

# Communicating Through a Crisis

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# Accountability Partner

- **Find a partner right beside you.**
- **Or Partners!**
- **No one left out!**

# Accountability Partner

**You accountability partner will check with you periodically and make sure you are on task.**

**Decisions you will make today to make a difference in your school, both individually and with your district!**

# Today's Training!

- **Unique!**
- **Specific!**
- **Sustainable!**
- **One that you will use and keep up to date!**

# Sustainable

- **Something you will put together because it is the right thing.**
- **It is something you will go back and use, review, and adjust on a regular basis!**
- **It makes sense!**

# What worries me! - School Safety





What is the first thing schools look at  
in School Safety!

- **Things we can implement quickly!**
- **Things that people can see!**
- **Things that are measurable!**

# Measurable

## Locks



## Metal Detectors





# Communications Steps



# Communication Before a Crisis

## Preparation/Readiness Before A Crisis/Critical Incident (Cont'd)

- The crisis/critical incident plan is developed by representative members of the school/district/community. Plan includes:
  - ✓ Key “Response Phase” roles/responsibilities are identified and assigned to individuals.
  - ✓ Communication Needs—Internal/External
  - ✓ Responsive Services Planning
- Drill, Drill, Drill
- Debrief/Evaluate/Alter Plan after drills

Step 1:



# Prevention Program

- **The best way to prepare for a crisis is to make prevention and school safety the highest priority!**

# Prevention Programs

- **Prevention programs create and maintain a safe school environment!**

## Statement

- **We have to slow down so we can speed up!**

# Putting Your Crisis Plan Together



# The team for a district-level plan

- District leaders should coordinate with community experts and local emergency responders to create a plan.
- Team members could include:
  - District staff (superintendent or designee, transportation chief, communications director, personnel director, facilities person)
  - Local or state affiliate representative
  - Parent representatives
  - Local emergency responders
  - Community experts



# The Team for a School-level Plan

- Team members are selected largely from school staff. Their work should be coordinated with the district's plan. Team members could include:
  - Principal
  - Assistant principal
  - Representatives from the teaching staff
  - Facility manager
  - Food service representative
  - Front office professional
  - NEA affiliate representative and/or other association leaders
  - Parent leader
  - Physical/mental health professionals (e.g., counselor, school nurse, psychologist, social worker)
  - Security officer
  - High school student leader's) (if applicable)
  - Technology specialist
  - Liaison to district communication office

# *Crisis response team personnel identification.*

- Specific roles and responsibilities assigned to district staff in emergency situations.





## Identify Your Crisis Communications Team

- **Establishing a chain of command in advance of a crisis or emergency!**
- **When assigning members to the crisis teams, keep in mind that some staff will be caring for kids and will not be able to do both!**

# The Crisis Communications Team

- **Whom do you need on your team to manage communications around the potential threats?**
- **Define their roles (not their titles!)**
- **Define their responsibilities on the crisis communications team**
- **How will you reach them?**

# School District Response Team

Members could include:

- **School district superintendent or senior administrator**
- **School district safety and security director**
- **School district communications director**
- **School district department directors**
  - **Student services – psych, social worker, nurse, counselor, etc.**
  - **Technology**
  - **Transportation**
  - **Food services**
  - **Facility use and maintenance**
  - **Risk management/legal counsel**
  - **Human resources**
- **Community mental health agency representative**
- **Community victim assistance representative**
- **Public safety officers**
- **NEA local association representative**

# Team Command Center

- Where does the Crisis Communications Team meet?
- What resources will your team need to effectively coordinate in a crisis?
- What's your back-up plan?
- Media Command/Update Center
  - How will you update the media?
  - What resources will they need?
  - How do you protect the team and employees while regularly sharing key information?

List types of crisis we can help prevent from happening!

- Facilities
- Personal feelings
- Bullying
- Others?

## Slow Down

- **Build Relationships!**
- **Be Proactive!**
- **Face to Face!**



# Potential Issues: Crisis Situations

- Intruder(s) on Campus
- Evacuation of Building
- Pupil Release/Evacuation
- Weapons and Dangerous Instruments on Campus
- Lost, Missing, Unaccounted for Student
- Media Procedure
- Medical Emergencies
- Major Disturbance on Campus
- Bomb Threat
- Hazardous Material/Chemical Spill
- Plane Crash
- Assaults
- Fire
- Weather

# Crisis Communication Plan



## Crisis Communication Objectives:

- **Prevent the crisis from happening!**
- Minimize the impact of a crisis as best as we can.
- Minimize the amount of time spent focused on the crisis – Internally – by others
- Regain control of the situation and the conversation as quickly as possible.

## Before the Crisis, Preparation

- **Organize a "what if" brainstorming session with others.**
- **Come up with "what if" scenarios about potential crisis situations and write a general procedure for responding to the "what if" crises.**



There are at least two immediate benefits to this exercise:

- **1. You may realize that some of the situations are preventable by simply modifying existing methods of operation.**
- **2. You can begin to think about possible responses, about best-case/worst-case scenarios, etc.**
- Better now than when under the pressure of an actual crisis.

# Crisis Communications Approach.

- Anticipate
- Identify potential threats.
- Monitor areas of risk.
- Prepare.
- Define key information in advance.
- Respond – React quickly and efficiently.
- Utilize standard processes and procedures.

## Physical Checklist -

1. Develop a checklist that fits your district of possible physical dangers.
2. Set dates that key people will inspect and correct any possible dangers. – Check off and date.
3. Meet and discuss periodically!

# Examples of Physical Dangers

- Sidewalks
- Fences
- Grounds
- Playgrounds
- Athletic/Activities Area
- Hallways
- Etc



# Social/Emotional Dangers

1. Develop a checklist that fits your district of possible physical dangers.
2. Set dates that key people will inspect and correct any possible dangers. — Check off and date.
3. Meet and discuss periodically!

# Examples of Social/Emotional

- Students/staff in hallways
- Student/staff in cafeteria
- Before and after school
- Activities
- Travel – Route busses and Activity busses
- Etc.

# Crisis Checklist and Worksheet

- Develop a literal checklist for the Crisis Communications Lead for any situation.
- What steps should you take in the moment?
- Start with who, what, when, where, how?

# Develop Holding Statements

- While full message development must await the outbreak of an actual crisis, “holding statements,” messages designed for use immediately after a crisis breaks.
- Examples?

## *Alert response procedures*

- **Written step-by-step instructions for notification of and response to various crises.**
- **Include checklists for use during varying degrees of danger levels:**

## During the Crisis, Communication

- Gather information.
- Facts should be routinely updated; rumors should be verified or exposed as myths.
- Miscommunication heightens during a crisis and can be exaggerated by half-truths, distortions, or negative perceptions.

# Communication During a Crisis

- **Develop a preliminary statement – what’s happened, what’s the immediate response.**
- **Develop a script for people answering phone calls.**
- **Disseminate accurate information to staff, district leadership, district communications department and other schools.**

# Communicate with families

- Initiate crisis plan parent notification system.
- Determine how, when and where families will be reunited.
- Begin external communications:
  - Contact local and state NEA leaders.
  - Communicate with appropriate state and local agencies.
  - Contact school district attorney.



# Manage media relations

- Establish a media briefing area.
- Work with law enforcement to set a designated area and perimeter for media.
- Identify the spokesperson (site- based or district official).
- Develop an initial media release.\*
- Hold a press briefing in conjunction with law enforcement.

# Other Thoughts

- **Control rumors by getting facts out as soon as information is verified.**
- **Take into account that personal communications tools, such as cell phones and text messaging, allow students to contact media and others directly.**

Establish network to account for missing and injured

- **Determine who is safe and who is not accounted for.**
- **Establish a liaison with local hospitals, if necessary.**

# Contact Mental Health Support

- **Request counselors and other trained professionals from neighboring schools.**
- **Contact district crisis response team.**
- **Contact local mental health agencies or centers.**
- **Contact state and national agencies who can provide immediate support to students and staff.**

## Establish Communications Channels for Internal and External Audiences.

- **Initiate phone tree and email to staff, students and parents.**
- **Carefully craft a script with what is known and not known to share with students and families.**

## Establish Communications Channels for Internal and External Audiences.

- **Create a recorded message on district voice messaging system and update regularly as new information becomes available.**
- **Include a phone number where people with questions can reach a “real” person.**

## Establish Communications Channels for Internal and External Audiences.

- **Update the district and school web sites with information about the crisis.**
- **Cross-reference hotline numbers and provide links to other resources, such as mental health support.**

## Establish Communications Channels for Internal and External Audiences.

- **Set up an information hotline staffed by central office personnel or trained volunteers from the teacher's association, retired administrators, etc.**
- **Provide a script and answers to frequently asked questions.**
- **Have operators log calls and keep track of new questions that arise.**



## Establish Communications Channels for Internal and External Audiences.

- **Develop fact sheet template to be used throughout the crisis.**
- **Send fact sheet electronically to internal and external audiences daily at a set time.**
- See sample fact sheet at **[www.neahin.org/crisisguide](http://www.neahin.org/crisisguide).**

## Establish Communications Channels for Internal and External Audiences.

- **Send an email to staff at the affected site and all other central and school sites in the district with the latest information about what happened and what is being done.**
- **Provide information on how to get updates through the Web site and hotline.**

## Establish Communications Channels for Internal and External Audiences.

- **Deal with rumors.**
- **Make sure all central and school-based staffs have accurate information that they can share in the community to squelch rumors.**
- **Recognize how technology — such as cell phones and text messaging — can accelerate the spreading of rumors.**

## Establish Communications Channels for Internal and External Audiences.

- **Provide scripts for office personnel on answering questions or giving directions to the staging area or other important locations.**

## Day one – evening

- **Meet with first responders and school/district crisis team.**
- Discuss what worked and what didn't.
- Talk about the next steps and how the agencies will work together over the next few days and meet again.
- Establish a process to coordinate media response.

## Plan for the next day for issues that affect students and school staff.

- Will school be open?
- Where will students and staff gather?
- Caring.
- Practice active listening, allowing staff to safely vent and be heard.
- **Make decision about classes the next day at affected schools as well as other schools in the district.**

# Plan for the next day for issues that affect students and school staff.

- **Release information about the following day as soon as possible.**
- What actions must we take immediately regarding mental health, safety and security, internal communications and media?
- Whom do we need to contact in our community, such as elected officials, former board members, hospitals, first responders, opinion leaders, district leadership, principals, staff, parents, attorneys, etc.?
- What help do we need, such as volunteers for hotline, phone banks, media relations, family liaisons, etc.

## Next Few Days

- Continue Meeting with team.
- Donations – how do we handle these?
- Funerals – school facilities – other locations?
- What else?



# After

- **Support families by providing information and resources.**
- **Make sure staff is valued and informed through daily meetings and phone calls.**
- **Return to normalcy.**
- **Continue to provide regular, ongoing communications.**

## Long-term communications and media strategies

- Communication with staff, students, parents, the community and media is just as critical after the emergency or crisis has passed.

# Long-term communications and media strategies

- **Communications strategies**
  - Continue to provide regular communications and realize that the need for updated information continues in the aftermath of a crisis.
  - Update Web sites, voice mails, phone scripts and fact sheets as needed.
  - Maintain a master list of frequently asked questions and answers.
  - Meet as needed with key stakeholders to identify questions, quell rumors and provide accurate and timely information.

# Long-term communications and media strategies

- **Media strategies:**
  - Convey a message of resilience, continued healing and a return to normalcy when working with the media.
  - Issue media advisories about memorial events open to the public, anniversary dates, fundraising or donations, etc.

# Long-term communications and media strategies

- **Managing media coverage of benchmark dates**
  - The media will cover benchmark events, such as the first anniversary.
  - For special events such as anniversary dates, establish a media area to determine where the media will set up cameras so as not to intrude on the ceremony.
  - Create a perimeter for photographers and satellite trucks. Set guidelines on still and video cameras in the building.
  - Decide if you will have a media pool (selected media representatives who share information) or allow all media to attend the event.

# Long-term communications and media strategies

- It's helpful to meet with the media in advance to establish mutually beneficial guidelines.
- Ask the media to:
  - Refrain from replaying or reprinting images of the crisis. Showing disturbing pictures has the potential to re-traumatize victims.
  - Honor the victims and not glorify the perpetrators of violence.
  - Respect the privacy of those who do not want to be interviewed.
  - Consider a “no fly” zone over an out- door memorial service.

# Long-term communications and media strategies

- Be proactive about pitching story ideas to the media that promote hope and healing.
- Develop a list of students and faculty willing to talk to the media.

# Evaluating your response

- **What worked? What didn't?**
- Evaluate each crisis response with a report to the superintendent and a plan for follow-up.
- For example, did you:
  - Notify the appropriate people at the onset?
  - Activate resources immediately to meet the needs of the students, families and staff?
  - Provide regular information updates and maintain open communication with teachers, other staff and parents.
  - Monitor rumors and maintain timely, accurate information?



# Evaluating your response

- Speak through one spokesperson to provide factual information to the media?
  - Develop media messages that communicated ways that parents can support the recovery of their children
  - Provide mental health resources for those in emotional distress and identify and follow up with vulnerable students and staff during the recovery period?
  - Identify during the aftermath any cues that could be traumatic reminders of the crisis and monitor behaviors among students and staff?

# Revisiting your crisis plan

- **Thoroughly review your current plan — at the district and school levels.** Keep in mind shifts from when it was first developed, such as changes in:
  - ● District policies and procedures
  - ● School facilities and grounds
  - ● Availability of evacuation sites and routes
  - ● Emergency phone numbers and resources
  - ● Special skills among staff members
  - ● Bell and bus schedules

# Revisiting your crisis plan

- Speak through one spokesperson to provide factual information to the media?
- Develop media messages that communicated ways that parents can support the recovery of their children?
- Provide mental health resources for those in emotional distress and identify and follow up with vulnerable students and staff during the recovery period?
- Identify during the aftermath any cues that could be traumatic reminders of the crisis and monitor behaviors among students and staff?
  - *Special needs of students*
- Lessons learned from emergency/crisis response
- Community hazards and risks

# Revisiting your crisis plan

- An emergency preparedness and crisis response plan is a living document that must be reviewed on a regular basis in order to make needed modifications and improvements to the plan.
- The review process should also include public safety and other key stakeholder input.

