



## McMaster Divinity College

**MS 3P1270**

**Crisis Intervention**

**Specializations: CS/PS**

Cathryn Harris, Ph.D. C.Psych.

[drcathrynharris@gmail.com](mailto:drcathrynharris@gmail.com)

Spring 2025

May 10th, May 24<sup>th</sup>, June 7<sup>th</sup>

9:30am to 4:30pm

### **COURSE SYLLABUS**

#### **1. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Any direct service ministerial role will at some point usually involve helping people deal with life crises. We have also been in the midst of a prolonged global pandemic that has created a multitude of other crises. This course will equip pastors, lay leaders, and pastoral counselors with basic level skills in crisis intervention with individuals, couples, families, and organizations. General crisis intervention theory and principles will be reviewed along with approaches to specific situations such as acute depression with suicidal intention, violent and aggressive behavior, psychotic decompensation, developmental crises, spiritual crises, catastrophic life events, and natural/technological disasters. In the process of the course, students will formulate a summary for one special focus crisis area of interest, including a concrete plan of assessment, intervention and follow-up, which is informed by current theory and research. Upon satisfactory completion of the course, students will exchange their work and collect a library of summaries on the most commonly encountered crisis situations, as ready reference to principles, resources and referrals for these topics.

**Prerequisites:** While previous coursework or experience in general counselling skills is preferred, it is not mandatory to benefit from this training. However, if no previous coursework or experience, students must read Chapters 1 through 3 inclusive of the textbook by Norman H. Wright prior to the first class, in addition to the course readings below due before the first class.

**Core/Required Course for:** MACSC, MDiv Specialization in Counseling and Spiritual Care

**Elective for:** Students outside the above programs

**Advanced Research and Doctoral Students:** 5- or 6-unit students needing to enroll in the course must obtain a separate set of course requirements from the instructor.

## 2. COURSE FORMAT

This intensive course is offered in live, synchronous, online videoconference format, scheduled on 3 full days of instruction. Class sessions will include didactic instruction, video presentations, group presentations, role play, and class discussion. Since this is a skills-development course, full participation in each of the three class days is required, and because of the intensive format of this course, readings must be completed before class, including the first day of class. Group presentations will require students to videochat and collaborate during the 4 weeks between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> class. Group presentations during the 3<sup>rd</sup> class will be made online. By the end of the course, each student will have summaries from the instructor and fellow students on a variety of specific crisis situations to build their own “Crisis Intervention” handbook and reference library.

## 3. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Since this is a skills-development course, the learning objectives for each student are the same.

### ***Knowing***

- To describe the goals, phases, and techniques of crisis intervention in general
- To explain how these goals, phases, and techniques are adapted uniquely to specific types of crises, including suicide, violent or potentially violent incidents, developmental crises, and other adventitious crises, such as natural or man-made disasters and the current pandemic crisis, as well as how these are adapted to specific populations
- To recognize and list the symptoms and adaptations commonly experienced in response to trauma
- To differentiate the unique opportunity and dangers in providing crisis intervention in a pastoral role
- To differentiate the unique challenges and adaptations involved in doing crisis counselling online or over the phone
- To explore and describe the unique role of the church in providing early intervention during crises

### ***Being***

- To identify the life crises which we have survived, and the adaptations to these crises that have affected our lives
- To increase tolerance in hearing others' pain and being open to the experience of one's own pain.
- To increasingly practice empathic listening skills, effective responses, and appropriate support in all our relationships, especially when these have been affected by crisis and trauma

### ***Doing***

- To observe and identify helpful versus non helpful responses in crisis situations
- To demonstrate skills in assessing, intervening, and follow-up in different types of crises, with different populations, and in different contexts
- To demonstrate skills in identifying the need for and facilitating referrals for further psychological and medical help when necessary
- To identify and list resources within our communities to provide support, education, and further help for individuals in crisis

- To develop an action plan for facilitating early intervention in crises and/or providing crisis intervention resources within our ministry context or community

#### 4. COURSE TEXTS

All required and recommended books for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca). The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

##### A. *Required Textbooks – All Students:*

Wright, H. Norman. *The Complete Guide to Crisis and Trauma Counseling: What To Do and Say When It Matters Most*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2011. (449 pp)  
 Mason, Karen. *Preventing Suicide: A Handbook for Pastors, Chaplains, and Pastoral Counselors*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014. (232 pp)  
 Jackson-Cherry, Lisa & Erford, Bradley. *Crisis Assessment, Intervention and Prevention (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.)* Pearson: New York City, NY.: Pearson, 2024. (528 pp)

##### B. *Additional articles:*

To supplement lectures, additional *required* articles are provided on the class website on A2L (See schedule below). An additional extensive bibliography is also provided to aid students in preparing for their class projects.

#### 5. INSTRUCTOR

**Biography:** Cathryn Harris, Ph.D. C.Psych. is an Assistant Professor at McMaster Divinity College. She is a Registered Psychologist (CPO) with competencies in both Clinical and Counselling Psychology, a Registered Marriage and Family Therapist, and Approved Supervisor in Marriage and Family Therapy with AAMFT and CAMFT, and a Certified EMDR Therapist. For 35 years, and currently fulltime, she has provided psychotherapy and psychological assessments to individuals, couples, families, children and adolescents in outpatient private practice. She has also worked in inpatient and day treatment programs, and provided consultation to pastors, teachers, and business professionals on individual and organizational issues. She has been continuously involved in the training and supervision of Christian mental health professionals for over 30 years, beginning as Adjunct Professor at Rosemead School of Psychology and at Fuller Graduate Seminary for a short while, and for the longest time as Clinical Supervisor for a Christian counselling ministry that placed counselling interns in churches throughout Southern California. It has also been involved in providing counselling skills training specifically to Pastors through much of her career, and enjoys being able to do more of this at MDC. Dr. Harris has been married for over 30 years to another psychologist, and has one adult daughter who has managed to survive that experience.

**Contact and Availability:** Dr. Harris is available for one-on-one consultation briefly after class and during breaks on the day class is scheduled. Otherwise, students may contact her at [drcathryn.harris@gmail.com](mailto:drcathryn.harris@gmail.com). Please make sure you put "Crisis Intervention course" in the subject line of any email to rapidly identify your communication.

## 6. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### A. Class Participation - 10% of grade

Attendance, and participation in class discussions, activities and roleplays.

### B. Personal Reflection Paper: Due July 31<sup>st</sup>, Midnight – 10% of grade

- 2 to 5 pages double spaced (no cover page required)
- Supports the "Being" goals of this course, encouraging self-reflection and growth in the person of the counselor or minister.
- Choose a crisis that has happened in your life that you feel comfortable disclosing, identify what "type" of crisis that it was, and compare the trajectory of your experience, your response to the crisis, the coping skills you used, and possible long-term consequences with the material presented in this course. In what ways does your experience fit (or not) with the theory, research, and practical coping skills reviewed in the course? Looking back, are there any suggested interventions or perspectives from the course that were or would have been helpful/ appropriate at that time?

### C. Online Chapter Quizzes on Jackson-Cherry & Erford - 15% of Grade

Based on the chapters in the principal textbook by Jackson-Cherry & Erford, quizzes through A2L will provide accountability and test student learning. Quizzes can be completed on each chapter, at the student's own pace, but must be finished by the last official date of the course, July 31<sup>st</sup>. This gives extra weeks to finish reading this valuable resource. However, recommended chapters for each intensive day will be provided, and the text is a resource to begin developing group projects.

### D. Group Presentation and Written Resource Handout - 30% of grade

**Handouts due: Friday June 6<sup>th</sup>, Presentations will take place Saturday June 7<sup>th</sup>**

- The **purposes** of this assignment are:
  - 1) To increase your understanding (Knowing) and Skills Practice (Doing) in depth in one specific area of Crisis Intervention,
  - 2) To practice good communication, empathy, cooperation and leadership skills (Being) in your group, and
  - 2) To broaden your familiarity with diverse areas of Crisis Intervention through listening to others' presentations, and
  - 3) To develop a "Crisis Handbook" for future reference in counselling and ministry by mutually exchanging your group's intervention outline and other materials with class mates. You will be asked for permission to share your group's work, and everyone will

get a copy of each group's work. Together with the materials from the course, this will contribute to your own reference "Crisis Handbook".

- Students will form **groups** of two or three (depending on class size) to produce an online presentation on a unique topic from the list below. This assignment is due during the third/last class (Presentation length will depend on class size).
- The **presentation** will be conducted online, and must include some interactive material and/or demonstration: role play, video, class activity, case study for discussion, etc. A partial bibliography is provided online with beginning reference materials for some topics. At least 5 journal articles, chapters, or book references are required. Make sure you focus on the *specific* information and interventions that are *unique* to this crisis.
- Groups will prepare a **written handout** for fellow students. This handout and all other written supplementary materials that are part of the presentation must be submitted online through A2L by the day before the last class/ Friday at 9am to allow time to upload to A2L for access for all class members.
- The handout will summarize an understanding of the *specific* crisis and outline the *specific* intervention strategies for this crisis, using these section headings (as has been demonstrated by other handouts given in class by the professor):
  - A. **Introduction** – definition of crisis, statistics, demographics, relevance to Christian or other target community, etc
  - B. **Assessment**
  - C. **Interventions**
  - D. **Follow-up**
  - E. **Resources**
  - F. **Bibliography and Other Recommended Reading**
- **Possible Crisis Topics for Group Presentations:**

#### Abuse and Violence

Sexual Assault

Sexual Abuse of a

Child/Adolescent

Domestic Violence

Physical Abuse of a

Child/Adolescent

#### Catastrophic Life Events

Accidental Injury/ Chronic Illness/

Terminal Illness

Arrest/Incarceration

Sudden Death/ Suicide/ Homicide

#### Special Populations and Settings

Families

Children and Adolescents

Refugees

Military

First Responders

Prison Population

#### Developmental/Transitional Crises

Bereavement/ Natural Death

Marital Separation/Divorce  
Unexpected Pregnancy/ Abortion/  
Miscarriage

Dementia/ Care of Elderly  
Aging/ Retirement  
Immigration

**E. Individual Paper – MINISTRY APPLICATION- 35% of grade: Due July 3rd, midnight**

- The purpose of this assignment is to develop a practical application of this course to your current or future ministry role. This fulfills the final objective of the course (Doing) to develop an action plan for facilitating early intervention for crises and/or providing crisis intervention resources within your ministry context or community for a particular type of crisis.
- If you do not have currently a specific ministerial role or community, you may use a hypothetical or anticipated one.
- The focus of the application needs to be on *psychological* crisis intervention (as opposed to social services crisis intervention such as providing for physical needs, etc.). You should choose from the range of topics and types of crises surveyed in this course. You can use your group topic, or a different one.
- You can use the material you researched for your group project, or other materials you collected during the course, including from other groups, (so long as authorship is clearly cited for original work by another person, and primary references are included in your bibliography as well).
- The paper is due approximately four weeks after the last class, as specified in the course schedule.
- **Assignment Description:** Imagine that you are submitting a proposal to a Church Board or non-profit organization to obtain funding or other support (you don't need to provide a budget, however). The content can be organized in bullet points/ outline form, but must include all relevant content, and should be at least 5-8 pages in length (single spaced within paragraphs, double spaced between paragraphs) plus appendices as necessary.

**Your paper should include (use these subheadings):**

- **Ministry or Community Context:** Description of ministerial or community organization involved, the characteristics of the community/ church involved (including demographics of the population served, location, purpose or mission, etc.) and your role/association with the organization.
- **Problem Identification:** Description of the need for crisis services and/or identification of how you will identify these needs. (the WHY). Clearly link the needs of the church /organization/community with the problem in focus. Why

do we need to address this in this community and why now? This section can give background to the issue/type of crisis you will be addressing so the reader can have some understanding of the problem. (Use footnotes to reference your bibliographic and other sources)

- **Participant Identification:** What is the target population? Who will be the recipients of the services or program? Why these people? How will you find them and identify them?
- **Action Plan:** Description of program elements to address the identified needs  
 WHO – will do each part of the program  
 WHERE – will it happen  
 WHEN – beginning, frequency, duration, etc ,  
 WHAT -are the goals and elements of the program, and what is the content of the program. You can include a class/course outline or counselling outline as an appendix, as well as any participant handouts developed as part of your group project, or developed new for this topic. (Use footnotes as necessary to reference sources. Give FULL information, so that someone can find the primary source on their own).  
 HOW will it be delivered, eg. in person, virtual, Sunday School series, etc) -  
 HOW will it be funded? (no need for a budget, but a general idea of who pays for it and how)
- **Evaluation Plan:** Description of HOW you will evaluate outcomes. How will you know your program was successful? What measure will you use?
- **Referral and Resources List:** List of resources in your specific community and geographical area to which you could refer those in this kind of crisis, in addition to resources for the needs you have addressed in your proposal. What if they need a “next step” or “further help”. Where can the participants get more information?
- **Bibliography:** Sources you consulted in formulating your plan, and which will be informative and relevant in carrying it out. Use MDC style for both footnotes and Bibliography.

## 7. COURSE ADMINISTRATION

**College Style for Submission of Written Work:** All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses  
<https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/mdc-style-guide/>

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

**Academic Honesty:** Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e.,

submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production, including AI) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

**A special note about AI:** You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

**AODA:** In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

**Gender Inclusive Language:** McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

**Submission of Written Work:** A digital copy of all written materials in **MICROSOFT WORD** format must be submitted online through Avenue to Learn by their due dates (do NOT send by email). ***Late submission of assignments may be deducted points for every late day (each 24 hours or portion thereof after due date).***

**Length:** Students are expected to adhere to the page range for written assignments. See Grading Rubric for penalties for papers that are under/over the expected length.



**Cell Phone/Computer Policy:** Students are to refrain from texting or conducting cell phone conversations while class is in session. Should you need to maintain contact with family members and/or your church or ministry, please turn off the ringer so as to avoid disturbing others; upon receipt of an urgent call, you may discretely excuse yourself from the classroom or video conference. The same policy applies to all computer-generated sound schemes or other electronic annunciation systems. If joining on livestream, it is expected that your camera is always on, just as if you were in the classroom. As a result, please make sure you are in a private, quiet place, free from distractions. Please mute your microphone when others are speaking unless directly differently by your instructor.

**Copyright:** *This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.*

*(continued next page)*

**8. COURSE OUTLINE : LECTURES, READINGS AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE**

*(Due on class date indicated)*

**DAY ONE: Saturday May 10th**

**DUE BEFORE CLASS**

**Required Reading Assignment:** Wright, Chapters 7-9, 14-15 (98pp); Mason (184pp)

**(\*\*For those with no previous training in counseling, please also read Wright, Chs 1-3)**

**Recommended Reading:** Jackson- Cherry, Chs. 1-4, 6

**Schedule:**

**Lecture Topics:**

**9:30am BEGIN**

Introduction to Course & Assignments

Your Role as Crisis Counselor

The Centrality of Relationship and Empathy

Crisis Intervention Theory

10:45

(15 min break)

11:00

General Crisis Intervention Principles

**12:15 LUNCH – 45 mins**

1:00

Suicide and Acute Depression

2:30

(15 min break)

2:45

Suicide Intervention/Prevention

3:25

(5 min break)

3:30

Suicidal Crisis Role Play Prep

3:50

Suicidal Crisis Role Play!

4:10

Debrief, Wrap up, Questions

**4:30 END**

**DAY TWO: Saturday May 24<sup>th</sup>**

**Required Reading Assignment:** Wright Chapters 4-6, 10-13 (192pp)  
Hiltner (1972), *"The Dynamics of Life Crises and Pastoral Care"* (7pp, on A2L)  
**Recommended Reading:** Jackson- Cherry, Chs. 5, 11-13

**Schedule:**

**Lecture Topics:**

<b>9:30</b>	<b>BEGIN</b>	Homicidal Ideation and Assaultive Behavior Psychotic Decompensation
10:45	(15 min break)	
11:00		Introduction to Life Event Crises and Bereavement Eg. Special Focus - Unemployment
<b>12:15</b>	<b>LUNCH – 45 mins</b>	
1:00		Trauma and the "Danger- Danger" System of the Brain Disaster Response and Emergency First Aid Eg. Anxiety and Panic Episodes
2:30	(15 min break)	
2:45		Principles and Guidelines for Online and Phone Counselling Helping Organizations and Groups: Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
4:10		Debrief, Wrap up, Questions
<b>4:30</b>	<b>END</b>	

**Friday June 6th 9am: WRITTEN MATERIALS FOR GROUP PROJECTS DUE**

**DAY THREE: Saturday June 7th GROUP PROJECTS DUE**

**Required Reading Assignments:**

Wright, Conclusion (pp. 415-432, 18pp.)

Dykstra, Robert C. (1990). *"Intimate Strangers: The Role of the Hospital Chaplain in Situations of Sudden Traumatic Loss."* (18pp, on A2L)

van Deusen Hunsinger, Deborah. (2011) *"Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel and Pastoral Care."* (18pp, on A2L)

**Recommended Reading:** Jackson- Cherry, Ch.14

**Schedule:**

**Lecture Topics:**

**9:30 am BEGIN** Group 1 Presentation:

10:10 (5 min break)

10:15 Group 2 Presentation:

10:55 (5 min break)

11:00 Group 3 Presentation:

11:40 (5 min break)

11:45 Group 4 Presentation:

**12:25-1:15 LUNCH – 50 mins**

1:15 Group 5 Presentation

1:55 (5 min break)

2:00 Spiritual Crises & Using Spiritual Interventions

2:40 (5 min break)

2:45 Termination and Follow Up

When Hospitalization is Necessary

How to Make Referrals Successful

3:40 (5 min break)

3:45 Debrief, Wrap up, Questions

**4:30 END**

**Thursday July 3rd Midnight: INDIV MINISTRY APPLICATION PAPER DUE**

**Thursday July 31<sup>st</sup> Midnight: PERSONAL REFLECTION PAPER DUE**