



*Safe Communities ~
Safe Schools*

FACT SHEET

FS-SC05

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Creating a Crisis Plan

Safe school and community planning involves many key elements. Such elements may include assessment and planning, program development and implementation, provision of student services, and crisis planning. Safe school and community planning is intended to enrich the overall school climate and prevent potential crises, while crisis planning is meant to ensure that the school and community are well prepared when a crisis does occur. Therefore, crisis planning is one essential component of an overall safe school and community plan.

"Crisis Planning" refers to two distinct components – emergency management and crisis response. Emergency management addresses physical safety, such as the emergency vehicles that will be dispatched, emergency drills, communication methods, on-site medical care, etc.; crisis response addresses the emotional support of the school community, such as grief counseling, media interviews and future prevention efforts.

It is important to be comprehensive when creating a crisis plan. For this reason, the following checklist is provided as a tool for developing a personalized crisis plan:

Emergency Management

- Review existing plans, if available.
- Consider the following emergencies during plan development – school violence, bomb threats, fire, natural disasters, hazardous materials, car/bus accidents, suicide threats, and staff or student illness, injury or death.
- Designate members of an Emergency Support Team (school official, media liaison, parent liaison, community liaison, fire department, police department, emergency medical personnel).
- Decide who will be in charge during a crisis and who will serve as a substitute if the appointed person is not available.
- Define who to contact and how for various emergencies.
- Identify alternative reunification sites for classes and/or families – never send students home alone.
- Add or modernize security equipment if necessary (intercoms, portable radios, cameras).
- Create a crisis box – include name badges and emergency cards for students. Require name badges for anyone, particularly media, at the emergency site.
- Develop a document that integrates the emergency and crisis response procedures into a single location. Review and update the document annually.

Crisis Response

- Psychological First Aid – have mental health counselors available to deliver tragic news to parents, students, and teachers.
- Creation of a "safe room" for students to visit during the weeks, or even months, following the tragedy. Grief counseling and/or pastoral care should be available in this room.
- Determine strategies for media relations and information dissemination.

- Resume normal school activities as soon as possible.
- Address parents' and students' concerns, fears, and questions. Deliver honest and accurate responses.
- Support the caregivers – recognize that clergy, school faculty, counselors, and emergency teams may also experience emotional problems as a result of the tragedy.

Not only is the development of the crisis plan essential, but also the rehearsal of the plan. The emergency management procedures should be communicated to all students and families. The complete document of procedures should be provided to teachers, support personnel, and especially community emergency teams—fire department, police, emergency medical personnel. When preparing for drills, it is imperative to include in the drill all of the emergency teams and affected individuals; it is not enough to just involve the school members in the drills. Keep in mind, when preparing for drills, that it can be harmful to create sensationalized or extremely violent scenarios.

References:

National School Safety Center. (2000, March). *School Safety Leadership Curriculum Guide* (Thirteenth Printing). Westlake Village, CA: Author.

Elliott, D.S., Grady, J.M., Shaw, T.E., Aultman-Bettridge, T., & Beaulieu, M.T. (2000). *Safe Communities ~ Safe Schools Planning Guide: A Tool for Community Violence Prevention Efforts* (SCSS-001). Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado.