Key Terms and Concepts for Crisis Response

Crisis – A "temporary state of upset and disorganization, characterized chiefly by an individual's inability to cope with a particular situation using customary methods of problem solving, and by the potential for a radically positive or negative outcome. "[i]

The impact of any particular event varies from person to person. We cannot define a crisis based on external events alone but rather as a combination of the event as well as the person's subjective reaction to it and their ability to cope with the circumstances. The same event may be a crisis for one person and not for another.

Trauma – Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one or more of the following ways:

- Directly experiencing the traumatic event
- Witnessing, in person, the event as it happened to others
- Learning that the traumatic event happened to a close family member or close friend
- Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of a traumatic event[ii]

Crisis Response – A comprehensive approach to addressing the needs that arise from any crisis situation. Crisis response is provided by a wide variety of individuals and systems and attends to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of those impacted by crises. Crisis response can include assessment, psychological first aid, and crisis debriefing.

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

Psychological First Aid – Supportive presence of community members following traumatic events with goals of:

- Stabilizing
- Reducing distress
- Identifying basic needs
- Providing practical care
- Enhancing coping
- Facilitating access to ongoing support and specialized care

Crisis Debriefing – A structured way of helping a person:

- Talk about what happened
- Talk about how it impacted them
- By offering them information
- By strategizing coping strategies with them
- By making referrals

Additional Resources/Supporting Documents:

[i] Slaikeu, Karl A. (1990). Crisis intervention: A handbook for practice and research. 2nd ed. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 15.
[ii] American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. 5th ed. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 271.