

# COPING WITH CRISIS

What counts as crisis calls and how to deal with these traumatic incidents.

By Dorothy Cave

**M**ost of us know and understand what a crisis call is or at least what we believe is a crisis call. This statement may sound a little confusing, but it isn't. As a telecommunicator, call taker, dispatcher or whatever your title is in your agency, you may have a different definition of a crisis call than the next agency or even someone in your agency. Here we will explain what most agencies consider a crisis call. However, these are not hard-and-fast rules; if your agency does not consider these crisis calls, they are not breaking rules. You must always follow your agency policy and procedure when it comes to call taking.

Let's start with a list of the apparent crisis calls, starting with a single gunshot/shooting/stabbing. As we know, the human body is not equipped to handle an intrusion of this kind; we tend to bleed a lot. Why should this be a crisis call? If our caller is the victim, they use a lot of energy to call. Their incident is a crisis for them; they have been shot or stabbed. It hurts, and some are unsure of their future. As telecommunicators, we must be the voice of reason, the "calm in the storm;" this should be considered a crisis call for us and our responders. Especially for calls of

this type, our responders need to know the circumstances of the call, if possible. Scene safety should be our No. 1 priority for our responders.

We can move on to motor vehicle crashes (MVC). The calls we receive can range from a fender bender to a fatal accident. Incredibly, some individuals make it through their lifetime without ever being in a vehicle accident, and even the fender bender can become a crisis call if this is the caller's or driver's first accident. There are many unknowns with vehicle accidents, even the "small" accidents.





As call takers we should keep in mind that if there is one fatality, the other occupants could be seriously injured or worse. Again, this is not a hard-and-fast rule. You can have one fatality while the others walk away with minor scratches.

The following example involves a deceased body; can you imagine someone who has never seen a deceased body? How do you think they would feel if they came upon one? Or worse yet, the deceased is a loved one. I would absolutely call this a crisis call for the caller. As the call taker, you may know the caller and all involved. If this is the case, this call is not only a crisis call for the caller but for you.

Most everyone sees these three types as crisis calls, but what makes other calls crisis calls? As telecommunicators we deal with many variables when taking calls, and we never know if this is going to be a crisis call just from answering the phone. I would think that many readers have taken calls that made you laugh and cry. For the calls that made you laugh, was that a nervous laugh because you were not sure how to answer

**Some calls are tough to listen to, but that is our job. Our job is not to take the caller's crisis on as our own.**

or respond to the caller? Responses like laughter are perfectly normal responses at times. Some may have made you cry. Crisis calls can encompass all these feelings. We are telecommunicators; we are human and not the end-all know-all. At times we might think we are, but this reaction can be a buffer to save us from our thoughts during a crisis.

When handling crisis calls, whether you take two or 200 calls a day, you must handle each one individually. Remember that you were not the cause of the call and did not perpetrate this crisis for the caller. Some calls are tough to listen to, but that is our job. Our job is not to take the caller's crisis on as

our own. Read that again, please. *It is not our job to take the caller's crisis on as our own.*

We have talked about the type of crisis calls that are blatantly obvious crisis calls, but what about those that seem to be run-of-the-mill? We have those calls that seem to start as mundane, the *someone stole my dog* call. As a call taker, and to me, this is a crisis; that dog is a part of the family. It also may be a crisis for the caller for the same reason. We should always expect the call to escalate from a calm caller to a screamer because it just hit home when they said out loud that someone stole their beloved pet.

How do we handle crisis calls? The first thing is to follow your agency's policies and procedures even if you don't agree with them. Telecommunicators who respond to a call in violation of agency policies may find themselves on the hook for any legal liability stemming from the call. You are required to ask pertinent questions to elicit the information needed for responders. We should always start with *where*; without this information we may not be able to help the caller.

APCO IntelliComm is your guidecards solution for a better, more user-friendly approach for agency operations.

- Configurable guidecard technology to align with your protocols.
- Cloud-based technology with quality assurance features.
- EMD, fire service and law enforcement are included.

APCO IntelliComm®  
Supported by IBM Watson Analytics

Easy to implement

Easy to learn

Easy to use

[apcointellcomm.org](http://apcointellcomm.org)

Earlier, we talked about the crisis for the caller and the call taker. We also talked about the call taker not taking on the caller's crisis, but how can you not in certain instances? We have child callers and elderly callers; these are the calls that tend to pull at our heartstrings. How can you control your own "crisis" during these calls?

- Remember that you didn't perpetuate the situation, and do all you can to get the appropriate help to the caller.
- Breathe.
- Stay calm. Use your calming techniques, repetitive persistence, calm voice and calling the caller by their name. Once you calm them, you can calm down too.

- Take a minute away from the emergency communications center floor.
- If you keep the caller on the line while responders are on the way, ask more questions. You may even have to change the subject; that will always be a judgment call.

I write this article from a call taker/telecommunicator point of view. We are all human, and we should understand that what we do is not something anyone can do. We should never feel as though we must suffer in silence when there are so many outlets available to us and so many people to talk to. This article is about crisis calls, but I want you to know that the crisis calls are

the ones that tend to break us, that make us take off our headset and never want to put it on again. These are the calls that make us cry alone in the bathroom down the hall where we hope no one can hear us. Many telecommunicators in our industry suffer in silence. You don't ever need to hold on to these crisis calls; they should never live rent free in your mind. ●

*Dorothy Cave is the Education & Training Manager for the APCO Institute. She started out as a call taker and moved up within her agency to training coordinator. She moved to APCO in 2013 as the EMD program manager.*

## CDE EXAM #67608

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Calls that start off mundane never escalate to a crisis call.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. True</li> <li>b. False</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. The most important piece of information a call taker can get is:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Which</li> <li>b. What</li> <li>c. Where</li> <li>d. Why</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Telecommunicators can follow their own set of rules; they are not mandated to follow the agency's policies &amp; procedures.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. True</li> <li>b. False</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. As a telecommunicator, we should never take on the _____.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Caller's identity</li> <li>b. Patient's pain</li> <li>c. Caller's crisis</li> <li>d. Patient's identity</li> </ol> </li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. You must always keep the caller on the line.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. True</li> <li>b. False</li> </ol> </li> <li>6. Call takers and telecommunicators should never _____.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Take a break</li> <li>b. Suffer in silence</li> <li>c. Follow policy</li> <li>d. All of the above</li> <li>e. None of the above</li> </ol> </li> <li>7. There are only three (3) types of crisis calls.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. True</li> <li>b. False</li> </ol> </li> <li>8. Crying in a hall bathroom is the only thing you will ever need after a crisis call.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. True</li> <li>b. False</li> </ol> </li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Call takers and telecommunicators should always follow the agency's _____ and _____.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Policy and procedures</li> <li>b. CAD and phone regulations</li> <li>c. Clock-in and clock-out procedures</li> <li>d. All of the above</li> <li>e. None of the above</li> </ol> </li> <li>10. No matter if you take two or two hundred calls, each call must be handled individually.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. True</li> <li>b. False</li> </ol> </li> </ol> |
|---|--|--|

### FOR CREDIT TOWARD APCO RECERTIFICATION(S)

Each CDE article is equal to one credit hour of continuing education

1. Study the CDE article in this issue.
2. Answer the test questions online (see below for online exam instructions) or on the exam page from the magazine article (photocopies are not required).
3. Add/upload your CDE article information and certificate of achievement in the "My Classes Taken" section of APCO's Training Central at [www.apcointl.org/trainingcentral](http://www.apcointl.org/trainingcentral).

Questions? Call us at (386) 322-2500.

**You can access the CDE exam online!** To receive a complimentary certificate of completion, you may take the CDE exam online. Go to <http://apco.remote-learner.net/login/index.php> to create your username and password. Enter CDE in the search box, and click on the "Crisis Call," then click on "enroll me" and choose "**Crisis Call (67608)**" to begin the exam. Upon successful completion of the quiz, a certificate of achievement will be available for download/printing.