisis to regain a sense of control in as many domains as possible as quickly as possible.
- Promotes the dignity and choice of the person, even when it is not the choice the worker prefers, if the individual understands the potential risks associated with the choice and is not putting themselves or others in imminent danger.
- Understands the person experiencing a crisis is an expert in their own life and situation and seeks to understand the individual's experience and feelings.
- Involves caregivers and other identified informal supports in planning when appropriate and clinically necessary (especially in situations with guardians of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who have a limited ability to provide complete and accurate information).

#### 1.2 Engaging to build trust and rapport

- Exhibits transparency in interactions.
- Demonstrates reflective communication and active listening in all aspects of the response, intervention, and planning related to a crisis.
- Demonstrates knowledge and application of age/developmentally appropriate engagement skills.
- Adjusts communication as needed relevant to age, educational level, and community standards.

#### 1.3 Ensuring client rights and confidentiality

- Adheres to all aspects of client rights as outlined in Wis. Admin. Code ch. DHS 94.
- Exhibits knowledge of and ability to communicate the process for filing a client rights complaint or grievance.
- Follows HIPAA regulations, including exceptions to HIPAA that allow for broader sharing of information during a crisis.
- Understands the rights of minors or individuals under a guardianship receiving crisis services.

## Recovery-oriented care

### Competency

### Knowledge, skills, and abilities

#### 2.1 Delivering strengths-based care

- Conveys dignity and fosters hope for individuals experiencing a crisis about their own recovery.
- Identifies and reinforces both formal and informal resources the individual experiencing a crisis can use to recover and prevent future emergencies.

#### 2.2 Connecting to continuum of care resources

- Maintains current and accurate knowledge of available treatment resources for mental health and substance use disorders to provide useful referral information to individuals and their families/support systems.
- Coordinates linkage and follow-up contacts to ensure seamless connection to services and resources for ongoing support.
- Supports individuals in accessing and using a variety of resources and tools for ongoing support of behavioral health wellness.

## Trauma-informed care

### Competency

#### 3.1 Prioritizing trauma-informed principles within the scope of practice

### Knowledge, skills, and abilities

- Demonstrates the ability to appreciate and understand the prevalence and impact of trauma on individuals and trauma-informed care as a critical component of care for people who are survivors of trauma.
- Seeks to understand whether the crisis a person is experiencing is related to trauma.
- Exhibits ability to tailor assessments and interventions to account for the impact of potential trauma, as well as the individual's strengths and potential trauma resilience.
- Demonstrates awareness of and sensitivity to the impact of secondary trauma on parents, family, caretakers, and other natural supports involved in the response to a crisis.
- Responds to the unique trauma-related needs of special populations, including veterans, foster/adoptive children, and marginalized groups.

# Self-awareness and stress management

## Competency

## Knowledge, skills, and abilities

### **4.1 Developing stress prevention practices that promote the health and well-being of oneself**

- Demonstrates knowledge of the signs and impact of secondary traumatic stress on helping professionals.
- Identifies and defines self-care practices and stress management needs.
- Establishes and maintains healthy boundaries for the safety and security of both the professional and those receiving services for a crisis.
- Engages regularly in clinical staffing with supervisor and/or colleagues.

### **4.2 Self-awareness as a key component to effective crisis intervention**

- Exhibits a well-regulated demeanor and respectful tone.
- Maintains an awareness of one's own trauma background and how it may impact a response to a crisis.
- Seeks informal and formal support to process trauma as needed.
- Examines one's own cultures, worldviews, and biases, including how these could influence service provision. In situations where one's own cultural identity may be misunderstood or harmed, avoids reacting in a manner that could adversely impact the person experiencing a crisis. Seeks support and consultation outside of the crisis intervention to process the situation.

## Culturally responsive

### Competency

#### **5.1 Respecting and building on the values, preferences, beliefs, cultural norms, customs, experiences, and identity of each individual and their community**

### Knowledge, skills, and abilities

- Demonstrates an understanding of cultural diversity, including intersecting identifiers of age, race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, religion, socio-economic status, etc., and the ability to explain the importance of how these factors may shape responses to crisis situations.
- Approaches every individual with genuine curiosity and openness to learn about their unique culture and how it is expressed.
- Exhibits respect to individuals by seeking permission prior to sharing the worker's own perspectives and experiences related to cultural norms and beliefs.
- Appreciates culture as a source of resilience.
- Recognizes that there may be conflicts within a family regarding cultural beliefs and effectively navigates contentious conversations in support of the individual experiencing a crisis.

#### **5.2 Communicating with awareness and knowledge of cultural differences and attempting to accommodate those differences**

- Seeks to understand an individual's language, communication styles, and linguistic differences.
- Communicates through nonverbal and verbal ways a demeanor that is knowledgeable and accepting of cultural differences.
- Acknowledges specific aspects of workplace culture that may be foreign to others outside of the workplace, including not using acronyms and jargon in communications.
- Understands and validates that one's experience of a crisis as a member of a marginalized community may be largely different than others who are not marginalized.
- Considers past harmful experiences that impact a person's interactions with the response to a crisis and settings providing treatment for a crisis.

# Safety planning

## Competency

## Knowledge, skills, and abilities

### 6.1 Crisis screening and decision-making

- Demonstrates basic understanding of Wisconsin mental health laws (Wis. Stat. ch. 51 and Wis. Admin. Code ch. DHS 34) and related statutes and administrative rules (Wis. Stat. ch. 48, Wis. Stat. ch. 54, Wis. Stat. ch. 55, Wis. Stat. ch. 938).
- Uses evidence-based screening tools and methods within their scope of practice.
- Understands the criteria and processes for civil commitments, holds, and involuntary proceedings.
- Exhibits ability to effectively triage crisis situations based on urgency while prioritizing interventions and appropriate levels of care.
- Employs collaborative decision-making techniques—centering the voice and choice of the individual and supportive contacts—to the greatest extent possible.
- Demonstrates critical thinking to know when consultation is needed; reaches out when needed; and practices within their scope at all times.

### 6.2 Individualized crisis planning

- Engages authentically with the individual experiencing a crisis and their collateral supports in the development of crisis plans.
- Updates crisis plans regularly to reflect changes in an individual's circumstances, needs, and available supports.



# Safety intervention

## Competency

## Knowledge, skills, and abilities

### 7.1 Crisis assessment

Demonstrates knowledge of and ability to conduct thorough, interactive crisis assessments for all individuals who present with potentially elevated risk of harm to self or others.

### 7.2 Crisis response

- Maintains current, accurate knowledge about community resources and services to provide access to timely, relevant interventions.
- Considers social determinants of health and is able to evaluate and identify underlying unmet needs, refer to appropriate resources, and integrate these needs and resources into the crisis response as appropriate.
- Demonstrates knowledge and ability to develop effective safety plans in the least restrictive environment (home/community or other diversion options) as appropriate and in cooperation with safety plan partners.
- Recognizes situations that may require mandated reporting and takes necessary steps to report.

# Collaborative teaming

## Competency

**8.1 Partnering with law enforcement, hospital personnel, child/adult protective services, and other community partners.**

**8.2 Partnering with peer providers and natural supports when available.**

## Knowledge, skills, and abilities

- Demonstrates understanding of the roles and scopes of practice of various professionals involved in crisis response and how to work toward a common goal.
- Exhibits ability to navigate difficult conversations with community partners when differences of opinion exist.
- Works with peers and natural supports to promote engagement with community supports that the individual has found helpful in the past, such as family, friends, treatment providers, and social services.
- Demonstrates an understanding and respect for the unique role and scope of peer providers in the response to a crisis.
- Works with peer supports to guide an individual's next steps for care.