



## Safe Communities ~ Safe Schools

# FACT SHEET

FS-SC05

2000, 2008

## Creating a Crisis Plan

Safe school and community planning involve many key elements. Such elements 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 includes two distinct components – emergency management and crisis response. Emergency management addresses physical safety, such as safe and efficient entry and exit, emergency drills and supplies, communication methods, on-site medical care, etc. Crisis response addresses the emotional support of the school and community after the crisis, such as grief counseling, media relations and future prevention efforts.

Although it is important to be comprehensive when creating a crisis plan, remember that the plan is a “working” document that should be constantly tested, assessed and updated. Additionally, crisis plans should reflect conditions that are unique to the school and surrounding community. To get started, the following checklist provides basic, general information on crisis plans:

### Emergency Management

- Review existing plans, if available.
- Consider the following emergencies during plan development – school violence, intruders, bomb threats, fires, natural disasters, hazardous material accidents, car/bus accidents, suicide threats, widespread staff or student illness and student/staff injury or death.
- Designate members of a Crisis Response Team (CRT). Members of a CRT can include school faculty and staff, parents, community members, and officials from the local fire, police and emergency management departments.
- 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 reunification sites for parents and families – never send students home alone.
- Add or modernize security equipment if necessary (intercoms, portable radios, cameras).
- Create a “crisis box” that includes name badges for students and staff, as well as emergency information cards. Emergency information cards should include information about student medical conditions, allergies, medications, and other special needs as well as parent/guardian contact information.

- Develop a document that integrates the emergency and crisis response procedures into a single location. Review and update the document annually.

## Crisis Response

- Have mental health counselors available to answer questions and provide information to students, parents and school staff about future support.
- 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.

The development of the crisis plan is essential, but so is rehearsing and practicing the plan. Schools should conduct regular drills and keep notes on what is working and what is not.

Additionally, emergency management procedures should be communicated to all students and families. The complete procedures should be provided to teachers, support personnel, and especially community emergency teams, including the fire department, police and other emergency management personnel. These documents should also be translated into age-appropriate and foreign languages if appropriate.

When conducting drills, try to make them as realistic as possible and include members of the Crisis Response Team as well as local first responders whenever possible. Practice drills often, and practice them effectively.

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### References:

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- National School Safety Center. (2000, March). *School Safety Leadership Curriculum Guide* (Thirteenth Printing). Westlake Village, CA.
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools. (2007). *Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities*. Washington, D.C.