PRACTICAL POLICE PSYCHOLOGY

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Dr. Miller is a frequent commentator on radio and TV, and the author of numerous professional and popular print and online publications pertaining to the brain, behavior, health, law, criminal justice, and business management psychology, including *Shocks to the System: Psychotherapy of Traumatic Disability Syndromes* (Norton).
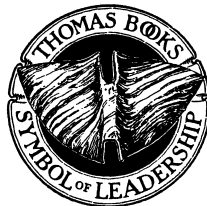
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PRACTICAL POLICE PSYCHOLOGY

Stress Management and Crisis Intervention for Law Enforcement

By

LAURENCE MILLER, PH.D.

FOREWORD

Over the past 50 years, the concept of an applied discipline of *police psychology* as an effective complement for professional law enforcement services has emerged. Through the efforts of early pioneers such as Martin Reiser, Morton Bard, Martin Symonds, and others, and particularly because of the successes and professional acceptance of the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit, law enforcement executives have recognized the value of such a discipline to their agencies.

Early in its development, police officers looked to psychologists and psychiatrists to help better understand, and better yet solve, the increasing number of unexplained crimes of violence, and, ultimately, the concept of "behavioral profiling" has become a common tool of investigators. Later in the evolution of this discipline, in an application of psychology to "in progress" crimes, police administrators began to ask for psychological assistance in more effectively handling hostage negotiations, keeping the hostages alive and taking hostage takers into custody. Even more recently, we've seen its use as we've tried to understand and control crowd and gang behavior and respond to incidents that evolved into "suicide by cop."

But *police psychology* is not just about understanding the bad guys and their actions; it's also about understanding the good guys. In 1973, the Task Force on Police of the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals recommended that "every police agency, by 1975, should retain the services of a qualified psychiatrist or psychologist to conduct psychological testing of police applicants in order to screen out those who have mental disorders or are emotionally unfit for police work." And, as we've learned more about the emotional consequences of policework, we've turned to the discipline of *police psychology* to allow us to better respond to the needs of the men and women in our profession, more effectively and compassionately assuring the safety and well-being of those personnel, our agencies, and our communities.

Yet, as with all applied sciences, *police psychology* brings with it its own unique realities, myths, and misconceptions. That, then, becomes the raison d'etre for a book such as this. Dr. Miller writes as a practicing police psychologist, one who has "walked the walk" and can now, with greater credibility, understanding, and feeling, explain his profession, its strengths, its limitations, and its

intricacies to other members of the psychological community and, I believe, to a broad spectrum of our law enforcement community: its executives, its practitioners, and its educators. His tone and his descriptions bespeak one who carries with him the understanding of the academic and psychological worlds, but speaks with the clear language of one who has been at the frontline.

My academic mentor, Dr. Harold J. Vetter, himself a psychologist turned criminologist, always taught me that the most effective teacher is one who is able to educate, communicate, and entertain, all at the same time! In this book, Dr. Miller does exactly that: he educates us about an issue critical to the success of our law enforcement agencies; he communicates in an extremely clear, concise, open, and honest manner; and he entertains us with his war stories and his frank language. Dr. Miller's book is a much needed, much awaited, practical guide to the discipline of police psychology and one which will have an impact on those who practice it, those who use it, and those who need it!

James D. Sewell, PhD
Assistant Commissioner (Retired)
Florida Department of Law Enforcement

PREFACE

Every time we dial 911, we expect that our emergency will be taken seriously and handled competently. The police will race to our burgled office, the firefighters will speedily douse our burning home, the ambulance crew will stabilize our injured loved one and whisk him or her to the nearest hospital. We take these expectations for granted because of the skill and dedication of the workers who serve the needs of law enforcement, emergency services, and public safety.

For police officers, this task is doubly challenging because they are the only public safety professionals whom the law and society grant the authority–indeed, the obligation–to use coercive physical force to influence the behavior of citizens. Further, their decision to use such force is based largely on their own judgment as to what is appropriate in each particular situation. For some citizens, police officers are the only resource they have to depend on in times of crisis and, for many of these, the police are the sole entry point into the broader social services sector. Not surprising, then, that the news media, entertainment industry, and the general public have infused law enforcement with a near-mythic status, both for good and for ill. We rely on the police to protect us, and are quick to condemn them if we feel they have violated our trust.

Practical Police Psychology: Stress Management and Crisis Intervention for Law Enforcement addresses the psychologically complex world of modern policing. This book analyzes both the dramatic crises and everyday challenges faced by all law enforcement personnel, from the street cop to the departmental brass. But analysis is only a first, albeit crucial, step. My aim is to offer usable, down-to-earth, and immediately applicable–that is, *practical*–psychological guidelines and recommendations for improving the quality of policing on a daily basis.

Two major themes inform this book. The first is the concept of *community policing*, which is becoming the model of local law enforcement in a growing number of jurisdictions. It is hard to think of another area of law enforcement where understanding human nature is more important. To be effective in community policing, the best patrol officers are already practical psychologists. They know how to wield influence and authority without resorting to force; to

deescalate curbside squabbles from becoming civil disturbances; to calm sui-
cidal, intoxicated, traumatized, and mentally disturbed citizens; to enlist co-
operation rather than resistance when investigating crimes; to encourage the
communities they patrol to see police officers as resources they can count on,
rather than as hostile invaders they must fear.

The second theme is *professionalism*. What most of this book's broad ap-
proaches and specific recommendations have in common is the concept of
the law enforcement officer as a true professional, charged with the same tech-
nical and ethical responsibilities as doctors, attorneys, psychologists, and other
professionals, and therefore entitled to commensurate respect. One feature of
the job description shared by these professionals is their role as competent *de-
cision makers*. That is, practitioners of all these disciplines follow certain stan-
dardized protocols of training and experience, yet each is empowered to use
a certain degree of judgment and discretion to deal with individual circum-
stances in their daily work. Indeed, these professionals couldn't be truly ef-
fective without some ideal mix of standardization and flexibility. As the
demands of law enforcement become increasingly more complex, citizens will
come to expect that those who serve and protect them will meet the highest
standards of education, training, and psychological fitness.

These two themes translate into two broad domains of policing where psy-
chological knowledge and expertise can make important contributions. One is
the role of law enforcement behavioral science in *operational assistance* of police
activities. These include hostage negotiation, suicide-by-cop intervention,
criminal investigation, undercover operations, riot and crowd control, deal-
ing with crime victims, and special assignments. It also includes less dramatic,
more everyday activities such as citizen-citizen dispute mediation, quieting
angry or distraught civilians, dealing with traumatized crime victims, handling
mentally disturbed citizens, responding to natural and technological disasters,
and interacting smoothly and cooperatively with other public agencies and
private businesses.

The second domain has to do with cops taking care of themselves and deal-
ing with problems within their own departments—often subsumed under the
broad heading of *psychological services*. This domain includes critical incident
stress, postshooting trauma, specialized psychotherapy for law enforcement
officers, alcohol and substance abuse problems, police family stresses and
family therapy, and departmental stress management and health maintenance
programs. It also includes standards and practices to enhance police perfor-
mance and the overall improvement of law enforcement quality within com-
munities by addressing selection and screening of officers, training and
discipline, supervision and leadership, and police departmental organization
and management psychology.

The target audience for *Practical Police Psychology* is a dual one. First, law
enforcement administrators, line supervisors, and working cops who are

committed to quality performance within their departments will learn how to provide the best possible clinical and operational psychological services to the men and women under their command and to the citizens they serve. Second, for psychologists and other mental health clinicians who are involved in, or may be considering law enforcement consultation, this book will provide a comprehensive guide to the unique challenges and rewards of working with police personnel and their departments. The tone of the text reflects this: sometimes, I'll be speaking shrinktalk to my fellow mental health clinicians; other times, I move into cop idiom; often, I'll drift in an out and combine the styles. Only you, the readers, can judge if this is an effective–and practical– mode of transmitting complex interpersonal information through the printed page. Basically, I write the way I teach: I respect my audience and try to communicate at a level that both accommodates and expands their individual perspectives and, at the same time, encourages questions and constructive feedback. So feel free to feed back.

The content of this book reflects a careful survey of the literature on police psychology and law enforcement behavioral science, combined with my own clinical and practical experience. I originally began with the idea of writing a book on police psychology that would cover the entire breadth and scope of the field and, at first, I was concerned that there might not be enough material to address all these areas adequately. Ha. As the research expanded and the piles of notes climbed, I came to realize that there exists a vast and largely untapped storehouse of literature bearing directly or indirectly on the psychology of law enforcement, and soon the task became how to winnow through this silo of data to cultivate a book that would be both authoritative and useful.

The first stage of modification involved a process of binary fission; that is, the material I reviewed seemed to fall into two broad areas where psychology and behavioral science were relevant to police work: stress management and crisis intervention on the one hand, and criminal investigation, interview and interrogation on the other. Rather than attempt to cram everything into an oversized book (yeah, right, you're thinking–like this one is a pamphlet), I decided to deal with the first subject area here; the second area will have to await a forthcoming volume of its own. My prioritization was guided largely by my own daily work and experience in the area of police psychology and by the interest elicited in my police academy courses.

Even within the subjects of law enforcement stress management and crisis intervention, some selectivity was necessary, and no doubt many a reader will be dismayed at his or her pet topic being given short shrift. Another problem was how to organize the chapters as well as the material within the chapters. This book's organization went through numerous revisions, as many of the chapter topics overlap and shade into one another. But of course, this is how it should be, because one of this book's themes is the interrelatedness of crisis

intervention and stress management: each necessitates utilizing skills and techniques that are universal in helping human beings in distress. Thus, while each chapter can stand independently on its own merits, I've endeavored to weave this common theme of universality throughout the narrative.

Laurence Miller

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A book like this has many influences, and a number of people encouraged and supported this project and/or the work that led to its inception and completion. Many of these people took the time to read pre-publication drafts of many of the book's chapters and to offer useful critiques and suggestions that have improved this volume immeasurably.

Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Assistant Commissioner James D. Sewell, Ph.D. has been a long-time supporter of my writings in the police psychology field. He generously critiqued many of the raw chapters of this book and I will never again use an excess comma without wincing at the thought of his blue-inked, fountain-penned redactions. He has been an invaluable source of information on certain technical aspects of law enforcement work that I could not have otherwise known. Jim is also an accomplished author in his own right, with numerous publications to his credit and I look forward to many future collaborations with him.

Over the years, I've had the pleasure of working with Captain James Cummings, M.S.W. of the Boynton Beach Police Department and Palm Beach County School District on a variety of tasks and projects, ranging from emergency call-outs during critical incidents to co-teaching classes and seminars at the police academy. Jim generously took the time to review some of the material for this book in the middle of his own preparation for advanced credentialing in the mental health field to complement his law enforcement experience. This, of course, exemplifies the present book's philosophy of continuing professional growth as the basis for superior law enforcement work. I look forward to continuing our informal "lunchtime seminars" and other work together.

And another Jim. Many of the ideas in this book were honed and developed through courses I teach at the Police Academy-Criminal Justice Institute of Palm Beach Community College. Institute Director Dr. James Marinelli, a former beat cop himself, continues to be a source of insight on how to handle the practical aspects of instructing and motivating law enforcement officers in a classroom setting. This Jim always finds time for our discussions and is always there with words of encouragement, which I appreciate greatly.

It was at the Police Academy–CJI that I met fellow instructor Colonel Jack Maxwell, a law enforcement consultant and hostage negotiator with over 100

successful negotiations under his belt—a "resume of life" if ever there was one. Jack scrutinized the chapter on hostage crises and made a number of critical emendations and suggestions that reflect his practical experience in this dangerous but vital aspect of police work. This chapter also benefitted from the input of Dr. Arthur Slatkin, psychological consultant for the Louisville, Kentucky Police Department and author of *Communications in Crisis and Hostage Negotiations*, a book that exemplifies the "practical" in practical psychology applications to law enforcement.

My affiliation with the West Palm Beach Police Department continues to be instructive and rewarding. Former Chief Ric Bradshaw (now Palm Beach County Sheriff) recognized the importance of psychological services to the health and well-being of his officers and was supportive of my efforts. Current Chief Delsa Bush came up through the ranks and continues the tradition of taking a firm-but-concerned, hands-on approach to the health and well-being of her officers, as well as being dedicated to needs of the community her department serves. She also reviewed the chapter on police officer misconduct and discipline, and was able to inject insightful doses of management savvy and street cred into the narrative. Police Chaplin and EAP Coordinator Carl Cooper and I have co-counseled a number of officers, and I never fail to be impressed by the breadth and depth of his commitment to his colleagues' welfare: If you're a cop in a jam, he's the guy you'd want to go to first. I've also had the pleasure of working with a number of WPBPD assistant chiefs, captains, lieutenants, and sergeants over the years—you know who you are, guys.

Historically, my involvement with the WPBPD came by way of my earlier role as Clinical Director of the Palm Beach County Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) Team. It was there that I became intimately acquainted with the kinds of work and the kinds of challenges faced by law enforcement, firefighter-paramedic, and other emergency services personnel in their daily jobs. The men and women volunteers of that CISD team continue their dedication to the health and well-being of their colleagues in distress. Such teams throughout the country and the world deserve our respect and admiration, as does their sponsoring agency, the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF).

A number of other people have graciously offered their time and expertise to discuss ideas and/or review material relevant to the present book. Police Psychologist Dr. Cary Rostow provided valuable information on conducting law enforcement fitness-for-duty evaluations, and his book, *A Handbook for Psychological Fitness-for-Duty Evaluations in Law Enforcement* (with co-author Robert Davis), is required reading for all police psychologists. Another author, FDLE Special Agent and novelist Jim Born (is that four Jims, now?) took time from his busy writing and book tour schedule to review and offer his comments on some of the present book's material. His novels include *Walking Money* and *Shock Wave*.

Even the feds got into the act. Thanks to Special Agent and Training Director Brian Jerome of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Miami Field Office for his helpful comments on some of this book's contents. I look forward to working with Brian in the future. Special Agent Hugh Galyean of the FBI San Francisco Field Office was one of the earliest supporters of this project; he has my enduring gratitude and I still have pictures of his baby on my computer.

I've only just recently met Dr. John Sullivan, Director of the International Center for Leadership and Development (ICLAD) in Boca Raton, Florida, but I'm looking forward to working with him and his organization, as it embodies this book's core philosophy of law enforcement officers as true professionals who are committed to continuing education and career development.

To all the cops in all the departments in all the locations where I've worked, taught, lectured, or consulted: One of the advantages of my being a civilian, and not a sworn officer, is that, while you may take what you do every day for granted, we don't. I know it sounds like a cliché, but I've learned a lot from working with you all and one of the things I hope this book accomplishes is to give people an idea of how difficult and complex a job it is to be a force for peace and stability in an increasingly violent and chaotic society. Thanks, guys, and no, I'm not gonna get all juicy on your asses.

Finally, again thanks to my family for putting up with the schedule-wrecking uncertainties of doing this kind of work and for your general support of my professional efforts. I know I don't say it often, but not a day goes by that I don't appreciate your love and support.

My thanks to Charles C Thomas Editor Michael Thomas for his patience awaiting the completion of this manuscript and for his expertise in helping to shape it into a valuable volume. Aside from being a pleasure to work with, the technical expertise of Michael and his staff are responsible for the appealing style, feel, and layout of the volume you hold in your hands. I look forward to future projects with Charles C Thomas Publishers.

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PART IV. POLICE ADMINISTRATION AND FAMILY LIFE

PRACTICAL POLICE PSYCHOLOGY

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: PRACTICAL PSYCHOLOGY, STRESS MANAGEMENT, AND CRISIS INTERVENTION IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

THE STRESSES AND CHALLENGES OF POLICING

The world of policing at the beginning of the twenty-first century is in some respects unique, in other ways linked to the past (Peak, 2003; Toch & Grant, 2005). The traditional role of the law enforcement officer has always been fighting crime, but today's urban and rural police are confronted with a host of unique challenges, only a minority of which involve the actual apprehension of criminals. On any given day, these may include resolving a dispute between merchants; helping a homeless person get to a shelter; finding a lost child; settling a family or neighbor squabble; taking a mentally disturbed citizen into protective custody; dispersing an unruly crowd of teens; making several traffic stops; applying first aid to an accident victim; or referring an ill, indigent, or elderly person to social services.

Note that all of these tasks require some combination of technical expertise and interpersonal skill, and any of them could devolve into a dangerous crisis situation if handled clumsily or ineffectively.

Indeed, it is a principle of this book's approach and organization that stress management cannot be separated from crisis intervention, as each comprises an essential component of the other. Stress provokes and exacerbates crises; crises elevate stress. Effective crisis intervention reduces stress, which in turn makes crisis management easier. Officers who know how to manage their own stress are less likely to be goaded into escalating a citizen confrontation into a crisis, and will be better able to use clear thinking and effective action if a crisis unavoidably occurs.

POLICE AS PRACTICAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

If law enforcement and mental health professionals share one thing in common, it is that we both spend virtually all of our time dealing with the outer reaches of human nature. That's why I usually begin my police academy classes by telling the officers that "we both do the same kind of work, but I have the easy job." That is, we both deal with extremes of human emotion and behavior, but I get to do it in the relatively secure confines of an office or hospital, while you have to do it on the street. My customers are frequently challenging, sometimes annoying, occasionally threatening, but rarely overtly dangerous; your customers may kill you. I often have to make tricky diagnostic determinations and decide on an appropriate course of action, and so do you. But I typically have the luxury of hours or days to pore over records and interview my patient in a quiet room; you have to make a snap decision in a few seconds under noisy, confusing, or hazardous conditions. If I'm wrong, I can usually go back and try something else; if you're wrong, people may be injured or killed.

Thus, knowledge of practical psychology is essential to police officers, both for their daily effectiveness and personal safety. A large proportion of officer injuries or fatalities occur in the course of routine police activities, such as traffic stops, mediating citizen disputes, or domestic calls. Mastery of interpersonal stress management, conflict resolution, and crisis intervention skills can thus be thought of as a kind of *psychological body armor* that protects cops from unnecessary risk as they carry out their sworn duties to protect and serve. One of the functions of this book is to guide officers in refining, expanding, and solidifying the interpersonal skills many of them already use intuitively to manage stress and crises on the job.

WHY DO MEN AND WOMEN BECOME COPS?

For all the show biz glamour, the real world of policing is far more prosaic, and understanding the details of the job can sometimes make one wonder why men and women choose to become cops. The working conditions can be brutal, especially in inclement climates, assignments can be miserable, especially at the beginning of one's career, and in many cases, promotion and advancement are extremely slow. In fact, about 80 percent of police officers spend their entire career as line officers on patrol, or as plainclothes detectives; 15 percent become supervisors; and only five percent rise to executive rank (Blau, 1994).

It is therefore interesting to examine what police officers do and don't like about their jobs, based on a general consensus from the literature (Anderson et al., 1995; Blau, 1994; Toch, 2002) and my own experience in speaking to officers.

What Police Officers Like About Their Jobs

Many officers are attracted to the power and respect that come with the image of a police officer. Being a member of an elite and honorable warrior culture holds the same fascination as does a career in the military; indeed, for many ex-soldiers, policing is a civilian extension of that role. Associated with this is the gratification of the societal protector role: many officers take justifiable pride in being part of the "thin blue line" that separates civilization from the barbarians. For officers whose beats include the neighborhoods where they grew up, there is the added satisfaction of protecting their home turf, and garnering the respect and admiration of local family members and neighbors–some of whom may well have had their past doubts as to what the officer would ever amount to.

The police role may be close to home in another way, as well. A fair number of police officers choose their profession to uphold a family tradition of law enforcement, and may have been inspired by a parent's or relative's career in this field, or in a related one like the military. The family background of many officers includes one or more relatives who have espoused strong moral and/or religious values, and policing is an eminently concrete way of reinforcing those values on a daily basis. A number of officers speak of their career in policing as a way of "giving back" something to the families and neighborhoods that once nurtured them. The downside, of course, is the potential for disillusionment and cynicism that occurs when the officers are exposed to, or tempted by, opportunities for corruption and misconduct–often made all the more easy by their familiarity with the local culture.

Many officers genuinely enjoy the support and camaraderie of their new "police family," which has become an extension of the extended tribal family group in which they grew up. But I've observed the opposite pattern as well. That is, many officers describe an unpleasant, hostile, and downright abusive early family environment, often characterized by an angry, moralistic, and physically punishing father, for whom the son or daughter "could never do anything right." Not infrequently, this parent was also an alcoholic. Yet, the officer will typically idealize this parent's strict disciplinarianism in one breath ("Dad didn't take no crap–we kids toed the line, or else"), while decrying his gratuitous cruelty in another ("He was a mean sonofabitch, especially when he was drinking–he'd whip our asses for no good reason").

This mental split often results in the officer internalizing the rigid but inconsistent moralistic

code expressed by the parent, while externalizing and projecting the meanness and lack of self-control onto the bad elements of society with which the officer is now charged with dealing. Such officers may be especially effective at their jobs, but are at risk for both overaggressiveness and burnout when their moral codes become threatened (see Chapter 13).

Interestingly, however, only a minority of officers cite a desire to "help people" as their first reason for joining the police force. This helping motivation seems to be something that develops over time, as they become more and more comfortable with the responsibility that policing places in their hands. For many, the initial attraction lies more in the perceived action and excitement that policing offers, as well as the autonomy and discretionary decision-making power that officers are typically granted. Indeed, some officers speak with pride of their "people skills," and ability to use "verbal judo" to resolve most of the everyday spats and squabbles that occur on their patrols (Chapter 2). Detectives and members of special units, such as undercover or SWAT, also enjoy the combination of physical activity and mental stimulation that their jobs afford, and many of these officers are quite explicit about the fact that they "wouldn't last a day in some desk job."

More prosaically, many candidates are attracted to policing by the relative job security, pension, benefits, and medical coverage that this kind of public service job affords—especially in the present work environment where such comprehensive job security is becoming a veritable corporate fossil in the private sector. And, yes, a few bad apples actually go into policing with the intention of exploiting their power for their own gain, although the vast majority of abusive and corrupt officers don't start off as crooks with a badge, but transmogrify over time due to a variety of internal pressures and external circumstances (Chapter 13).

What Police Officers Dislike About Their Jobs

Many of the negatives about police work cited by officers represent the flip side of the positives. The relative autonomy and discretionary power of policing also leaves room for ambiguity and second-guessing. Indeed, officers describe their frustration with being told to adhere to a set a rigid rules and protocols, yet at the same time being expected to apply these rules flexibly and creatively to everyday situations, and to get it right every time.

Officers who are into the helping role may become disillusioned by the perceived lack of appreciation, respect, or even common courtesy afforded to them by the citizens they put their lives on the line to protect. Of course, a lot has to do with the demographics of a particular patrol area, but some officers may be more sensitive to this violation of expectations than others.

Death is an inevitable feature of law enforcement work, and many officers describe the exposure to murder and violence as a necessary but aversive aspect of their jobs. Some officers take the counterphobic measure of immersing themselves in what they and society fear and loathe the most, becoming homicide and sex crimes investigators, undercover narcotics operatives, or crime scene investigators (Chapter 12). And of course, there is the ever-present danger of being killed on the job or having to kill others, which gives police work a unique status among civilian public safety roles (Chapters 7 and 8).

But by far, the worst stressors cited by officers come from their own departments. Actually, this should not be surprising, recalling how police departments, and most work organizations, represent an extended family tribal culture. And like any dysfunctional family, sometimes these stresses can lead to internal crises that can undo an officer's career or have severe repercussions for the department as a whole. That's why it is very important that these problems be identified and dealt with constructively as early as possible (Chapters 13 and 14).

TYPES OF CRISIS

Different types and sources of crisis can affect both the personal lives of police officers and the work they do with citizens (Anderson et al., 1995; Toch, 2002). These can be differentiated into several categories, although, as with most naturalistic classifications, several types may blend together.

Personal crises involve family, friends, and significant others. Examples include relationship problems, separation and divorce, parent-child conflict, financial strains, alcohol and substance problems, and stresses within the extended family. At the extremes, these may come to police attention in the form of child abuse, domestic violence, stalking, and harassment, many of these fueled by alcohol or drug abuse.

Professional crises involve stresses related to work. Examples include management-employee conflicts, harassment by coworkers, filing of grievances, and stresses related to discipline, termination, or downsizing. Extreme cases may escalate to sexual harassment and workplace violence.

Situational crises refer to specific, short-term crises that may vary in severity, but are time-limited in nature, even though they may have long-term effects. There are numerous examples of these in almost everybody's life, including bereavement of family members, traumatic termination of a relationship or job, accidental injury, or natural disaster. Law enforcement may become involved when the crisis involves crime victimization or, alternatively, carrying-out of criminal activity in response to overwhelming stress.

Ongoing crises are, by definition, longer in duration and may have an abrupt onset, such as an injury that produces long-term disability or an arrest or lawsuit that is followed by years of legal and financial stress. Or the crisis may evolve more gradually, such as a progressive physical or mental illness, or an escalating series of financial losses.

Again, the boundaries between categories are fluid. A situational crisis of job loss may become an ongoing financial crisis if equivalent alternative employment can't be found in a sagging economy. An ongoing problematic relationship can escalate to violence when prodded by the lack of money and family budget squabbles resulting from the job loss. Violence can lead to arrest, incurring further financial losses and heightening family stress, and so on. How individuals cope with these types of crises depends on the nature and intensity of the crisis itself, the coping resources of the persons involved, and the practical and psychosocial support systems available.

TYPES OF PREVENTION:
THE PSYCHOEPIDEMIOLOGY OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Epidemiology is the clinical science that studies the spread of illnesses and their effects within populations. Most familiar in the area of infectious disease, the epidemiological model has also been applied to a range of somatic and psychological disorders, ranging from the mortality from cancer in neighborhoods exposed to toxic pollutants, to posttraumatic stress disorder in populations affected by natural or man-made disasters. Epidemiologists distinguish three main stages of prevention, which are termed primary, secondary, and tertiary. These can also be applied to psychological casualties and disabilities within a population, as well as to individual cases of crisis intervention work (Gilliland & James, 1993; Miller, 1998c).

The goal of *primary prevention* is to prevent as many new cases of the crisis as possible from arising in the first place. In the case of an impending flu epidemic, this might involve vaccinations for vulnerable members of the community, educational programs targeting cleanliness and hygiene for preventing infection, and improved public sanitation and school nutrition programs to bolster physical health and resistance. For impending mental health crises—for example, dealing with potential workplace violence—this might involve public information about practical prevention measures for home, family, and business; education about the nature of workplace bullying and harassment, and the stress syndromes they entail; diversity training, stress management, and conflict resolution skills; and training in how to recognize the warning signs of impending violence.

Secondary prevention assumes that there has already been an initial outbreak of the crisis within the population. The goal is now to prevent it from spreading further and to minimize its effects. In our flu epidemic example, some individuals may have already been infected. Some of the secondary prevention measures involve continuing the same

things we did in primary prevention, such as making doubly sure others are fully immunized, and if necessary, even taking such drastic measures as quarantining contagious persons. For a brewing workplace violence crisis, we might recognize that an employee or customer is becoming increasingly agitated and has already threatened one or more persons and perhaps destroyed some property. At this stage, we would try to deescalate the conflict, contain and isolate the subject, call police or security, and begin evacuating nearby employees or students from the area.

In *tertiary prevention*, the crisis has hit its peak or run its course, and what we are actually "preventing" at this stage is the development or worsening of aftereffects that might occur in the aftermath. For the flu, this may involve treating secondary bacterial infections in flu survivors whose immune systems have been weakened, arranging care for children of dead or disabled parents, and maintaining electricity, food, and sanitation in affected areas. For the workplace violence crisis, this means arranging mental health follow-up to limit the development of posttraumatic stress reactions among affected employees and customers, as well as dealing with the media and general public to restore the organization's reputation and image so that the company's viability is not undone by the episode.

The overall concept is that most crises are fluid, organic entities that evolve over a time course–which can range from minutes to years–and that, at each stage, there must be an established set of measures to counteract the traumatic effects of the crisis. Hence, preparation, planning, and training are crucial.

THE BASIC CRISIS INTERVENTION MODEL

Although individual systems differ, a broad consensus on a standard protocol for basic crisis intervention has emerged (Dattilio & Freeman, 2000; Gilliland & James, 1993; Kleespies, 1998). Much of this format has evolved from suicide hotlines and other clinically-oriented crisis intervention services, but can be productively adapted for law enforcement crises and represents the basic model of crisis intervention used throughout this book. A basic outline of the model is presented here, with specific examples appearing in subsequent chapters.

Define the Problem

Some personal crises relate to a specific incident, such as a spouse who suddenly learns of an sudden affair or separation, or a person who has just been the victim of a crime. Often, however, a crisis state will evolve as the cumulative result of a number of overlapping stressors. In such cases, the affected person may be unclear as to what exactly led to the crisis. Furthermore, this confusion typically adds to anxiety and a sense of being overwhelmed, which escalates to panic and despondency in a spiraling vicious cycle.

Thus, the first task is to help the subject clarify in his or her own mind what exactly has led to the crisis state. This often involves a set of focusing and clarifying questions. What is the subject experiencing? What led up to the crisis? What aspects of the situation feel most out of control? Most in control?

Ensure Safety

The goal of crisis intervention is stabilization for later treatment. You want to ensure that the subject stays alive and/or keeps from harming others long enough for him or her to obtain whatever follow-up services are necessary. Assume that if the subject contacted you at all, or is even willing to talk to you at any point, then he or she has not made the irrevocable decision to use violence against self or others. Your job is to use this interval to encourage the subject to put even a few short steps between the thought of a harmful action and its execution. If the subject has a gun, ask him to unload it or at least holster it or decock it. If it's a bottle of pills, ask her to keep the cover on for now. If he's standing on a roof ledge, ask him to take just two steps back in the meantime. The key is to let the subject retain enough control so that he doesn't panic, but keep things as safe as possible while you continue to negotiate a safe resolution to the crisis.

Provide Support

Support means "being there" with the subject, showing that you're trying to understand. As we'll see in subsequent chapters, you don't necessarily have to agree with a distressed subject's reasoning or point of view–and in many cases, it may be counterproductive to disingenuously pretend that you do–but a little empathy and commiseration can go a long way in establishing trust and encouraging a nonviolent resolution to the crisis. It may also elicit some insight into issues that underlie the present crisis or that may have led up to it. But remember, the goal of crisis intervention is not psychotherapy. You don't want to disregard a subject's important feelings and thoughts about his or her situation, but be careful to keep the conversation reasonably focused on resolving the present crisis, perhaps gently suggesting that the larger issues can be dealt with later–which implies that the subject will indeed be around later.

Examine Alternatives

Often, subjects in crisis are so fixated on their pain and hopelessness that their cognitive tunnel vision prevents them from seeing any way out. Your job is to gently expand the range of nonviolent options for resolving the crisis situation. Typically, this takes one of two forms: accessing practical supports and utilizing coping mechanisms.

Practical Supports. Are there any persons, institutions, or agencies that are immediately available to help the subject through the crisis until he or she can obtain follow-up care? Of course, you want to be reasonably sure that these support people will calm, not inflame, the situation until professional help is obtained. Support systems or persons can consist of trusted relatives, friends, clergy, a local mental health clinician, and so on. One caution here is that one or more of these individuals may have had contentious dealings with the subject in the past, and might even have been part of the reason the crisis got out of control in the first place. So try to get a little background information if possible and use your judgment.

Coping Mechanisms. These can consist of cognitive strategies, religious faith, distracting activities, pleasant family images and so on–anything that helps

the subject inject an element of comfort and control into an otherwise painful and chaotic situation. You can appeal to both present and past coping mechanisms. For subjects who are feeling hopeless, it is often useful to recall past crises that were resolved–however incompletely–without violence. This shows that it's at least *possible* to get through the present crisis, and possibly come up with an even better solution this time that will prevent things from ever getting this bad again. Success may then build on success. However, the caution here is that the subject may think that this present crisis is a whole lot worse than anything that's happened in the past–and sometimes this may in fact be true–in which case, comparison with past, smaller crises may only serve to highlight the hopelessness of the present "big one." Then, the intervener will have to use his or her judgment and be creative in dealing with this kind of comparison paradox.

Make a Plan

Work out a plan that will ensure the subject's safety, terminate the crisis for now, and provide for follow-up. Make the plan as explicit as possible, giving the subject as much input and buy-in as he or she is able and willing to contribute. Make sure the plan is understood completely by everyone concerned. The plan should contain both short-term elements (Where will you stay tonight? Which clinic will you call in the morning? If you need to go to the ER, how will you get there and who will pick you up and take you home?), and long-term elements (Who will you be seeing for follow-up therapy? How will you contact Legal Aid to get your case handled? Who will let your job know you're taking some sick time?).

Obtain Commitment

Again, the more buy-in the subject has to the initial plan, the more likely he or she is likely to commit to it and follow it through. Obviously, there is no way to contractually enforce an agreement between yourself and the subject, so his or her commitment to the plan will stand and fall based on the level of trust you've built up during the encounter. But often, just promising something out loud to a trusted other can cement a person's commitment to