

Crisis Assessment – BASICS Model

What is assessment?

Assessment is a skill that involves observing, asking questions, and bringing information together in order to understand how a person is functioning at any given moment in time.

Why do assessment? When someone has been through a crisis, we want to understand what their functioning is now and what it was before the crisis so that we know their baseline and can interpret current functioning accordingly. The goal is to gather relevant information regarding immediate needs and concerns so that the peer responder can know what help needs to be provided.

When is assessment done? Assessment is really more a skill than a discrete event. It is a key component of Psychological First Aid and also a component of Crisis Debriefing. We can assess someone in any conversation, whether the first contact or subsequent encounters. Therefore, the answer is that we are assessing all the time.

How is assessment done? Assessment is not an interrogation, but rather is best done in the context of a caring conversation. Questions should be limited and should be adapted to each person and situation. Some other key principles in how you do assessment include:

- Introduce yourself to the person
- Help them to feel comfortable and safe
- Ensure basic needs have been met (food, water, shelter)
- Take your time and don't appear to be in a hurry
- Be patient
- Allow for periods of silence
- Ensure privacy
- Remember that you do not have to find out everything at once. Arrange for follow up times if the person is overwhelmed or too tired to continue.
- Be careful to not be intrusive. If you are asking specific questions, be tentative and be sure they understand that you are asking so that you can know how to best help them. Always give them permission to not answer the question if it makes them uncomfortable.
- Look for opportunities to reassure and comfort them even as you are asking these questions. Interject supportive comments such as, "that must be very hard," or "makes sense that you would feel that way given what is happening to you."

General questions

We might start with some general questions to find out how the person is doing such as:

- How are you doing?
- What are your most immediate concerns?
- How are you feeling right now?

Contextⁱ: If the person talks about a change in their functioning, then you want to try to anchor this to events and time. The traumatic event is an obvious event that has impacted coping, but you may be surprised to find out that other events prior to the crisis are also significantly impacting the person. Possible questions are:

- When did you first start to feel this way?
- What significant things led up to you feeling like this? (Listen for events that include major losses or transitions or other crises)
- Have you experienced any crises like this before?

BASICS model

Now we move from general to specific and we want to try to get a sense of the person's functioning in a wholistic way using the BASICS model. This means that we will look at how they are doing in the following areas:

- Behavior (Actions/Choices)
- Affect (Emotions)
- Somatic (Physical)
- Interpersonal (Relationships)
- Cognitive (Thoughts)
- Spiritual (Faith)

Specific questions: In each of the BASICS areas, you may want to follow up with some specific questions to better understand the person's needs. Below are some possible questions or things to determine. It's possible you will observe some of these things without asking or it's possible that the person will talk about some of these things spontaneously and you will not have to directly ask.

If the person has already mentioned one of these things, you can demonstrate that you have been listening well, by referring back it and then asking further clarification questions.

Behavior (Actions/Choices)

- How has your sleep been? (Listen for insomnia, nightmares, or any kind of sleep disruption)
- How is your appetite? When did you last eat?
- Have you found yourself using medications or alcohol to help you cope? (Listen for abuse of substances)

Affect (Emotions)

- Many people in your situation would feel sad. Are you feeling that way? (Sadness and grief are expected emotions in crisis situations, but you also want to be listening for signs of depressionⁱⁱ, especially if the person has a history of depression).
- It sure would be natural to be angry in this situation. Are you feeling angry?
- Have you been feeling worried or anxious or tense?
- Are you scared or frightened of anything right now?
- Is there anything that gives you a sense of hope in this situation?

Somatic (Physical)

- Do you have any medical concerns right now?
- What medications do you take? (Sometimes people forget to take their medications when they are stressed. (Listen for any medications related to psychological disorders)
- How is your energy level? (Listen for fatigue)

Interpersonal (Relationships)

Who in your life right now can be a support to you? (Listen for feelings of isolation as well as any current relational conflicts that might impact their coping)

Who can you ask to help you with some of these specific needs?

Is there anyone else in your life who you are concerned about? (This might be opportunity for the person to talk about their spouse, children, family members, or co-workers who have also been impacted by the same events).

Cognitive (Thoughts)

- Are you having any thoughts that are disturbing to you right now? (Listen for any distortions of reality or perception).
- Have you experienced any confusion?
- What do you think the next steps should be? (This is a way of determining their current ability to engage in problem solving.)

- Have you had any thoughts of giving up or hurting yourself? (you are listening for any suicidal thoughts or intent)ⁱⁱⁱ

Spiritual (Faith)

Is there anything in your own faith walk that is giving you comfort or encouragement right now? (Keep in mind that this is not a time for giving spiritual platitudes that may sound hollow to them. But, if they are finding strength in certain spiritual truths, then we want to affirm this.)

What spiritual questions is this bringing up for you? (It is important to give the person room to voice their anger and confusion about things like, “Why would God allow this to happen” without feeling like we need to give an answer which we do not have.)

Additional Resources/Supporting Documents:

ⁱ Pre-Crisis Factors Checklist (6.5)

ⁱⁱ Depression Signs (8.1); Depression Screening Questions (8.2)

ⁱⁱⁱ Suicide Risk and Protective Factors (8.4) & Suicide Screening Questions (8.5)