Exercise 1. The Case of Rita

The case of Rita, based on a real situation in our counseling practice, is presented here for you to consider because it clearly demonstrates and emphasizes the six steps in crisis intervention. We suggest that you make notes as you read and reread it. Suppose you were the crisis worker to whom Rita had come for help (in person, not on the telephone).

As an exercise to discover how well you have learned the six-step crisis intervention model, write a personal narrative description of how you might use the six-step model to help Rita during the initial session you have scheduled with her. (We have also written our description. Please write your description before reading ours, found at the end of this case; then compare your crisis intervention strategies with the narrative we have prepared. Remember, in crisis intervention, there is no one best way. Yours may be as effective as ours or more so. We hope the exercise will prove instructive for you.)

Rita is a 35-year-old businesswoman. She is a graduate of high school and a post–high school vocational-technical institute. She holds a certificate in auto mechanics. She has never been to a counselor before. She has come to the crisis worker at the suggestion of a close friend who is a school counselor. Rita owns and operates an automobile tune-up and service shop. She employs and supervises a crew of mechanics, tuneup specialists, and helpers. She works very hard and keeps long hours but maintains some flexibility by employing a manager. Rita’s husband Jake is a college-educated accountant. They have two children: a daughter, 13, and a son, 8. The family rarely attends church, and they don’t consider themselves religious. But they are church members. Their close friends are neither from their church nor from their work. Rita’s presenting problem is complex. She constantly feels depressed and unfulfilled.

She craves attention but has difficulty getting it in appropriate ways. For diversion, she participates in a dance group that practices three nights a week and performs on many Friday and Saturday evenings. Rita, Jake, and their children spend most of their Sundays at their lake cottage, which is an hour’s drive from their home. Their circle of friends is mainly their neighbors at the lake.

Rita’s marriage has been going downhill for several years. She has become sexually
involved with Sam, a wealthy wholesaler of used automobiles. She met him through a business deal whereby she contracted to do the tune-up and service work on a large number of cars for Sam’s company. Sam’s contracts enable Rita’s business to be very successful. Rita states that the “chemistry” between her and Sam is unique and electrifying. She says she and Sam are “head over heels in love with each other.” She lives with Jake but no longer feels any love for him.

According to Rita, Sam is unhappily married too, and Sam and his current wife have two small children. Rita states that she and Sam want to get married, but she doesn’t want to subject her two children to a divorce right now and she’s very fearful of her own mother’s wrath if she files for a divorce. Sam fears his wife will “take him to the cleaners” if he leaves her for Rita right now. Lately, Sam has been providing Rita with expensive automobiles, clothing, jewelry, and trips out of town. Also, Sam has been greatly overpaying Rita’s service contracts, making her business flourish. Jake doesn’t know the details of Rita’s business dealings with Sam, but he is puzzled, jealous, frustrated, impulsive, and violent. Jake used to slap Rita occasionally. Recently, however, he has become more frustrated, impulsive, and violent. Jake has beaten Rita several times in recent months. Last night he beat her worse than ever. Rita has no broken bones, but she has several bruises on her body, legs, and arms. The bruises do not show as long as she wears pantsuits.

Rita has told her problems only to her school counselor friend. She fears that her boyfriend would kill her husband if he found out about the beatings. Rita is frustrated because she cannot participate with the dance group until her bruises go away. Rita is feeling very guilty and depressed. She is not especially suicidal, however. She is feeling a great deal of anger and hatred toward Jake, and she suffers from very low self-esteem.

She is feeling stress and pressure from her children, from her mother, from Jake, and even from Sam, who wants to spend more and more time with Rita. Recently, Rita and Sam have been taking more and more risks in their meetings. Rita’s depression is getting to the point where she doesn’t care. She has come to the crisis worker in a state of lethargy—almost in a state of emotional immobility. But Rita has decided to share her entire story with the worker because she feels she is at her “wit’s end,” and she wouldn’t dare talk with her minister, her
physician, or other acquaintances. Rita has never met the crisis worker, and she feels this is the best approach, even though she is uncomfortable in sharing all this with a stranger.