Personal Conduct in a Crisis

Critical situations can push a worker to the limits of their professional abilities. The following tips might help you plan coping strategies to get yourself through such a crisis.

The Worker Must Learn Resilience

Anger and abuse directed towards you isn’t generally personal. Most often, it relates back to the source of the anger, and is unfortunately targeted at the closest person.

The youth worker may represent an abusive parent or relative, a bully from school or even the social system itself.

The source of the anger needs to be understood and analysed objectively to work effectively with the young person.

A Sense of Personal Awareness is Essential

Young people in crisis often need to ‘get’ someone. They might require a victim, or feel the need to intimidate and hold the power.

This may come in the form of personal abuse, attacking a particular weakness or difference in the worker, or physically threatening behaviour. The worker needs to know the signs, and remain in control at all times. To be drawn into personal abuse can quickly escalate the severity of the crisis.

Always Maintain Emotional Detachment

To remain detached from someone who is verbally abusing you in a personal and hurtful way is difficult, but must be done. Too many youth workers engage a young person with retaliation, losing objectivity and control of the situation.

The youth worker must realise that the professional environment is very different from the personal situation, regardless of the ‘sense of family’ that may have been established.

Different ‘Masks’ for Different Roles

Within the work place, the youth worker is often acting and is often not showing their true feelings. The professional ‘mask’ is applied as soon as the worker arrives. This is a useful method of preparation in the workplace and highlights the fact that personal and professional are very different.

This does not mean the youth worker is an impersonal, distant liar or actor. It means they are able to protect the young person from over involvement and inappropriate attachments. In addition this discipline assists the worker in remaining objective and calm in a crisis.