THE “ABCD” TRAINING MODEL

Here is a model I have found very useful in introducing seminarians, pastors and trainees for lay caring teams to the basic steps in the process of helping people in crisis. The ‘A-B-C-D Method’ of crisis helping was developed by psychiatrist Warren Jones for training the lay staff of a community crisis center in Pasadena, California. His approach utilizes the essence of crisis intervention theory. This model incorporates my additions and interpretations of his original approach…

_Hope-Action Counseling: How to Help a Person in Crisis_

This method of crisis help consists of doing four things:

A. ACHIEVING A RELATIONSHIP (OF TRUST AND CARING)
   ➢ Listen non-judgmentally and with caring to what the person is feeling and experiencing (“listening love”). Check out what you understand the person to be saying to see if you’re on her or his wavelength.
   ➢ Let the person experience your warmth and concern by your attending, listening, and empathetic responses.
   ➢ Ask the person to tell you about the crisis—when it started, how it developed, how he or she feels about it now.
   ➢ Let the person know you’d like to work together in finding something that she or he can do to make the situation better.
   ➢ Affirm the person whenever possible—point out that you are aware of the strength it takes to carry the burden of the crisis and to ask for help.
   ➢ See the person as having the ability to cope with the crisis and to learn and grow from handling it constructively, and let the person know you see him or her in this way.

B. BOIL DOWN THE PROBLEM (TO ITS MAJOR PARTS)
   ➢ As the person explores the crisis, help her or him sort out the pieces of the problem, separating those parts that he or she can do something about from those about which nothing can be done. (No use wasting energy on the latter.)
   ➢ Help the person choose one part of the problem on which to work first.
   ➢ Encourage the individual to describe previous efforts at a solution to that part of the problem. (No use repeating things that haven’t worked.)
   ➢ Encourage the person to think of other possible solutions—perhaps suggest approaches for the person to consider.
   ➢ Help her or him examine each approach in terms of probable consequences—“What will probably happen if you…?”
   ➢ Help the person decide which alternatives he or she wants to try _now_.
   ➢ Discuss all the person’s resources—the “things you have going for you”—inner strengths, friends, family, spiritual resources, to help in coping.
   ➢ Keep affirming the person’s efforts to deal with his or her crisis, expressing appreciation for the small step the person takes in coping responsibly.
C. CHALLENGE THE INDIVIDUAL TO TAKE CONSTRUCTIVE ACTION (ON SOME PART OF THE PROBLEM)

➢ Encourage the person to plan how to approach that part of the problem on which she or he has decided to focus; the plan should be realistic, with small achievable goals.
➢ Encourage commitment to implementing the action plan, beginning soon and on a realistic, agreed-upon time schedule.
➢ If the person resists acting on the problem, help him or her explore and resolve these resistances.
➢ Assure the individual that you will be available as a caring, concerned person as the struggle to implement her or his plan occurs.
➢ Support the person in crisis with realistic hope. Use resources such as prayer to strengthen the person’s sense of responsibility, strength, and support by other people and by God.
➢ Don’t agree to do anything that the individual can do himself or herself.
➢ Point out that as one begins to do something, however small, to improve the situation, one’s feelings probably will improve—one will feel less depressed, more hopeful, and more self-esteem.
➢ Have the person phone you between sessions to let you know how the action plan worked; make a date to see her or him again soon.
➢ Encourage the individual to actively mobilize his or her resources for dealing with the crisis—spiritual, interpersonal, inner, practical, resources.
➢ Keep affirming the person by expressing appreciation for whatever she or he does to handle the crisis responsibly.
➢ Discuss the growth possibilities in coping successfully.
➢ Set a time to get together again soon.

D. DEVELOP AN ONGOING GROWTH-ACTION PLAN

➢ IN the next meeting(s), ask the person to describe what happened in implementing the action plan, affirming successes (however small).
➢ Help the person develop further action goals for coping with other parts of the crisis. (What’s the next step?) Repeat those parts of B and C that are necessary to help the person continue effective action.
➢ Tell the person that the more one copes effectively, the easier it becomes because one’s coping muscles gain strength. Realistic hope based on the person’s potentials and successes increases as one’s coping strength is used and grows stronger.
➢ Encourage the person to reach out to help and be helped by others going through similar crises.
➢ Help the person become a part of an ongoing support and outreach group (a grief group, A.A., a prayer-support group, [a Hope Group], etc.).
➢ Help the person recognize growth as it occurs through constructive coping.
➢ After the heat of the crisis diminishes, encourage the person to reflect on and learn from the crisis experience.
➢ Help the person put the crisis in the context of his or her faith, and thus grow spiritually.