

CORE TEAM HANDBOOK

COORDINATION & ORGANIZING IN RESPONSE TO AN EMERGENCY

FENTRESS COUNTY SCHOOLS

Developed and revised by the Crisis Intervention Planning Committee.

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What Is A Crisis?

A crisis may be defined as any event or situation, which calls for quick action in order to minimize possible harmful effects. A crisis may involve one student in one class or every student and faculty member in Fentress County. The following are some examples of situations where the CARE Team would be instrumental:

Suicide
Sudden Death of a Teacher, Administrator, or Student
Death of a Parent
Gunman Threatening the School
Natural Disaster (Tornado, Flood, Etc.)
Created Disasters (Fire, Structural Failure, Etc.)

The Importance of Confronting A Crisis

Studies indicate that the most effective method of handling a crisis is head-on—dispelling rumors and overcoming natural tendencies of denial. Especially in situations where death is involved, it is important to act quickly, carefully, and honestly. Active prevention should be the primary focus of CORE Team members and other school personnel. Next, the CORE Team concerns itself with intervention when a crisis occurs. Finally, the CORE Team seeks to provide postvention in order to lessen the effects of the event by providing follow-up on high-risk individuals and assisting the school in returning to a preventive mode.

Why Do We Need This Plan?

Aside from the previously stated (and certainly most important) reasons for protecting the physical and mental health of the students in our care and maintaining the fidelity of the educational environment, this plan is necessary in order to show the community that we care about their children. Having a plan such as this builds good community-school-relations and adds one more “selling point” to parents considering moving their students to our system. Furthermore, recent legal decisions show that having a plan such as this can help us deal with the issue of liability if and when the situation occurs.

A Step-By-Step Plan

In order to maximize efficiency and minimize confusion, the role of each member of the CORE Team, along with other key school personnel, has been written in a clear step-by-step fashion. In the event of a crisis or emergency, Principals, Counselors, Teachers, and Non-certified personnel may turn to this systematized plan of action for guidance and suggestions. These steps are the heart of CORE Team operations; however, each team should feel free to alter the system to conform to their school’s unique needs.

**Step-By-Step Guidelines
For
CORE Team Members,
Teachers,
And
Non-Certified Personnel
In the Event of
Sudden Death**

- Step-By-Step Plan for Principal**
- Role of Guidance Counselor**
- Step-By-Step Plan for Teachers**
- Role of Non-Certified Staff**

Some Things to Remember When Faced With the Issue of Death

The death of a student, faculty member, or parent is a tragic and “touchy” situation in any instance. When faced with death due to suicide, however, special cautions and measures should be taken. First, recognize the danger signals that may precede suicide attempts. TAKE EVERY SUICIDAL THREAT, COMMENT, OR ACT SERIOUSLY. DON’T BE AFRAID TO ASK THE PERSON IF HE/SHE IS REALLY THINKING ABOUT SUICIDE. Be willing to listen. Be calm. Avoid trying to shock or challenge the person or analyze his/her behavior. FOR THE WARNING SIGNS, AND STEPS TO TAKE SPECIFICALLY IN THE CASE OF SUICIDE, SEE THE APPENDIX.

An Important Point

If the death of a student or faculty member is the result of suicide, acknowledge the tragedy of the event, do not encourage memorializing the act of suicide. School personnel should emphasize that suicide is A PERMANENT SOLUTION TO A TEMPORARY PROBLEM.

Principals, teachers, counselors, and other school staff members need to recognize that the day and week or two following the sudden death of a student or teacher will be a time in which there is much turmoil and confusion. The amount of turmoil evidenced by the students and the amount of confusion experienced by them, will be a direct result of several variables. These variables include the visibility of the student who is deceased, the manner of death, and whether the death receives closure quickly or a police investigation continues. Please recognize that individual variables will certainly have an effect on various aspects of intervention. These variables must be kept in mind as you work through the crisis with your students.

Principal's Role

A Ten-Step Plan to Deal With Sudden Death

Introduction

When any individual within a school becomes aware of a sudden death via homicide, suicide, accidental death, or death following illness, it should be the responsibility of the individual to immediately call the principal and inform him/her of all known facts regarding the death. The principal will then take the lead in the activation of the process through which the students will be notified about the death. If the death is discovered outside of school hours, in the evening or late at night, the principal should call the members of the CORE Team and the faculty. Inform the staff that there may be a change in the procedure of the normal day and that you may need them to come to school early the next morning for a faculty meeting.

STEP #1

MEET FIRST WITH THE MEMBERS (OR LEADER) OF THE CORE TEAM FOR THE PURPOSE OF IDENTIFYING THE AGENDA TO BE FOLLOWED. IF NECESSARY, CALL A FULL FACULTY AND STAFF MEETING AT LEAST 30 MINUTES PRIOR TO THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL DAY. THIS WOULD INCLUDE CERTIFIED AND NON-CERTIFIED PERSONNEL.

STEP #2

DIRECT A TEAM MEMBER TO IMMEDIATELY GO TO THE DECEASED STUDENT'S LOCKER/DESK, REMOVE THE CONTENTS, AND TAKE THE BELONGINGS TO THE OFFICE. IF POSSIBLE, THIS NEEDS TO BE DONE PRIOR TO THE ARRIVAL OF STUDENTS AT SCHOOL SINCE, IN SOME INSTANCES, STUDENTS MAY REMOVE THE DECEASED'S PROPERTY WHICH RIGHTFULLY BELONGS TO THE PARENTS.

STEP #3

DIRECT A TEAM MEMBER TO PULL THE DECEASED STUDENT'S CUMULATIVE FOLDER TO DETERMINE WHAT OTHER SCHOOLS THE DECEASED ATTENDED. THE PRINCIPAL OR OTHER TEAM MEMBER SHOULD CALL THE OTHER SCHOOL(S) AND INFORM THEM OF THE EVENT WHICH HAS OCCURRED. (IT MAY BE NECESSARY FOR THE PRINCIPALS OF THE OTHER SCHOOLS TO ACTIVATE THEIR OWN CORE TEAMS IN ORDER TO DEAL WITH STUDENTS AT THEIR SCHOOL WHO MIGHT HAVE KNOWN THE DECEASED). IF THERE ARE SIBLINGS OF THE DECEASED AT OTHER SCHOOLS, THOSE SCHOOLS SHOULD BE CONTACTED SO THAT THEIR NEEDS MAY BE ADDRESSED.

STEP #4

IDENTIFY AN AREA (OR AREAS) IN THE BUILDING WHERE STUDENTS MAY COME FOR SUPPORT AND COUNSELING. THIS AREA SHOULD BE ONE THAT WILL FACILITATE COMMUNICATIONS. THE AREA WILL BE PRIMARILY STAFFED BY COUNSELORS AND SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS. THIS AREA WILL REMAIN OPEN AS NEEDED FOR STUDENTS AND FACULTY.

STEP #5

**THE PRINCIPAL WILL BE THE MEDIA CONTACT PERSON.
(SEE THE APPENDIX ON HOW TO WORK WITH THE MEDIA)**

STEP #6

PREPARE AN ANNOUNCEMENT TO BE READ OVER THE P.A. SYSTEM TO THE STUDENTS DURING THE FIRST CLASS PERIOD.

NOTE: IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE A CENTRAL SPOKESPERSON FOR ALL ANNOUNCEMENTS TO STUDENTS. BY THE TIME STUDENTS REACH SCHOOL FOLLOWING A SUDDEN DEATH OR SUICIDE, MANY WILL HAVE HEARD DIFFERING VERSIONS ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED. THE PRESENCE OF A STRONG, CARING, AND SUPPORTIVE AUTHORITY FIGURE (I.E., THE PRINCIPAL) SHARING INFORMATION DURING THIS STRESSFUL TIME, IS IMPORTANT.

ONE EXAMPLE OF AN ANNOUNCEMENT IS FOLLOWING:

“STUDENTS MAY I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE, LAST NIGHT (STUDENTS NAME) FROM OUR JUNIOR CLASS DIED. THIS MORNING THE FACULTY MET TO DEVELOP A PLAN TO HELP ALL OF US COPE WITH THIS SAD EVENT. YOUR TEACHER HAS BEEN GIVEN SOME SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO PROCEED WITH CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES TODAY. ADDITIONALLY, THERE WILL BE SPECIAL COUNSELING AVAILABLE FOR ANY STUDENT WHO FEELS THE NEED FOR SOME EXTRA SUPPORT. COUNSELORS WILL BE AVAILABLE IN (GIVE LOCATION) ALL DAY.

I WOULD LIKE ALL OF US TO REFLECT FOR A MINUTE IN MEMORY OF (STUDENT'S FIRST NAME). (PAUSE). YOUR TEACHERS WILL NOW SPEND SOME TIME WITH YOU IN DISCUSSIONS. THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.”

NOTE: THERE MAY BE SOME SITUATIONS WHERE IT IS BETTER TO DEAL WITH A SMALLER GROUP OF STUDENTS WITHIN THE TOTAL SCHOOL POPULATION (I.E., ONLY SIXTH GRADERS, ONLY MRS. JONES' CLASS, ETC.). IN THIS CASE AN ANNOUNCEMENT ON THE P.A. SYSTEM WOULD NOT BE APPROPRIATE. THE CORE TEAM WILL NEED TO DECIDE HOW BEST TO PROCEED. ALSO, IN THE EVENT OF SUICIDE, ANY STATEMENT WHICH MEMORIALIZES THE STUDENT SHOULD BE AVOIDED.

STEP #7

CLARIFY FUNERAL ARRANGEMENT INFORMATION AND PREPARE DETAILS FOR STUDENT/FACULTY ATTENDANCE AT THE VISITATION AND FUNERAL. WHEN DETAILS ARE FINAL, AN ANNOUNCEMENT SHOULD BE MADE TO STAFF AND STUDENTS.

NOTE: IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE FACULTY MEMBERS PRESENT DURING THE ENTIRE VISITATION PERIOD TO ASSIST THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR IN HANDLING DISTRAUGHT CHILDREN AND TEENS.

DESIGNATE ONE SECRETARY WHO WILL KNOW HOW TO REACH THE PRINCIPAL THROUGHOUT THE DAY SO THAT THE PRINCIPAL CAN RESPOND TO ANY EMERGENCY/ADMINISTRATIVE SITUATIONS WHICH MAY DEVELOP.

STEP #8

CALL AND/OR VISIT THE PARENTS AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE TO EXPRESS THE SCHOOL'S AND YOUR CONDOLENCES. VISITING THE PARENTS IS ENCOURAGED, AND THE PRINCIPAL MAY TAKE ALONG A STAFF MEMBER WHO HAS BEEN WELL ACQUAINTED WITH THE STUDENT.

STEP #9

IF NEEDED, CALL AN END-OF-DAY FACULTY MEETING TO DISCUSS PROGRESS.

STEP #10

FOLLOWING THE DECEASED STUDENT'S FUNERAL, BEGIN TO BRING CLOSURE BY ENCOURAGING TEACHERS TO RESUME REGULAR CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AS QUICKLY AS APPROPRIATE.

ON THE DAY FOLLOWING THE FUNERAL, THE PRINCIPAL SHOULD MAKE A CLOSURE STATEMENT TO ALL STUDENTS AND FACULTY (THIS IS DONE THE DAY FOLLOWING BECAUSE MANY OF THE DECEASED STUDENTS CLOSEST FRIENDS WILL NOT HAVE RETURNED TO SCHOOL THE DAY OF THE FUNERAL):

(THE FOLLOWING IS ONE EXAMPLE)

"May I have your attention please? I wish to thank each of you, students and faculty, for the support you have shown each other during the past few days. The example you have shown is a positive and healthy one and provides us the opportunity to work towards strengthening our relationship with each other. Counselors will remain available if you should wish to talk with someone. (Any additional comments from the family that have been passed on to the principal might be shared at this point). Thank you for your attention."

Guidance Counselor's Role

A Ten-Step Plan to Deal With Sudden Death

Introduction

The Guidance Counselor(s) play an integral part in the life of the CORE Team. In each school, the counselor most likely acts as the leader of CORE Team and implementer of the intervention plan. They should take responsibility for gathering information about student/staff reaction to the death and act as a "hub of information".

STEP #1

IDENTIFY SCHOOL STAFF WHO WERE CLOSE TO THE DECEASED STUDENT AND MAY NEED EXTRA SUPPORT (I.E, A TEACHER WHO HAD A SPECIAL HELPING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE STUDENT, HAD THE STUDENT IN CLASS, OR HAS A SIBLING IN CLASS).

START A LIST OF "HIGH RISK" STUDENTS IN NEED OF EXTRA SUPPORT. THESE INCLUDE: CLOSE FRIENDS OF THE DECEASED, RELATIVES, STUDENTS WITH OTHER STRESSES (I.E. TROUBLED YOUTH AND THOSE WHO ARE QUIET AND WITHDRAWN), STUDENTS IDENTIFIED BY FACULTY, STUDENTS IDENTIFIED BY OTHER STUDENTS, "SUICIDAL" STUDENTS, STUDENTS WITH UNRESOLVED GRIEF OR LOSS (E.G., FAMILY MEMBER HAS COMMITTED SUICIDE, DIVORCE SITUATIONS, RECENT MOVES), AND STUDENTS WITH "GUILT" FEELINGS.

STEP # 2

GUIDANCE STAFF AND OTHER COUNSELORS (SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS, ETC.) SHOULD BRIEFLY MEET WITH ALL IDENTIFIED "HIGH RISK" STUDENTS AND WITH ANY STUDENTS WHO ARE REFERRED BY STAFF. DECIDE WHAT, IF ANY, INTERVENTION IS APPROPRIATE AND PRIORITIZE CASES ACCORDING TO RISK. OPTIONS INCLUDE: (A) BRIEF SUPPORTIVE COUNSELING WITH GUIDANCE COUNSELOR (S) OR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST (S) AND (B) GRIEF GROUP. THE GRIEF GROUP SHOULD AUTOMATICALLY BE FORMED THE FIRST DAY. THE FOCUS IS ON MEMORIES OF THE DECEASED AND GRIEF WORK. FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS, TWO GROUPS ARE TYPICALLY FORMED, ONE MALE AND ONE FEMALE.

STEP #3

IDENTIFY NON-SCHOOL ATTENDEES OR ABSENTEES WHO MAY BE "AT RISK" AND INFORM PARENTS OF YOUR CONCERN FOR THEM.

STEP #4

SERVE AS A RESOURCE TO SPECIFIC CLASSROOMS DURING THE FIRST CLASS PERIODS. ASSIST ANY WHO FEELS UNABLE TO RESPOND TO STUDENTS.

STEP #5

FOR STUDENTS WHO REQUEST TO LEAVE SCHOOL BECAUSE OF THEIR GRIEF REACTION:

- (A) RELEASE THE STUDENT ONLY TO A PARENT OR ADULT DESIGNATED BY THE PARENT.**
- (B) LET THE STUDENT KNOW THAT YOU EXPECT HIM/HER TO RETURN TO SCHOOL THE NEXT DAY.**
- (C) CHECK TO SEE IF THE STUDENT RETURNS THE NEXT DAY AND BRIEFLY CHECK TO SEE HOW THEY ARE DOING. IF A STUDENT HAS NOT RETURNED, CONTACT THEIR PARENTS. OFFER YOUR ASSISTANCE TO THE PARENTS AND/OR THE STUDENT.**

STEP #6

AT THE END OF THE FIRST DAY, THE CORE TEAM SHOULD MEET TO UPDATE THEMSELVES AND REVIEW THE LIST OF "HIGH RISK" STUDENTS. CROSS STUDENTS OFF THE LIST WHO NO LONGER NEED MONITORING OR INTERVENTION.

AN EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO EVALUATE THE PREVENTION, INTERVENTION, AND POSTVENTION THUS FAR. CONSIDER THE QUESTIONS:

- (A) WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE TO PREVENT THE DEATH?**
- (B) WHAT ACTIONS TAKEN AFTER THE DEATH SEEM APPROPRIATE AND MEANINGFUL WITH HINDSIGHT?**
- (C) WHAT ACTIONS MIGHT BE MODIFIED OR ADDED IN THE FUTURE SHOULD THERE BE ANOTHER CRISIS?**

AT THE END OF THE WEEK, REVIEW THE STATUS OF "HIGH RISK" STUDENTS ON THE LIST. DETERMINE WHICH STUDENTS MAY NEED TO BE REFERRED FOR FURTHER HELP.

STEP #7

DISCUSS THE ROLE THE COUNSELOR(S) (SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST(S), ETC.) WILL FILL IN RELATION TO THE FUNERAL HOME VISITATION, FUNERAL, OR MEMORIAL SERVICE. INTRODUCE SCHOOL PERSONNEL TO THE FUNERAL HOME STAFF AND REQUEST INTRODUCTION TO THE FAMILY MEMBERS PRESENT.

Guidance Counselor's Role (Continued)

AFTER THE FUNERAL, ASSIST THE BUILDING STAFF IN MOVING TOWARD A "BUSINESS AS USUAL" ATMOSPHERE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. (AN ANNOUNCEMENT WILL BE MADE BY THE PRINCIPAL REGARDING CONTINUED AVAILABILITY OF GUIDANCE STAFF).

STEP #8

CAREFULLY REVIEW WITH THE PRINCIPAL AND OTHER CORE TEAM MEMBERS THE MEMORIAL REQUESTS FOR THE DECREASED STUDENT (IF ANY).

STEP #9

PROVIDE ONGOING INSERVICE AND TRAINING TO STAFF IN IDENTIFYING THE WARNING SIGNS FOR STUDENTS AT RISK AND THE APPROPRIATE INTERVENTIONS.

STEP #10

PROVIDE FOLLOW-UP SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE PERCEIVED AT HIGH RISK.

Teacher's Role

A Five-Step Plan to Deal with Sudden Death

Introduction

Teachers play a vital role in helping students deal with their feelings regarding the death of an individual. The CORE Team is available to assist you in helping your students. They have additional materials and literature should you need them. FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING DEATH, PARTICULARLY IN THE CASE OF SUICIDE, SEE THE APPENDIX.

STEP #1

ATTEND THE FACULTY/STAFF MEETING IF CALLED BY THE PRINCIPAL.

STEP #2

TEACHERS WILL NEED TO FOLLOW THESE PROCEDURES DURING THE FIRST HOUR OF CLASSES FOLLOWING THE PRINCIPAL'S ANNOUNCEMENT.

- (A) ACKNOWLEDGE THE DEATH...EXPLAIN ACCURATE FACTS TO THE BEST OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE AT THAT TIME. REVIEW THE LIFE OF THE DECEASED WITH THE STUDENTS. TRY TO EMPHASIZE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF THE DECEASED STUDENT'S LIFE.**
- (B) LET THE STUDENTS KNOW THAT ANNOUNCEMENTS WILL BE MADE IN REGARD TO THE FUNERAL. STUDENTS WILL BE EXCUSED FROM CLASSES TO ATTEND ACCORDING TO THE SCHOOL'S CHECKOUT PROCEDURES.**
- (C) OPEN UP DISCUSSION WITH THE STUDENTS. LET THEM KNOW IT IS NORMAL AND O.K. TO FEEL UPSET.**
- (D) ANNOUNCE TO STUDENTS: THERE WILL BE ADULTS AVAILABLE TO THEM FOR COUNSELING/TALKING/LISTENING IN THE DESIGNATED AREA (S). TRY TO FIND OUT THE NAMES OF STUDENTS WHO EXPRESS INTEREST IN COUNSELING DURING THE DAY.**

ALLOW EXPRESSIONS OF GRIEF. ACKNOWLEDGE AND ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS OF LOSS, ANGER, SADNESS, ETC.

NOTE: PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERING REACTIONS TO GRIEF. ONE WAY FOR THE TEACHER TO ENCOURAGE THE STUDENTS' EXPRESSIONS OF GRIEF IS FOR THE TEACHER TO ACKNOWLEDGE HIS OR HER OWN FEELINGS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE STUDENT'S DEATH.

Teacher's Role (continued)

THE MAJOR RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DISCUSSION OF GRIEF WILL BE WITH THE TEACHER IN THE FIRST PERIOD CLASS. IF YOU ARE UNCOMFORTABLE DISCUSSING GRIEF, ASK FOR ASSISTANCE FROM THE CORE TEAM LEADER.

(E) IF THE DEATH WAS BY SUICIDE, ACKNOWLEDGE THE TRAGEDY; HOWEVER, DO NOT ENCOURAGE MEMORIALIZING THE ACT OF SUICIDE. SCHOOL PERSONNEL SHOULD EMPHASIZE THAT SUICIDE IS A PERMANENT SOLUTION TO A TEMPORARY PROBLEM. ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO TALK ABOUT WAYS TO COPE WITH STRESS. HELP STUDENTS IDENTIFY PEOPLE IN THE SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY WHO CAN SERVE AS A RESOURCE.

DISCUSS THE EMOTION OF ANGER AND WHERE THE FEELING IS DIRECTED. ASK STUDENTS TO EXPRESS THOUGHTS OF RESPONSIBILITY REGARDING THE EVENT AND PROCESS THE ACCOMPANYING FEELINGS OF SADNESS.

DISCUSS OPENLY AND FRANKLY WITH THE STUDENTS WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE FUNERAL CEREMONY (I.E., THE APPEARANCE OF AN EMBALMED BODY, AND OPEN CASKET, CREMATION, ETC.). DO NOT BE MORBID OR SENSATIONALISTIC IN YOUR DESCRIPTION, BUT BE FACTUAL AND REALITY-BASED.

SUGGEST THAT THE CLASS RESPOND TO THE DEATH BY SHIFTING THE PAIN TO ACTION. FOR EXAMPLE, PLANT A TREE ON SCHOOL GROUNDS AS AN ENDURING SYMBOL OF THE LIFE AND OF THEIR SADNESS, PLANT BLOOMING FLOWERS IN THE CLASSROOM, WRITE SYMPATHY CARDS OR LETTERS TO THE FAMILY.

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS MAY WISH TO CALL THE PARENTS OF STUDENTS IN THEIR CLASSROOM TO INFORM THEM OF THE DEATH OF A CLASSMATE IF TIME PERMITS. A COPY OF THE STUDENT ROSTER AND HOME PHONE NUMBERS SHOULD BE KEPT AT HOME TO FACILITATE THIS CONTACT.

STEP #3

CHANNEL THE NAMES OF STUDENTS, OR THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES, TO THE GUIDANCE OFFICE IF THEY SEEM HIGH RISK, NOW OR AS THE WEEK PROGRESSES.

STEP #4

CONTINUE WITH CLASSES THE REMAINDER OF THE SCHOOL DAY. ALLOW FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION TIME IF THE TEACHER FEELS COMFORTABLE AND IF THE NEED ARISES.

Teacher's Role (continued)

STEP #5

ATTEND ANY END-OF-DAY FACULTY MEETING, WHICH MIGHT BE CALLED BY THE PRINCIPAL. THE PRINCIPAL AND CORE TEEAM MEMBERS WILL BY AVAILABLE TO DISCUSS CONCERNS YOU MAY HAVE REGARDING ANY OF YOUR STUDENTS.

Role of Non-Certified Staff

A Four-Step Plan To Deal With Sudden Death

Introduction

All building personnel are affected by the death of a student or faculty member. Therefore, it is important to inform non-certified staff of their role in dealing with this tragic event.

STEP #1

ALL NON-CERTIFIED STAFF SHOULD ATTEND ANY FACULTY/STAFF MEETING CALLED BY THE PRINCIPAL IN ORDER TO BE INFORMED OF THE DEATH AND THE PLANS FOR THE DAY.

STEP #2

SECRETARIAL STAFF SHOULD REVIEW CHECK-OUT PROCEDURES AND THE PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING REQUESTS OR CALLS FROM PARENTS, NEWS MEDIA, AND OTHERS.

STEP #3

THE SECRETARY SHOULD FREE GUIDANCE SCHEDULES FOR THE DAY. THE SECRETARY SHOULD HOLD CALLS FOR GUIDANCE PERSONNEL UNRELATED TO THE CRISIS, UNLESS OTHERWISE DIRECTED. SOME COUNSELORS MAY DIRECT THE SECRETARY TO CLEAR THEIR SCHEDULES FOR SEVERAL DAYS SO THEY CAN BEST RESPOND TO THE SITUATION.

STEP #4

NON-CERTIFIED SUPPORT STAFF (INCLUDING TEACHER ASSISTANTS, LUNCHROOM PERSONNEL, CUSTODIANS, AND BUS DRIVERS) SHOULD GIVE THE NAMES OF ANY STUDENTS THEY ARE CONCERNED ABOUT TO THE CORE TEAM LEADER.

**Step-By-Step Guidelines
For
CORE Team Members,
Teachers,
And
Non-Certified Personnel
In the Event of a
Disaster or Other Crisis**

- Step-By-Step Plan for Principal**
- Role of Guidance Counselor**
- Step-By-Step Plan for Teachers**
- Role of Non-Certified Staff**

What is a Disaster or Other Crisis?

A Disaster may be defined as any occurrence caused by the forces of nature or man, which result in property damage, personal injury, or even death on a potentially wide scale. Natural Disasters include: tornadoes, floods, severe thunderstorms (hail, high winds, lightning), earthquakes, landslides, fire, and so-called “Acts of God”. Human-caused disasters would include: nuclear attack, radiation leakage from a nuclear power plant, or war. Any other crisis may be defined as those events which require immediate action to protect the students from harm or to lessen the affect of some traumatic event such as: a building structural failure, a gunman in the school, a hostage situation, riot, murder, or other criminal acts directed at students or faculty. Some overlap is inherent between this chapter and the chapter on “Sudden Death”.

Some Scenarios To Consider

- A tornado strikes a residential area after school hours, and a student is killed;
- A tornado strikes a school while in session, and injury and death result;
- A tornado strikes a school while in session, without injury or death; however, the students seem emotionally traumatized;
- Several students lose their homes due to flooding (winds, fire, quake, etc.);
- A severe earthquake occurs while school is in session. No injuries are noted, but communication lines are down, and students have no way of contacting home;
- A sudden ice storm or blizzard causes difficulty-transporting students home;
- A man enters the front doors of the school carrying an assault rifle;
- Bleachers collapse during a ball game and several people are injured or killed;
- Disgruntled citizens storm the school, disrupt the school routine, and occupy the office;
- A school bus accident; or
- Students stranded at school after hours.

For some of these situations preplanning can be done, but other events may be sudden and planning may be difficult or impossible. All factors must be considered, but some common elements may be found across these situations. The following step-by-step guidelines are to be used as suggestions for the members of the CORE Team. If death is involved (whether of a student, parent, or faculty member), the CORE Team members are to refer back to the guidelines for handling a Sudden Death.

Principal's Role

A Six-Step Plan for Coping With Disasters and Other Crises

Introduction

Of all personnel in the public schools, the principal is probably the most knowledgeable regarding the subject of disaster awareness. This plan is *not* designed to interrupt the predetermined disaster plan a principal may already have in place but is intended to supplement and provide for consideration of the *psychological* welfare of students in the aftermath of such an emergency. These steps are broad enough to include the principal's own established disaster response plan and give proper consideration to the CORE Team component.

STEP #1

THE PRINCIPAL SHOULD MAKE CERTAIN THAT AN ADULT STAFF OR FACULTY MEMBER IS PRESENT IN THE SCHOOL OFFICE DURING SCHOOL HOURS. DEFINE THE NATURE OF THE EMERGENCY AND MAKE THE APPROPRIATE INITIAL RESPONSE. IF THERE IS IMMINENT DANGER, MAKE THE APPROPRIATE ALERTS, ANNOUNCEMENTS TO THE STUDENTS AND FACULTY, ETC. AN ACCURATE STUDENT INFORMATION ROSTER SHOULD BE MAINTAINED IN ALL SCHOOL OFFICES. (THIS SHOULD INCLUDE THE STUDENT'S SCHEDULE AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES FOR CONTACTING PARENTS.) A "PHONE TREE" SHOULD BE DEVELOPED SO THAT FACULTY AND STAFF CAN BE CONTACTED QUICKLY IF AN EMERGENCY OCCURS OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS.

IF NEEDED, CONTACT THE APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES (FIRE, RESCUE, POLICE, AMBULANCE, ELECTRICAL SERVICE, ETC.—THIS DUTY MAY BE DELEGATED TO SECRETARIES AND/OR CORE TEAM MEMBERS). IF COMMUNICATION LINES ARE DOWN, DESIGNATE SOMEONE TO ACT AS A MESSENGER TO GET INFORMATION OUT OF THE SCHOOL.

IF THE SITUATION IS IMMEDIATELY THREATENING TO STUDENTS, TAKE ANY STEPS NECESSARY TO PROTECT THE STUDENTS (I.E., THERE MAY BE EMERGENCIES WHERE THE STUDENTS MUST REMAIN IN CLASS FOR THEIR SAFETY—GUNMAN IN THE SCHOOL, ETC.). IT IS SUGGESTED THAT YOU HAVE AN EASILY RECOGNIZABLE CODE WORD TO USE OVER THE P.A. SYSTEM AS A WARNING TO TEACHERS AND STUDENTS TO REMAIN IN THEIR CLASSROOMS.

STEP #2

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING A DISASTER, ASSESS THE SITUATION AND ACTIVATE THE CORE TEAM. THE PRINCIPAL AND THE CORE TEAM SHOULD CONSIDER QUESTIONS SUCH AS:

- (A) HAS STUDENT THREATENED TO HARM SELF OR ANOTHER PERSON? IF SO, YOU HAVE THE DUTY TO WARN THE PARENTS OR THE PERSON THREATENED.**
- (B) SHOULD SCHOOL BE SUSPENDED FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE DAY?**
- (C) SHOULD PARENTS BE CONTACTED AND ASKED TO PICK-UP THEIR STUDENTS?**
- (D) IS THE DISASTER OF SUCH MAGNITUDE THAT BUSES WILL NOT RUN?**
- (E) WHEN IS IT LIKELY THAT SCHOOL WILL BE REOPENED? (MOST SOURCES AGREE THAT IF POSSIBLE, SCHOOL SHOULD BE HELD THE NEXT DAY.)**
- (F) DOES THE CORE TEAM NEED TO PROVIDE A PLACE FOR COUNSELING STUDENTS OFF-CAMPUS? (IS THE BUILDING DAMAGED, ETC.)**
- (G) WILL STUDENTS NEED TO BE SUPERVISED AT SCHOOL OVERNIGHT?**
- (H) WILL SOMEONE BE NEEDED TO PROVIDE MEALS? (PTO/PTA, OTHER GROUP?)**

OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT DEATH OR SERIOUS INJURY HAS OCCURRED AND THAT SOME SURVIVING STUDENTS MAY HAVE WITNESSED THESE TRAUMATIC EVENTS. IMMEDIATE MEASURES SHOULD BE TAKEN BY ALL CORE TEAM MEMBERS TO LOCATE SUCH STUDENTS, MOVE THEM TO A PLACE OF SAFETY, AND ADMINISTER "PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID" (COMFORTING, TALKING, ETC.). PARENTS OF SUCH STUDENTS NEED TO BE INFORMED OF THEIR CHILD'S EXPOSURE TO TRAUMA, AND OF THE AVAILABILITY OF COUNSELING. KEEP WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION OF ANY STUDENTS WHO LEAVE THE PREMISES.

IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT MEMBERS OF YOUR FACULTY AND STAFF HAVE BEEN TRAUMATIZED. THIS SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND BEFORE THE NEXT FACULTY MEETING IS CALLED. THE CORE TEAM MAY WISH TO PUT TOGETHER A FACULTY/STAFF COUNSELING GROUP.

STEP #3

ONCE YOU HAVE DECIDED HOW THE REST OF THE DAY WILL PROCEED, INFORM THE FACULTY AND STUDENTS OF THE AGENDA BY MEANS OF BUILDING-WIDE COMMUNICATION, IF AVAILABLE, OR IN WRITTEN FORM. CONVEY INFORMATION REGARDING SERVICES AVAILABLE (TRANSPORTATION, MEDICAL, COUNSELING, ETC.), SCHOOL SCHEDULE CHANGES, AND FACULTY MEETINGS.

YOU MAY WISH TO MAKE A BRIEF, FACT-BASED STATEMENT REGARDING THE EMERGENCY AND ANY INJURIES, WHICH OCCURRED (DO NOT TRY TO HIDE THE FACT IF INJURIES TOOK PLACE). BE HONEST, BUT DO NOT OVERREACT WHEN ANNOUNCING THAT FURTHER EMERGENCIES MAY FOLLOW (EARTHQUAKE AFTERSHOCKS, ADDITIONAL STORM FRONTS, ETC.) ASSURE THE STUDENTS AND FACULTY THAT EVERYTHING IS BEING DONE TO HANDLE THE SITUATION.

STEP #4

**THE PRINCIPAL WILL BE THE MEDIA CONTACT PERSON.
(SEE THE APPENDIX ON HOW TO WORK WITH THE MEDIA)**

STEP #5

ONCE THE STUDENTS HAVE LEFT THE SCHOOL, CALL A FACULTY MEETING IN ORDER TO DISCUSS WHAT WILL BE DONE OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS (INCLUDE CERTIFIED AND NON-CERTIFIED PERSONNEL). DISCUSS THE POSSIBILITY OF A FACULTY/STAFF COUNSELING GROUP.

STEP #6

KEEP IN CONTACT WITH THE CORE TEAM LEADER (ESPECIALLY IF SCHOOL IS SUSPENDED FOR SEVERAL DAYS). PROVIDE WRITTEN INFORMATION TO PARENTS ON HOW THEY CAN ASSIST THEIR CHILDREN IN HANDLING THE CRISIS. REASSESS AND UPDATE SUCH INFORMATION AS THE SITUATION PROGRESSES.

Guidance Counselor's Role

A Four-Step Plan for Coping With Disasters and Other Crisis

Introduction

The role of the Guidance Counselor(s) during a disaster or other crisis is paramount. As the backbone of the CORE Team, the counselors help “pick up the pieces” following such an event. Though their main concern is the emotional well being of the students, the counselors may find that they, along with others, are significantly affected by the events surrounding a natural disaster or unexpected crisis. Having a step-by-step plan of action can help CORE Team members perform their roles even under the pressures of personal involvement in a crisis situation.

STEP #1

IF A DISASTER IS IMMINENT, WORK WITH THE PRINCIPAL AND OTHER SCHOOL PERSONNEL TO INFORM THE STUDENTS, PREPARE THEM FOR ACTION (MOVEMENT TO SAFE PLACES, ETC.), AND ATTEMPT TO PREVENT PANIC.

BE HONEST AND FACTUAL IN RELATING THE NATURE OF THE EMERGENCY TO THE STUDENTS. DO NOT OVERREACT, AND TRY TO CONTROL YOUR OWN EMOTIONS.

STEP #2

ONCE THE CARE TEAM IS ACTIVATED, YOUR PRIMARY JOB SHOULD BE TO ASSESS THE REACTIONS OF THE STUDENTS TO THE DISASTER AND DETERMINE WHAT STEPS SHOULD BE TAKEN TO HANDLE THEIR NEEDS. IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING SUCH A DISASTER, MEET WITH THE CORE TEAM AND THE PRINCIPAL AND CONSIDER HOW TO DEAL WITH THE FOLLOWING:

(A) HELP THE PRINCIPAL IN CONTACTING AUTHORITIES, IF NECESSARY.

(B) DISCUSS WHEN AND IF SCHOOL WILL BE CLOSED.

NOTE: AT SOME STAGE, CORE TEAM LEADERS AND PRINCIPALS AT OTHER SCHOOLS SHOULD BE CONTACTED IN ORDER TO COORDINATE EFFORTS AND SHARE RESOURCES. IF THE DISASTER IS SYSTEM-WIDE, CALL A CENTRAL OFFICE MEETING OF CARE TEAM LEADERS IN ORDER TO ORGANIZE A SYSTEM-WIDE INTERVENTION.

(C) DISCUSS WHEN, IF, AND HOW PARENTS WILL BE CONTACTED.

(D) DISCUSS WHERE COUNSELING CAN BE DONE, AND ARRANGE AREA (S).

(E) DETERMINE EXTENT OF TRAUMA ON STUDENTS AND WHETHER MORE COUNSELORS ARE NEEDED. IF THEY ARE NEEDED, CALL THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST, HE/SHE WILL CONTACT OTHER COUNSELORS FOR YOU.

Guidance Counselor's Role (continued)

- (F) LOCATE EMOTIONALLY TRAUMATIZED STUDENTS OR FACULTY AND IMMEDIATELY BEGIN "PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID" (COMFORTING, TALKING, ETC.).
- (G) MAKE A LIST OF STUDENTS CLOSEST TO TRAUMATIC EVENTS (ACTUALLY WITNESSES A DEATH, ETC.). AND TARGET THEM FOR INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING, AND PERHAPS REFERRAL TO LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH PERSONNEL.

NOTE: PARENTS SHOULD BE NOTIFIED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE IF THEIR CHILDREN HAVE BEEN VERY CLOSE TO A TRAUMATIC EVENT. THEY SHOULD BE INFORMED OF THE COUNSELING OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE.

STEP #3

IF A DEATH HAS OCCURRED, FOLLOW THE GUIDELINES UNDER "SUDDEN DEATH".

STEP #4

MAKE COUNSELOR ASSIGNMENTS AND IMPLEMENT INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP COUNSELING. PROVIDE ONGOING SERVICES AND FOLLOW-UP AS DEEMED NECESSARY. DETERMINE IF A FACULTY/STAFF SUPPORT GROUP IS NEEDED- IF SO, ORGANIZE MEETING.

Teacher's Role

A Five-Step Plan for Coping With Disasters and Other Crisis

Introduction

Teachers are the “front line soldiers” when it comes to crisis and disaster situations. These events often occur while classes are in session. Teachers must be able to make quick, rational decisions in order to protect their students and minimize the effects of such occurrences.

STEP #1

IMPLEMENT STANDARD EMERGENCY PROCEDURES OR ANY DIRECTIVES GIVEN BY THE PRINCIPAL. IF YOU ARE ORDERED TO STAY IN THE CLASSROOM-STAY IN THE CLASSROOM! ATTEND ANY FACULTY/STAFF MEETING (S) CALLED BY THE PRINCIPAL.

STEP #2

PROVIDE ASSURANCE TO YOUR STUDENTS. IF THE DANGER IS IMMINENT, TRY TO REMAIN CALM AND CONTROL PANIC. EXPLAIN SAFETY MEASURES CLEARLY, MAINTAIN YOUR COMPOSURE, AND KEEP CONTROL OF THE SITUATION.

STEP #3

THE TEACHER SHOULD ACCOUNT FOR EVERY STUDENT IN CLASS, ESPECIALLY IF THE BUILDING IS DAMAGED. STUDENTS WHO LEAVE THE CLASS/SCHOOL SHOULD BE PROPERLY CHECKED-OUT (KEEP A WRITTEN LOG OF STUDENTS LEAVING). REPORT ANY MISSING STUDENTS TO THE OFFICE IMMEDIATELY.

STEP #4

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING A DISASTER OR CRISIS, OBSERVE YOUR STUDENTS, REFER ANY STUDENTS WITH COUNSELING NEEDS TO THE CORE TEAM LEADER, COUNSELOR, OR OFFICE STAFF. IF DEATH HAS OCCURRED, REFER TO THE CHAPTER ON “SUDDEN DEATH” AND FOLLOW THE STEPS THAT APPLY.

Teacher's Role (continued)

STEP #5

AS THE SCHOOL ROUTINE RETURNS TO NORMAL, CONTINUE TO BE SENSITIVE TO YOUR STUDENTS' NEEDS. DETERMINE WHETHER YOU SHOULD RETURN TO THE NORMAL ROUTINE (CURRICULUM), OR WHETHER YOU SHOULD IMPLEMENT ALTERNATIVE PLANS.

TEACHERS SHOULD MAKE ALLOWANCES IN DETERMINING GRADES AND CLASS REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA. IT MAY BE A WHILE BEFORE THEY RETURN TO THEIR PREVIOUS ACADEMIC PRODUCTIVITY.

ALLOW FOR THE FATIGUE, WHICH STUDENTS MAY EXPERIENCE DUE TO STRESS AND CHANGES IN SLEEP PATTERNS. PLAN FOR LESS INTENSE INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR A FEW DAYS. DELAY TESTS IN ORDER TO ALLOW STRESS LEVELS TO DECREASE. STUDENTS WILL NOT RECEIVE A FAIR EVALUATION IF STRESS LEVELS ARE HIGH.

WATCH FOR DELAYED REACTIONS TO STRESS AND BE AWARE THAT SIMILAR INCIDENTS IN OTHER LOCATIONS MAY TRIGGER RENEWED FEELINGS. WATCH FOR LONG-TERM REACTIONS SUCH AS: FLASHBACKS, PANIC ATTACKS, HALLUCINATIONS, WITHDRAWAL, DIMINISHED INTEREST IN USUAL ACTIVITIES, SLEEP DISTURBANCES, POOR CONCENTRATION, ETC. REFER SUCH STUDENTS TO THE CORE TEAM LEADER OR COUNSELOR.

Role of Non-Certified Staff

A Four-Step Plan for Coping With Disasters and Other Crises

STEP #1

ALL NON-CERTIFIED STAFF SHOULD ATTEND ANY FACULTY/STAFF MEETING CALLED BY THE PRINCIPAL IN ORDER TO BE INFORMED OF THE SITUATION AND PLANS FOR THE REST OF THE DAY (AND UPCOMING DAYS).

STEP #2

THE SECRETARY MAY BE THE FIRST TO HEAR OF AN EMERGENCY SITUATION AND SHOULD CALL THE PRINCIPAL IMMEDIATELY AND INFORM HIM/HER OF THE PROBLEM. IF THE PRINCIPAL CANNOT BE REACHED, THE ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL OR CORE TEAM LEADER SHOULD BE CALLED. THE SECRETARY SHOULD EXPECT TO HANDLE REQUESTS OR CALLS FROM PARENTS, NEWS MEDIA, AND OTHERS, AND SHOULD REVIEW SCHOOL PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING SUCH CALLS. MAKE CALLS BRIEF (IT MAY BE NECESSARY TO KEEP LINES OPEN FOR EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS).

STEP #3

RELEASE THE STUDENT ONLY TO A PARENT OR AN ADULT DESIGNATED BY THE PARENT.

STEP #4

THE SECRETARY SHOULD NOTIFY OTHER NON-CERTIFIED PERSONNEL (TEACHER ASSISTANTS, CAFETERIA STAFF, BUS DRIVERS, CUSTODIANS) THAT THEY MAY BE REQUESTED TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SERVICES BEYOND THEIR NORMAL RESPONSIBILITIES.

STEP #5

NON-CERTIFIED SUPPORT STAFF (INCLUDING TEACHER ASSISTANTS, LUNCHROOM PERSONNEL, AND BUS DRIVERS) SHOULD GIVE THE NAMES OF ANY STUDENTS THEY ARE CONCERNED ABOUT TO THE CORE TEAM LEADER.

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The Ramstein air show disaster: A witness's personal recollection. (March, 1989)

Public relations' important role in establishing a crisis team. (May, 1989)

What to say when someone dies. (September, 1989)

Disaster team works during crisis. (November, 1989)

Impressions of the bay area quake. (November, 1989)

Children and suicide. (June, 1990)

Appendix

- Death by Suicide & Suicide Contagion**
- Why Suicide? (reasons)**
- Suicide's Warning Signs**
- How to Work With the Media**