



*Safe Communities ~
Safe Schools*

FACT SHEET

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Introduction to Safe School Planning: Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery

Each day, nearly 50 million children in the U.S. go to school, and these schools are entrusted with the task of keeping our children safe during the day. Although schools are overwhelmingly safe, schools and school districts across the country can face an emergency or crisis situation at any time and without warning.

All schools and districts should strive to develop and implement an effective safe school plan in an effort to be prepared should such an event occur. Although safe school plans should be tailored to the community that they serve, these plans should generally address the four phases of crisis management: Prevention/Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery.

Prevention/Mitigation

Although schools cannot possibly guard against all threats, they can take preventative actions to reduce the likelihood of such events. Prevention and mitigation efforts are designed to avoid and/or reduce the impacts of a disaster, as well as to decrease the need for extensive response. Prevention efforts focus on efforts to reduce the likelihood of emergency situations, while mitigation efforts try to minimize the effects and impacts of the events once they occur.

Prevention and Mitigation efforts can include the following:

- Conduct assessments of the school climate
- Determine what the needs of the school are with regard to violence and crime
- Work with local first responders and emergency managers to determine hazards unique to the area
- Establish effective, evidence-based problem-solving or anti-bullying programs

Preparedness

Despite a school district's best efforts at taking preventive precautions, there is no guarantee that an emergency or crisis situation will not occur. Therefore, being prepared to face an emergency situation is a very important part of the overall planning process. Preparedness involves a continuous investment of time, resources and planning efforts, and these plans cannot be developed overnight.

Preparedness efforts can include the following:

- Identify all stakeholders involved in crisis planning

- Identify and acquire the necessary equipment that will be needed in an emergency or crisis situation
- Develop procedures for communicating with staff, students, families and the media

Response

Response plans are designed to ensure that the other steps in the emergency plan are carried out in an efficient and effective manner. Although related to the other planning stages, the response plan should be treated as a separate entity. Part of an effective response strategy includes keeping in close contact with local emergency responders, including standardizing training and communication techniques. Taking the time to do this before an emergency or crisis situation arises can result in a more effective response.

Response efforts can include the following:

- Respond to emergency situations as quickly as possible
- Notify emergency responders and the school crisis response team
- Follow the pre-established chain of command

Recovery

The goal of recovery is to restore the school to a learning environment as quickly as possible. Recovery efforts can take time, and school administrators should not rush the recovery process. School staff can be trained to deal with the emotional needs of students, parents, and other staff members. Recovery efforts can also take into account planning for memorials and anniversary dates of the crisis.

Recovery efforts can include:

- Identify what follow-up services are available for staff, students and parents
- Return to the “business of learning” as quickly as possible
- Take as much time as needed in the recovery process
- Capture “lessons learned” and incorporate them into future plans

Taken together, the four stages of crisis planning: Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery, can be effective tools in preparing for and responding to the effects of an emergency/crisis situation. Although each category is a distinct, separate entity, all four components should work together as much as possible. Proper planning, training and practice can help solidify these separate components.

Schools and their districts should work with the community as much as possible in creating their safe schools plan, as many community leaders and first responders are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their local areas in regards to emergency management. Additionally, state and federal resources are available to those who seek them.

Finally, it should be noted that it is usually up to the school or district to create, implement and oversee their own safe schools plan. School administrators at both the school and district level should take a hands-on approach to ensure that their safe schools plan is effective, efficient and ready for an emergency or crisis situation should it occur.

References:

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