

# Collaborative Crisis Planning with Families

*A Tool for Local Interagency Planning Teams*

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Development Disabilities

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## Introduction

All families face crisis at some time or another. As the System of Care movement has grown, so has the likelihood that children will stay in their homes or communities, *even when things are disruptive*. As children remain at home, the demand to have a wider range of community support options has increased even as resources have tightened. Collaborative Crisis Planning assumes that if we can predict, plan and shape responses to events we can get to working smarter rather than simply working harder. Collaborating with families to name the crisis and construct the response is a critical first step in developing a durable system of support so that children can grow up at home and families can enjoy the support they need to raise children with complex needs.

This manual was designed as a companion reference to a series of trainings about crisis planning. The design of this training is to identify steps for building crisis plans in a collaborative manner with families. Recognizing that having a crisis requires a different response from a safety situation this workbook is divided into two sections. The first section provides an overview and definitions of crisis and safety and identifies methods for telling the difference between a crisis event and safety situation. The rest of the manual is focused on Collaborative Crisis Planning and is designed to walk the participant through a set of steps in developing a collaborative crisis plan.

Each step has a form attached that can be used “in the field” to identify creative responses and assure that the types of crisis responses are relevant to the family and their concerns. Practitioners and families are encouraged to copy these forms and use them in order to build community capacity to effectively respond to families in a strength-based, creative and culturally competent manner.

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## Overview: Crisis and Safety

Crisis and safety are two different things. Some definitions of crisis<sup>1</sup> include:

1. **A Risky or Worrying Time:** a situation or period in which things are very uncertain, difficult, or painful, especially a time when action must be taken to avoid complete disaster or breakdown
2. **Critical Moment:** a time when something very important for the future happens or is decided
3. **Turning Point in Disease:** medicine a point in the course of a disease when the patient suddenly begins to get worse or better

Danger<sup>2</sup> definitions include;

- Step 1. **Likely to cause harm:** likely to cause or result in harm or injury

The lines between crisis and safety situations are frequently blurred within the child and family service systems. As the movement towards community-based programming has increased, professionals involved in helping families have been called upon to manage disruptive situations without disrupting the child's living situation. This is partially due to the growing realization that moving children into settings that contain their behavior may keep young people safe for "right now" but cause more harm later in the form of interrupted attachments as well as the issues with keeping young people safe in congregate care settings.

Managing crisis and safety situations in a System of Care context often presents some unique challenges. In System of Care, efforts are made to fully engage families in decision making and programming. Achievement of full engagement often results in professionals having more access to a family's daily life and struggles. This increased access can often result in confusion between what are crisis situations and what are safety situations. As professionals get more information about a family's daily life they are likely to get more information about situations that are worrisome or stressful for families. While these situations are not necessarily crisis situations, professionals may find themselves spending a great deal of time trying to reduce the stress of each of those situations.

Maintaining clarity about the difference between safety and crisis issues is especially critical in a System of Care context. As mentioned earlier, full engagement can lead to greater exposure to daily challenges faced by a parent raising a child with Serious Emotional Disturbance. That exposure can lead to increased worries about family stability and can also lead to a tendency to paint an overly catastrophic picture of the family's life. Additionally, in the Child and Youth serving system issues of compliance can lead to confusion about containing behavior rather than promoting safety. This flood of information can result in service providers becoming

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<sup>1</sup> Encarta Dictionary English North America, 2010

<sup>2</sup> Encarta Dictionary English North America, 2010

overwhelmed with the challenges the family faces. When this occurs the helper may find themselves helping less and hurting more.

The other issue for many individuals doing family work has to do with choices made by families. We may confuse stability with good outcome and some families just aren't engineered to lead a life of stability. It is not unusual to hear a community-based Care Manager expressing frustration about a family's choices because it seems that those choices are impacting the family's stability. For example, a family may choose to spend money in one way and the consequence may be eviction, causing them to have to return to another relative's home. Additionally, a family member may be counseled to avoid confrontation with the child because yelling matches break out, yet s/he continues to confront the young person and call the crisis line when the confrontation gets heated. In each of these circumstances, the situation may be worrisome but not necessarily threatening.

It is important for individuals involved in System of Care to be clear about the difference between crisis and safety situation. Too much focus on crisis management may result in time spent pushing for stability while failing to see the very real threats that families face every day in homes and communities. It is important to realize some families choose to live a crisis filled lifestyle which is really a matter of personal choice and rights as long as harm or danger isn't produced. In this context families really define their own crisis (one person's crisis is not necessarily another person's crisis) while communities and systems set standards for safety.

On the next page is a table with a number of events listed in the left hand column. Quickly go through each of those situations and identify whether they are crisis or safety situations using the definition of crisis as a time that causes uncertainty and safety as a situation that presents a threat or risk.

### Activity: Crisis or Safety

Step 1: Mark each situation as a crisis or safety situation.

Step 2: Choose the three you feel strongest about your rating and identify why you rated as you did.

Situation	Crisis (C) Safety (S)	Why?
Young person uses alcohol illegally		
Parent threatens child after a misbehavior		
Family is likely to be evicted		
Young person gets upset when boyfriend breaks up with her		
Young person runs away		
Youth engages in survival sex while on the streets		
Parent is late to pick up toddler more than three times per week		
Young person gets suspended from school		
Young person starts over texting boy/girl friend after they break up		
Young person throws things when s/he's upset (books, pencils, etc.)		
Parent relapses over the weekend		
Parent stays out all night at a casino		
Parent is exhausted because s/he gets up several times per night to check on the child		
Young person gets arrested and is in detention		
Family member is hospitalized due to auditory hallucinations		
Family member yells and leaves loud voice mails to one of the staff		
Young person refuses to take their psychotropic medicine		

Step 3: Pair up with someone you don't know well. Compare your ratings. Use the space below to list similarities and differences.

## Managing Risk: Sorting the Difference between Crisis and Safety Situations

Two dimensions should be considered when distinguishing between crisis and safety situations. The first is around the impact or severity of the event. Four distinct points on the severity continuum are identified in the figure below:

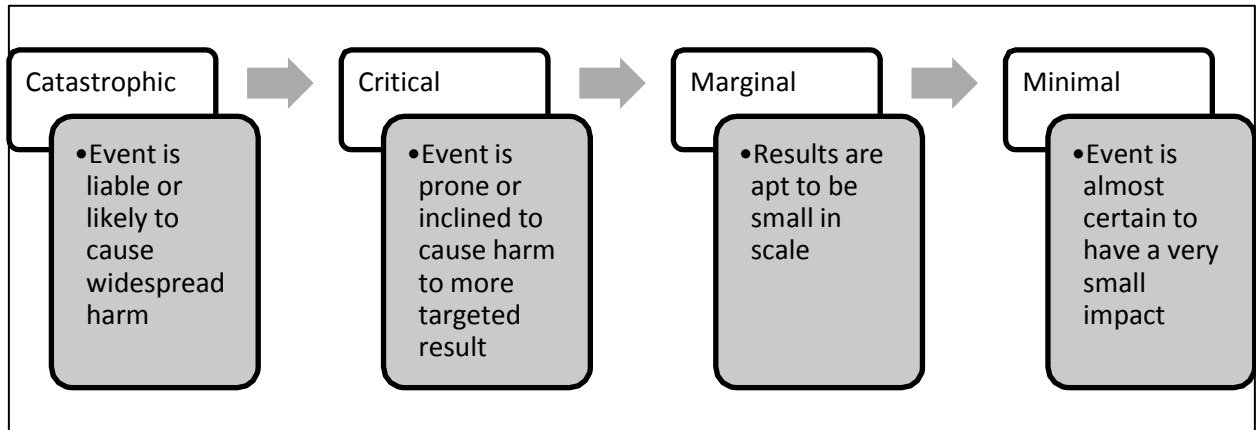


Figure 1 Impact Continuum

If the event is likely to have a catastrophic or critical result that will cause either widespread or targeted harm it should be considered a safety issue rather than a focus on a crisis issue. Some events may begin as a crisis and migrate into the safety corridor. This underscores the importance of working closely with families to identify events that are likely to occur as well as constantly assessing situations to assure that everyone is safe.

The other dimension for managing safety involves the probability of occurrence. If the event is high risk but low likelihood of happening, it shouldn't be the focus of a great deal of energy.

The figure below identifies the continuum of likelihood of occurrences:

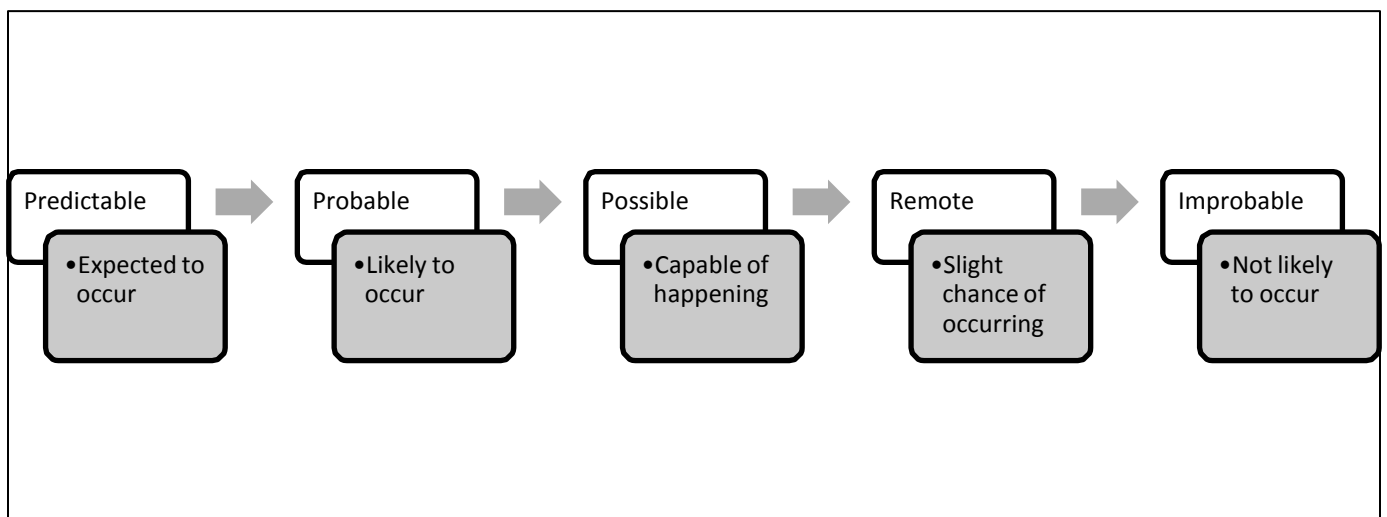


Figure 2 Probability Continuum



### Activity: Using the Risk Assessment Matrix

Using the dimensions of probability and impact creates an opportunity for individuals working with families to identify focus areas for time, energy, commitment and resource. Listed below are a series of events that are likely to be considered safety issues. Go through and mark the three that you are currently worried about with a family. If you don't see your concerns, listed there is space to add your own.

- Young person engages in prostitution
- Family arguments escalate to hitting
- Young person drinks liquor and has a medical condition that makes this especially risky
- Family with very young children lose their housing
- Parent is driving without insurance or a license
- Young person gets on the roof at school and threatens to jump
- Young person cuts themselves
- Parent uses corporal punishment to discipline the children
- Sexual abuse has happened in the past
- Young person gets mad and hits holes in the wall when told "no"
- Young person is often out late at night
- Parent relapses with alcohol
- Family lives in a violent neighborhood
- There are firearms in the house
- Other:
- Other:
- Other:

Now using the Risk Assessment Matrix on the next page, identify each event in very specific terms including the last time the event happened, where it occurred and what exactly happened. Next, identify where in the grid you would place the event based on the impact and likelihood of reoccurrence. If you have landed in the red or yellow area it is likely a safety issue. If it is in the gray area it might become a crisis issue. If you've landed in the green area it is possible that the situation is strength that can be built on for either crisis management or safety programming.

# Risk Assessment Matrix

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Define the event in specific behavioral terms:				
Likelihood Of Occurrence	Impact/Severity			
	Catastrophic	Critical	Marginal	Minimal
Predictable	Red	Red	Yellow	Grey
Probable			Yellow	Grey
Possible	Yellow	Yellow	Grey	Green
Remote		Grey		Green
Improbable	Grey	Grey	Grey	Green

## Tips for Sorting Safety and Crisis Situations

- Learn from the past: pay attention to the impact of events that have happened in the past in order to promote safe futures
- Promote choice for families in all situations. The greater the say the lower the risk
- Use impact and likelihood to create a rational prediction of threat
- Separate compliance or follow through from safety concerns
- Recognize that a crisis filled lifestyle may be a personal choice
- Learn to respect the fact that for some families crisis may be their most familiar activity
- Sort your emotional response from the facts
- Avoid the “gang up” effect; just because a collaborative group is talking doesn’t mean that it’s really a safety issue
- Avoid creating the catastrophic future: just because it worries you doesn’t mean it is really a safety issue

## Collaborative Crisis Planning

One of the first challenges for anyone working with families in a community context involves staying present and working with the family to resolve crisis situations. A crisis can be a worrisome or risky event. Other defining characteristics of a crisis include:

- *A sense of not knowing what to do*
- *Feeling overwhelmed by events*
- *Recognizing that coping abilities are not enough to manage a situation*
- *Dread that if this situation doesn't get resolved things may become unsafe*

Crisis occurs for everyone at some time or another. Crisis situations can be seen as the opportunity point for change to occur. On the other hand, the presence of crisis situations can be taken to mean that community participation is not working. When the presence of crisis is seen as the absence of good outcome, communities may fall into the trap of identifying placements that remove the child from the family and community rather than continuing to work with the family around crisis situations. Individuals involved in System of Care development are quick to point out that a crisis event may be the fulcrum for real change to occur within a particular situation. Recognizing that collaborating with families is critical no matter what the circumstances is a key ingredient of a well constructed System of Care. The steps of developing a collaborative crisis plan are listed below:

- Step 1. Introduce concept of crisis and define a list from this family
- Step 2. Triage List
- Step 3. Develop Proactive and Reactive Plans
- Step 4. Implement, Practice & Review Crisis Response
- Step 5. Evaluate and Modify Each Plan

Using these steps to develop a detailed crisis plan can assist people with knowing what to do when crisis happens. Having realistic crisis contingencies in place can be an intervention in and of itself. This can often result in families having more options, more confidence and a practical range of coping strategies designed to help manage situations. Each of the steps for developing crisis plans are detailed in the following pages.

## Step One: Introduce Crisis and Define a List

Starting a discussion with family members about an appropriate crisis plan starts with introducing the concept of crisis. Defining a crisis as a time when you don't know what to do is often the first step in developing a proactive plan. Once you've defined the concept the next step is to assist each family member with their own definition of a crisis. It is important to remember that in a crisis situation, the person who has the crisis defines the crisis. On the other hand, for some individuals situations have been around for so long that they may not see them as a crisis even though others do. In these circumstances it is important to start with the families listing of a crisis and then create opportunities for others who know the family to add to the list.

*Training Activity: Think about a family you have worked with or know. Using the form on the next page identify what each family member would say is a crisis. Don't limit the answers and don't try to come up with the "right" event. This activity is about brainstorming all of the options for crisis management.*

**Family Forms: The form on the next page can be used with families in identifying crisis events. If using this form with a family, complete the information identifying the family name, name of staff completing form and date for initial completion. This form can be reviewed regularly with the family and those dates of review should be entered. In the first column, identify the name and family role (i.e. parent, child, brother, etc.) for the person working with to complete this form. In the next column identify what the person says or would say are examples of crisis for them. In some cases, the practitioner may elect to complete this form by having the parent identify what the child or other family members would say is a crisis.**

**Crisis Brainstorming Worksheet**

Family Name:		Staff Name:	
Date Completed:		Dates Revised:	
Family Member Name & Role	Description of a Crisis (Each family member)		

## Step Two: Triage Each Crisis for Planning

Now that you have generated your list of crisis, according to the family's definition, your job is to work with the family to sort through each crisis event. This is a way to shorten the original

list down to a few items for action. By selecting those items of most impact, you are likely to be able to craft reasonable range of responses to those circumstances.

This triage approach occurs collaboratively with the family driving the process while other providers, helpers and community members provide support. Typically, this rating of each event occurs through going back over the list and rating each item according to its impact or result. The ratings typical are sorted using the following responses:

- High Impact: This is unsettling and would prefer to not ever experience it again
- Medium Impact: This is uncomfortable but I could live with it occurring again
- Low Impact: This situation doesn't really bother me all that much

In seeking ratings from the family, it is important to let each family member's opinion stand rather than second guess their ratings. If a family member doesn't find a particular event troublesome even if others are bothered by it that item will not be selected for crisis planning.

*Activity: Return to your list of events on the previous page. Apply what you know about the family and put an "H", "M" or "L" beside each item. Circle two events with a rating of "H" for the next exercise.*

**Family Form: The form on the next page adds a column for identifying the impact or consequence of the anticipated crisis event. This column should be completed by the family or from the family's point of view.**

**Crisis Brainstorming Worksheet**

Family Name:		Staff Name:	
Date Completed:		Dates Revised:	
Family Member Name & Role	Description of a Crisis	Impact H-High M-Moderate L-Low	



## Step Three: Develop the Plan

Effective crisis response involves two levels of response. One is a proactive response that is designed to keep the event from reoccurring again while the other is a reactive plan that is designed to provide everyone involved with a clear job and responsibility. Each event that has been prioritized High impact should have a detailed proactive and reactive component complete with specific duties, timelines and assignments. It doesn't matter whether you start with a proactive or reactive plan as long as both are in place when the discussion is complete.

### The Proactive Prevention

The Proactive Prevention is designed to keep a crisis from happening again. The process for building a sensible prevention scheme typically involves brainstorming with the family to come up with a range of ideas to keep the event from reoccurring. If you are working in a team environment for family support, the process should entail empowering the team to brainstorm a range of ways to prevent reoccurrence. This typically occurs by posting or summarizing the event and then brainstorming at least ten ways to keep it from happening. It is important to strive for ten to assure that creative ideas are considered. Once the list of ten is generated it should be arranged to identify those areas that will build on the person's strengths or interests. Follow up by sorting those strength based items to determine those that are likely to be most effective. When the original list of ten has been sorted, assign tasks to individuals for implementation. Once individuals have been assigned, ask each person to identify when they expect to implement.

Good Proactive Prevention strategies are those that build on family strengths and community capacities. Effective strategies organize a range of responses from a range of people rather than expecting the person in the middle of the crisis to be the first step in keeping the event from occurring. Rather than focusing on a triggering event and trying to contract with the person who is "triggered" to do something different a good prevention strategy will empower others to do things to prevent a reoccurrence. For example, a young person who yells and hits things may indicate that what "triggers" them is when they are told what to do by an adult. Asking that young person to agree to take deep breaths or a time-out if necessary may sound like a good strategy. The problem is that agreeing to take a time-out may sound good when things aren't emotional but when the event is close to "take-off" those agreements may be forgotten. Examples that often work include practicing the art of distraction by having someone else step up to redirect the situation, establishing code words that establish a clear response, stepping in sooner rather than later and simply helping people feel better when things are starting to feel rough.

*Activity: Use the sheet on the following page to identify a proactive plan. First list the two items selected in the first column from the previous activity. Next, pair up with someone else in the room and brainstorm ten options for each time. Now choose those items which build on strengths and are likely to keep the event from happening and list them in the third column. Once each item has been listed identify who should be responsible and when they will complete their task.*

**Family Form: The form on the following page can be used in working with families to brainstorm the proactive prevention strategies. This can be done in a team setting or with individual families by clearly defining the troublesome event in the first column and brainstorming ways to keep it from reoccurring. Once ten options have been identified those options that build on family member strengths or community capacities should be listed in the next column. It is easiest to list the numbers of the actions that have been selected. The last two columns should be completed by identifying who is responsible for completing this action and when it should be occur. You might have more than one individual assigned for each action.**

**Proactive Prevention Planning Form**

Family Name		Staff Name		
Date Completed		Others Present:		
Event	Ten Options	Selected Options (Strengths, Community)	Who	When

## The Reactive Response

Even with the best and most reliable implementation of proactive strategies, crisis events are likely to occur. Good reactive strategies are designed to manage people and events as they happen. The first rule of a well constructed reactive response is to assure the right size response for effective management. Effective response should be dependent upon the severity, context and cause of the crisis event. Relatively minor events that are caught early in the cycle can and should be managed with friendly support and acknowledgement. More severe events may require responses that range from information and referral to structured interventions. In creating right size responses the following conditions should be considered:

- **Timing:** Create a response that occurs as quickly as possible and is able to be implemented in a relevant time frame.
- **Empowerment:** Create responses that follow the plan and allow the person in crisis to be in charge of decision making.
- **Collaborative Action:** When a crisis occurs it is important to mobilize everyone rather than waiting for the individual experiencing the crisis to start the chain of events.
- **Outcome Oriented:** The purpose of a reactive crisis plan is to get through with the least amount of damage in the shortest amount of time.
- **Clear Communication:** The biggest danger during the implementation of a reactive response is that various team or family members will lose hope or establish a different meaning about the event. Managing communication empowers everyone involved to manage the event rather than having the event manage them.

*Activity:* Complete the form on the following page outlining your proactive response. When that is complete, use the telephone tree on the page after that to identify your communication plan.

**Family Form:** The forms on the next two pages can be used when working with families. The Reactive Response Form can be used to identify what types of reactions should be planned when the event occurs. Reactive responses are divided into the following types:

- **Supportive Activities:** Designed to simply make the person in the midst of crisis feel better
- **Intervention:** Designed to influence the result of the event
- **Resource:** Designed to provide access to information, skills, agencies or services that are likely to be helpful.

**In the event of a crisis episode a well constructed response will have a balance of activities among all of these types. This form can be completed with a family or with a family who is working with a support team. Once the three types of activities have been constructed, the**

**person completing the form should review the four questions at the bottom of the form with the family. This will help those helping to build the right type of crisis response.**

**The second form, entitled Crisis Communication Form, should be used to identify notifications when the event has occurred. This form begins with the first box on the telephone tree starting with the family. Each person on the notification list should have their name and phone number listed. This can be completed in a team setting if you're working with a team of people to support a family or can be completed with a family. Copies of the form should be provided to all team members or all individuals on the notification list.**

Reactive Crisis Plan Worksheet		
Family Name:		Staff Name:
Date Completed		Others Present
Name The Event	Three Reactive Responses	Who Should be Responsible for This Activity
	Supportive	
	Intervention	
	Resource	
	Supportive	
	Intervention	
	Resource	

Review your plan using the following areas.

- The response can be implemented quickly and efficiently
- The family continues to be in charge even when the event is occurring
- Responsibility for response is shared
- The response will result in the event ending



## Step Four: Implement the Plan

Once the Crisis Plan has been developed it is important to actually implement and try those plans out. Rehearsals and practice sessions should be set up as a part of developing crisis capacity. Typically these start with at least two planned rehearsals that occur in negotiated times and places and involve those who are likely to be most impacted by the crisis event. Each practice session should include an evaluation component during which the family and others get to comment on the probability of the plan working. Once the plan has been modified through the planned practice sessions the next step is to try it out with unplanned rehearsals. This typically occurs within a range of time frames negotiated with the family. For example, a helper may say to a young person, “Now that we’ve tried this and it works when you know I’m coming, next week I’ll drop by your house one day and we’ll try it when you’re not expecting me.”

Once the practices have been implemented, community contacts should be considered. If you expect that someone else will be involved with this plan, it is important to plan for their involvement. For example, if you expect that the school truancy officer may be called, you might want to meet with local district officials or at the very least provide the parent with a letter that explains the desired response and someone to be contacted for help. Additionally, everyone who is going to respond to the event should have the communication list available in a way that allows it to be transported.

Finally, the point of good crisis response is to manage it to resolution. Unfortunately there is often an aftermath associated with crisis episodes that may include resentment, exhaustion or fear. That emotional “hangover” may result in the situation lingering or becoming worse not because the situation is that bad but individual responses to the situation can be distressing. It is often helpful to have an individual from among the team working with the family or the family itself to be declared the “crisis referee.” This person declares the event over and provides everyone with feedback about how the event was managed.

***Activity:** Identify who would be the person to do the practices with the family you are considering. Identify where and when they would do the rehearsals as well as what it would take to engage the family in those events. Finally identify who would be the referee for the event in terms of calling the crisis over and providing feedback about how it was managed.*

**Family Form:** The form on the next page can be used with families when scheduling rehearsals. The first column identifies the date of the crisis practice drill. The next column identifies whether the time and place of the drill had been specified or whether it had been a surprise. The next column identifies who, what, where and when things happened followed by a rating in the fourth column. This rating should come from discussions with the family immediately after the drill. During this debriefing everyone should discuss whether the practiced responses are likely to effectively manage the crisis. When the letter grade is at least a “B” practice drills can cease.



**Crisis Practice Record**

<b>Date Crisis Plan Completed</b>		<b>Family Name:</b>	<b>Staff Name:</b>	
<b>Date of Practice</b>	<b>Type Planned Unplanned</b>	<b>Describe the practice including location, time of day, who was involved and length of time for completion.</b>	<b>Rate the Plan (A, B, C, D, F)</b>	<b>Suggested Improvements</b>

## Step Five: Review, Modify and Improve After Implementation

When the plan has been developed, practiced and followed, the next step is to work towards continuous improvement of the plan. Within a System of Care context this usually involves meeting with the family and rest of the team to identify what worked and what didn't work. The first level of review is whether everyone involved in the plan did what they said they were going to do. This is called Follow Through.

The second component of Crisis Plan Review involves checking for outcomes. Typically in crisis planning and creating sensible crisis response there are two levels of outcomes for review. The first is the duration of the event. It is reasonable to expect that the event will last for shorter periods of time as the response is implemented and practiced. Second we would anticipate the impact of the event should change as well. This means that the after effect of the crisis event should lessen as individuals receive support, resource and intervention designed to increase their confidence and ability to cope. Often this may mean that the crisis doesn't completely go away but instead the person experiencing the crisis knows what to do when the event occurs. Once you know what to do then the impact of the crisis is managed and the event moves from a crisis event to an activity that can be managed.

*Activity: Review the Crisis event you've been planning about. Identify the baseline for duration and impact in the chart below. Once you have done that identify the target you expect to achieve.*

	Duration	Impact
Baseline: Describe the amount of time the event currently takes and the impact of the event.		
Target: Describe what you would hope the results of your intervention would be. Make sure you identify what the family would say.		

**Family Form: The Crisis Management Tracking Form can be used with families to track crisis response. This form can be completed weekly or monthly and reflects both the baseline of where you started and target of where you would hope to end. Family and Staff names should be completed as well as the start date of the process. Notes can be used to**

**identify any unique feature about this crisis response. Once agreement has been reached with the family about the target, a method for measurement should be identified. Choose simple easily accessed ways to get the information needed. Simple measures might include after hour phone calls, police contacts, school attendance or self reports of others involved. Once that measure has been negotiated, it should be reviewed in the agreed upon time frame which will either be weekly, bi-weekly or monthly. The person completing the form should gather that information and simply put an X in the box that reflects progress at the time of review. If there is no change you should mark the box at baseline. When the desired target has been reached mark that area. This form should be completed with the family to gather their perspective on progress.**

Crisis Management Tracking Form												
Family Name						Staff Name						
Start Date:						Notes:						
Baseline Where are you now?												
Target Where do you Hope to Be?												
Measure How will you know?												
TARGET												
BASELINE												
Weekly												
Bi-weekly												
Monthly												
(circle one)		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11