

Crisis Psychotherapy Note Cheat Sheet

Reviewed by the BastionGPT Clinical Advisory Board · July 2026

A crisis psychotherapy note documents an encounter where psychotherapy addressed an acute crisis: the precipitating event, urgent assessment, mental status, risk findings, interventions, client response, and disposition. In the US it supports time-based codes 90839 and 90840. No format is mandated; the content and the time are the requirement.

Precipitating event & history of crisis state the why-now

Do: record what happened, when it escalated, and why it needed attention today: acute stressor, recent changes, relevant history.

Pitfall: distress without the why-now; a reviewer should see a problem requiring immediate attention, not a difficult week.

Mental status & presentation focused, not boilerplate

Do: record appearance, speech, affect, thought process, orientation, judgment, and changes across the encounter.

Pitfall: skipping the MSE in the urgency of the moment; it is part of the service Medicare describes.

Risk assessment ends in a formulation

Do: cover ideation, intent, plan, means access, and protective factors as relevant, and close with the risk formulation.

Pitfall: a bare "denies SI"; the formulation is what supports the disposition.

Interventions & resources mobilized the psychotherapy

Do: name the crisis-focused therapeutic work and the supports activated, with consent noted for collateral contacts.

Pitfall: a note that reads as monitoring or coordination only; the service is psychotherapy for crisis.

Client response measurable where possible

Do: record how the client's state changed in response to the work (a distress rating works well).

Pitfall: no recorded response, which leaves the disposition looking arbitrary.

Disposition & follow-up the part that gets defended later

Do: record where the client went and why that was safe: level of care, consultation, a dated next contact, escalation instructions.

Pitfall: "will follow up" with no timeframe; give the disposition reasoning and a date.

Before you sign

- ☐ Time supports the code: start/stop or total, segments if split
- ☐ Why-now documented: the problem needed attention today
- ☐ Risk formulation connects to the disposition
- ☐ Therapeutic work named, not just monitoring
- ☐ Collateral contacts show a consent basis
- ☐ Follow-up dated, with escalation instructions
- ☐ Signed with credentials, dated promptly

Drafting with AI

Capture 30 seconds of bullets after the encounter: precipitant, mental status, risk findings, interventions, response, disposition, times.

"Draft a crisis psychotherapy note from these bullets for a same-day 65-minute office session, established CBT client, acute situational crisis: ..."

Never paste client-identifying information into consumer AI tools. BastionGPT is HIPAA-compliant with a signed BAA on every plan.

250–700 words
typical length

15–25 min by hand
clinical team estimate

After any crisis encounter
office, telehealth, community

Care team · payers · legal
who reads it

Crisis Psychotherapy Note Template

Copy or print for your practice · Adapt fields to your organization's, payer's and jurisdiction's documentation requirements.

Client (initials): _____ Date: _____ Setting: ☐ office ☐ telehealth ☐ home/community

Start/stop time(s), may be non-continuous: _____ Total crisis time (minutes): _____

Precipitating event & history of crisis state

What happened, when it escalated, and why it needed attention today

Mental status & presentation

Appearance, speech, affect, thought process, orientation, judgment; changes across the encounter

Risk assessment

Ideation, intent, plan, access to means, protective factors; risk formulation that supports the disposition

Interventions & resources mobilized

Crisis-focused therapeutic work delivered; supports and services contacted, consent noted

Client response

How distress changed in response to intervention, measurable where possible

Disposition & follow-up

Level of care and why it is safe; consultation; dated next contact; escalation instructions given

Clinician signature / credentials: _____ Date signed: _____