

School Crisis Communications

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Today we will . . .

- identify common mistakes in school crisis preparation (policy, procedures, crisis communications, and training) and learn how to correct them.
- identify new resources available to aid schools in crisis prevention/mitigation and response.
- explore secondary stress disorder and ways to support crisis team members.

Agenda

1. Definition and conceptual framework
2. Crisis communications planning

How we will work

- Slides to capture the big ideas
- Small group exercises to practice applying those big ideas
- Handouts to help you use this information in your districts.
- Resources for your teams

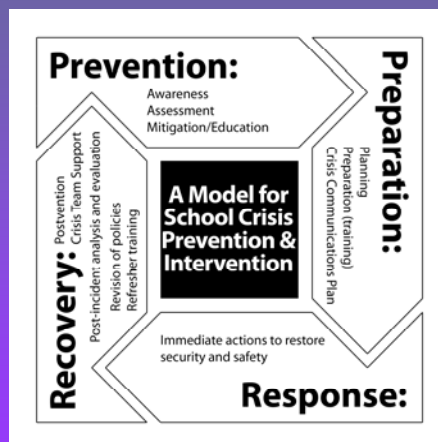
I. What do we mean by school crisis?

A school crisis is a temporary event or condition that affects a school, causing individuals to experience fear, helplessness, shock, and/or horror.

A school crisis requires extraordinary actions to restore a sense of psychological and physical security.

The origin of the crisis need not be school-based; outside incidents and conditions also can create a crisis for a school. (Kerr, 2008)

A conceptual model



From: Kerr, M.M. (2009) School Crisis Prevention and Intervention. Columbus: Pearson/Merrill

Design by Rob Perrone

MITIGATION/PREVENTION

- What are we hearing and seeing?
- What do we know?
- Where can we get more information?

Assessment of risk

- Who or what is at risk?
- What are the risk factors and warning signs?
- How much time do we have?

Mitigation/prevention Education

- What can we do to keep this from happening here?
- How can we reduce the harm or disruption to our school and community?

PREPARATION

- Do we have the authority to respond to this crisis?
- What are we allowed or directed to do?
- How would we mobilize internal and external resources?
- How would we respond to restore safety and security?
- What would we communicate internally within the school district and externally to others?

Response

- Now what?

Be CALM

- **B**efore you act, **b**e sure you get the facts.
- **C**all for help and **c**ommunicate the instructions.
- **A**nticipate what could happen next and **a**ddress the plan accordingly.
- **L**isten to your audiences and **l**earn what they need.
- **M**anage the crisis and **m**aintain the responders (food, water, etc.).

RECOVERY

- How can we restore the school facility (if damaged)?
- How can we help people recover a sense of psychological safety, while respecting their need to grieve?
- How do we address reminders and anniversaries of the crisis?

Evaluation

- What happened?
- How and why did it happen?
- Was the incident preventable?
- Was the response effective?
- How can we improve?
- What lessons can we share?

Crisis Plan Reviews

Ask yourself if your district's plan for a particular crisis meets the goals stated earlier. If not, what needs to be added?

Resources for this section

- North Dakota Department of Health Alert Network (September 22, 2003) Health update: Homeland Security Chemical Threat Information. Retrieved December 28, 2006 from <http://www.keystosaferschools.com/Reports/HealthAlertAdvisory20030922.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, *Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities*. Retrieved June 25, 2006 from <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/crisisplanning.pdf>

II. Crisis Communications

A crisis communications plan (CCP) outlines how the district will convey information to and receive information from its employees, students, families, and the general public.

“The CCP provides a functioning collective brain for all persons involved in a crisis, persons who may not operate at normal capacity due to the shock or emotions of the crisis event.”

(Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 11).

Internal and External Audiences

- staff
- students
- parents
- those in the community
- those who may read, hear, or see media reports

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2002) counsels:

- Crisis + heightened public emotions + limited access to facts + rumor, gossip, speculation, assumption, and inference = an unstable information environment (p. 5).
- Review your remarks to gauge the probable impact. . .and adjust them as necessary; e.g., are you using words, like “crisis,” “life-threatening,” or “extremely” and can other, less dramatic words be substituted? (p. 5)

The Crisis Continuum



Thinking about the impact of crisis communications

Resources

- Project Reassure, founded in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, offers easy-to-read handouts for those comforting children and teens, including those with special needs (www.projectreassure.org).
- The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) web site has some handouts in different languages.

Crisis Communications Resources

- United States Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2002). *Communicating in a crisis: Risk communication guidelines for public officials*. Rockville, MD
- National Education Association (2002) *NEA Crisis Communications Guide and Toolkit*. Washington, DC: National Education Association.
- Fearn-Banks, K. (2002). *Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach (2nd Ed.)*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Additional Resource:

- Strategic Partnerships with Media Representatives .
- Document recommends that schools create communications plans and train a public information officer to be the primary liaison to the public.
- These along with other strategies described in the publication ensure that when a school emergency occurs, the media can enhance the school's transition into the recovery phase rather than hinder it.

Available at:

http://rems.ed.gov/views/documents/HH_Vol2Issue8.pdf

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