

Emergent or Urgent Situations for the Pastoral Counselor: Mental Health Emergencies and ABC's of What to Do First:

Part 1

The title above reflects a plan for a new series for this blog. On a weekly basis, I will briefly capsule a particular issue that may come to the attention of pastoral counselors, priests and deacons, as well as others in the Christian community involved in peer counseling, leading support or self-help groups of various kinds, or in other ongoing ministry. Together, I hope that we can share our experiences on the topic at hand.

Five years ago, I wrote a first draft of a "Primer" with 20 or so segments which was intended to overview common problems that come to the attention of deacons, pastors, and volunteer workers in the church engaging in counseling in emergent or urgent situations. It has taken me this long to get back to this project.

It is my hope to write new segments – or invite others to write new segments -- and to rewrite those completed five years ago and to obtain and include feedback from others who have experience with these various problem situations, with an eventual goal of publication. There are no available books that cover these issues in a hands on and practical way while also providing an overview of the topic. Please note that I do not have expertise in all of these areas. I look forward to being taught by those who work with some of them every day.

If you want to volunteer to author a segment, please contact me! The segment should be succinct, no more than 2-4 pages. It should include some general orientation to the area of concern, general guidelines, and then a list of practical advice of "what to do" [or not do]. References, or links to relevant resources should be included. How would you advise a pastor facing the problem who does not have your background? If you author a segment or provide helpful feedback to an existing segment, I will acknowledge you on this website and credit you in any future publication. You can make a difference for future church workers by contributing to this process! If you are a volunteer leader, a pastor or deacon, or someone who has actually lived through the particular experience being discussed, YOU can provide important insights!

Whenever possible, information about preventive education and care should be integrated into the discussion. Dedicated and caring church leaders will often be in a position to encourage prevention of illness, injury, neglect, and abuse among their people. Being Christ to others in the world requires attention to the whole person. It is with this premise that we begin. I have been a licensed psychologist for the past 35 years, with specialties in clinical, forensic, and neuropsychology and I aspire to use specialty knowledge and experience from my practice to enhance the work of the church.

I will open this column with a piece on "breaking bad news" to people. Please provide your experiences, insights and feedback! You can play an important part in improving and rewriting this segment. We have several hospice or hospital chaplains within the ECC as well as others from other ministry settings and perhaps they can offer us all some words of wisdom on this topic. Those who serve as chaplains in disaster situations or with police or fire departments may also have some additional perspectives.

Below is a list of topics that I originally compiled plus some additional topics that I recently added. If you have suggestions for other topics, please let me know. And if you want a topic addressed sooner rather than later, please write! These do not have to be done in the order they are listed. If there is a need right now, let's do it!

Abortion/infant adoption/unwanted pregnancy/newborns" Safe Haven
Adolescent parents
Adoption of older children
AIDS/HIV, care of persons afflicted
Alcohol or drug withdrawal
Attention deficit /hyperactivity disorder /use of cognitive functioning enhancing medications
Bad news, disclosure of
Bipolar disorder
Bullying in school settings / risk of violence
Child abuse/neglect /prevention
Codependent relationships
Compulsive or "addictive" behavior patterns:
Gambling
Internet chat and on-line pornography
Overspending/indebtedness
Shoplifting
Drug and alcohol abuse
Compulsive sexuality / "addiction"
Hoarding / "packrat" behavior
Consultants /resources in the community for pastors
CPE or continuing education resources for pastors
Death in the family
Dementia, onset, how to recognize
Dementia, caring for family members
Depression and suicidality
Disability, applying for social security disability
Divorce, remarriage, and "blended" families
Domestic violence/homicide risk
Foster care
Gay/lesbian/transgender „coming out“
Grandparents or other extended family assuming primary care of children

Homeless ministries
Homicide survivors
Hospital visitation of parishioners, guide to facility expectations / security / clearance
Hospital visitation of parishioners, guide for visits
Immigrants, stress, adjustment
Intellectual disability [mental retardation] in adults / care provider issues
Jail/ Prison inmates / family members in jail/prison
Jail/ Prison inmates / guide to facility expectations / security / clearance
Juvenile arrests
Juvenile dependency / child protective services
Medical illness (acute)
Medical illness/disability (chronic)
Heart disease/stroke
Diabetes
Arthritis
Renal disease
Cancer
Head-injured, living with
Spinal cord injuries / Quadriplegic
Amputees
Mental illness onset – bipolar, schizophrenia, psychosis
Multi-generational households
Nursing care at home / hospice
Nursing care in a facility
Pastoral professional associations
Prescription drug abuse
Psychopathic personality / criminal behavior and its effects on family
Rape, date rape, or other sexual assault
School violence / bullying
Self-help vs. professional help, choices
Sexual abuse / risk of / prevention, in family, community, church groups
Sexual abuse victims, adults, in the church
Sexual abuse victims, children and adolescents
Special education, parents seeking for their child
Spiritual direction or mentoring vs. “therapy”, choices
Suicide risk
Suicide survivors
Tough love, for adolescents, unemancipated adults
Unemployment
War veterans / PTSD
Work place violence, risk of