



Hurricanes

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Information for Administrators & Crisis Team

Acknowledgements

During the first six weeks of the 2004-2005 school year, the state of Florida was struck by four hurricanes, resulting in \$42 billion dollars in damage and the destruction of over 65,000 homes. Following each natural disaster, school psychology leaders throughout the state worked to secure resources to support parents, teachers and administrators, often while coping with their own personal losses. The president of the Florida Association of School Psychologists at the time, Mary Alice Meyers, mobilized our state association to support the communities affected. It became clear that a document designed to assist adults in responding to the mental health needs of children following a hurricane was critically needed.

Kim Richardson, Psy.S., a classroom teacher for over ten years and a school psychologist, volunteered to steward this ambitious project. Kim has given countless hours to the compilation of these materials, which has resulted in an extremely comprehensive, user-friendly document that brings together “Best Practices” in preparing for, responding to and coping in the aftermath of a hurricane. Documents were gleaned from organizations such as the National Association of School Psychologists, FEMA, the Red Cross, and Education World.

Many thanks go to Mary Alice Meyers, Bob Templeton, Gene Cash, and Scott Poland for their leadership and feedback in the dissemination of these materials.

Please make copies of this CD, print out the materials and help support anyone for whom they may be of use. Hurricane Katrina has made us all powerfully aware of the potential devastation a natural disaster can bring. It has also made us keenly aware of the potential power of humanity following such tragedy. Perhaps Adam Lindsay Gordon, said it best: *“Life is mostly froth and bubble, Two things stand like stone; Kindness in another’s trouble, Courage in your own.”* May these materials provide you with resources to support both kindness and courage.

Respectfully Submitted,

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September 4, 2005

Dear Administrator:

Hurricanes may have friendly names, but there is nothing nice about them. These catastrophic storms can produce winds anywhere from 74 mph to 200 mph. In addition, hurricanes can create torrential rains causing floods and devastation. Not only can this happen along the coast, but hundreds of miles inland as well. On August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina hit the coastline of Louisiana and Mississippi with winds clocked at 160 mph. Thousands of people lost their homes, lives, and basic services such as water, gas, and electricity.

Preparation for emergencies is critical at school and in the community. Long before hurricane season begins, administrators can incorporate hurricane preparedness in their schools. When disasters of this kind occur, students can be the most affected. They may experience varying emotions and reactions. Just knowing that these reactions are likely and normal can help you be better prepared. As a caring role model in a young child's life, it is important to remember that your students and staff may look towards you for information and guidance.

So what specifically can administrators do to help alleviate their staff and students' stress during the aftermath of a hurricane? Providing an opportunity in their school for children to express their emotions will enable them to feel more secure in their environment. Enclosed are materials and activities designed to help your school assist with students' varying emotions. These resources are geared with you, the administrator, in mind.

Respectfully Submitted,



Responding to Natural Disasters: Helping Children and Families Information for School Crisis Teams

By Philip J. Lazarus, NCSP, Florida International University

Shane R. Jimerson, NCSP, University of California, Santa Barbara

Stephen E. Brock, NCSP, California State University, Sacramento

Natural disasters can be especially traumatic for children and youth. Experiencing a dangerous or violent flood, storm, or earthquake is frightening even for adults, and the devastation to the familiar environment (i.e., home and community) can be long lasting and distressing. Often an entire community is impacted, further undermining a child's sense of security and normalcy. These factors present a variety of unique issues and coping challenges, including issues associated with specific types of natural disasters, the need to relocate when home and/or community have been destroyed, the role of the family in lessening or exacerbating the trauma, emotional reactions, and coping techniques.

Children look to the significant adults in their lives for guidance on how to manage their reactions after the immediate threat is over. Schools can help play an important role in this process by providing a stable, familiar environment. Through the support of caring adults school personnel can help children return to normal activities and routines (to the extent possible), and provide an opportunity to transform a frightening event into a learning experience.

Immediate response efforts should emphasize teaching effective coping strategies, fostering supportive relationships, and helping children understand the disaster event. Collaboration between the school crisis response team and an assortment of community, state, and federal organizations and agencies is necessary to respond to the many needs of children, families, and communities following a natural disaster. Healing in the aftermath of a natural disaster takes time; however, advanced preparation and immediate response will facilitate subsequent coping and healing.

Issues Associated with Specific Disasters

Hurricanes. Usually hurricanes are predicted days to weeks in advance, giving communities time to prepare. These predictions give families time to gather supplies and prepare. At the same time, however, these activities may generate fear and anxiety. Although communities can be made aware of potential danger, there is always uncertainty about the exact location of where the hurricane will impact. When a hurricane strikes, victims experience intense thunder, rain, lightning, and wind. Consequently, startle reactions to sounds may be acute in the months that follow. Among a few children subsequent storms may trigger panic reactions. Immediate reactions to hurricanes can include emotional and physical exhaustion. In some instances children may experience survivor guilt (e.g., that they were not harmed, while others were killed or injured). Research indicates that greater (1) symptomatology in children is associated with more frightening experiences during the storm and with greater levels of damage to their homes.

Earthquakes. Aftershocks differentiate earthquakes from other natural disasters. Since there is no clearly defined endpoint, the disruptions caused by continued tremors may increase psychological distress. Unlike other natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes and certain types of floods), earthquakes occur with virtually no warning. This fact limits the ability of disaster victims to make the psychological adjustments that can facilitate coping. This relative lack of predictability also significantly lessens feelings of controllability. While one can climb to higher ground during a flood, or install storm shutters before a hurricane, there is usually no advance warning or immediate preparation with earthquakes. Survivors may have to cope with reminders of the destruction (e.g., sounds of explosions, and the rumbling of aftershocks; smells of toxic fumes and smoke; and tastes of soot, rubber, and smoke).

Tornadoes. Like earthquakes, tornadoes can bring mass destruction in a matter of minutes, and individuals typically have little time to prepare. Confusion and frustration often follow. Similar to a hurricane, people experience sensations during tornadoes that may generate coping challenges. It can be difficult to cope with the sights and smells of destruction. Given the capricious nature of tornadoes, survivor guilt has been observed to be an especially common coping challenge. For instance, some children may express guilt that they still have a house to live in while their friend next door does not. In addition, a study following a tornado that caused considerable damage and loss of life revealed significant associations between children's disturbances and having been in the impact zone, been injured, and having experienced the death of relatives.

Floods. These events are one of the most common natural disasters. Flash floods are the most dangerous as they occur without warning; move at intense speeds; and can tear out trees, destroy roads and bridges, and wreck buildings. In cases of dam failure the water can be especially destructive. Research has reported that many children who survive a destructive flood experience psychological distress. The two most significant predictors of impairment are the degree of disaster exposure and perceptions of family reactions. Sensations that may generate coping challenges include desolation of the landscape, the smell of sludge and sodden property, coldness and wetness, and vast amounts of mud. Most floods do not recede overnight, and many residents have to wait days or weeks before they can begin the cleanup.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that although natural disasters may last for only a short period, survivors can be involved with the disaster aftermath for months or even years. In attempts to reconstruct their lives following such a natural disaster, families are often required to deal with multiple people and agencies (e.g., insurance adjustors, contractors, electricians, roofers, the Red Cross, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the Salvation Army).

Possible Reactions of Children and Youth to Natural Disasters

Most children will be able to cope over time with the help of parents and other caring adults. However, some children may be at risk of more extreme reactions. The severity of children's reactions will depend on their specific risk factors. These include exposure to the actual event, personal injury or loss of a loved one, dislocation from their home or community, level of parental support, the level of physical destruction, and pre-existing risks, such as a previous traumatic experience or mental illness. Symptoms may differ depending on age but can include: (2)

- **Preschoolers**—thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior, and withdrawal from friends and routines.
- **Elementary School Children**—irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration, and withdrawal from activities and friends.
- **Adolescents**—sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior, and poor concentration.

A minority of children may be at risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Symptoms can include those listed above, exhibited over an extended period of time. Other symptoms may include re-experiencing the disaster during play and/or dreams; anticipating or feeling that the disaster is happening again; avoiding reminders of the disaster; general numbness to emotional topics; and increased arousal symptoms such as inability to concentrate and startle reactions. Although rare, some adolescents may also be at increased risk of suicide if they suffer from serious mental health problems like PTSD or depression. Students who exhibit these symptoms should be referred for appropriate mental health evaluation and intervention.

Immediately Following a Natural Disaster: Information for School Crisis Teams

Identify children and youth who are high risk and plan interventions. Risk factors are outlined in the above section on children's reactions. Interventions may include individual counseling, small group counseling, or family therapy. From group crisis interventions, and by maintaining close contact with teachers and parents, the school crisis response team can determine which students need supportive crisis intervention and counseling services. A mechanism also needs to be in place for self-referral and parental-referral of students.

Support teachers and other school staff. Provide staff members with information on the symptoms of children's stress reactions and guidance on how to handle class discussions and answer children's question. As indicated, offer to help conduct a group discussion. Reinforce that teachers should pay attention to their own needs and not feel compelled to do anything they are not comfortable doing. Suggest that administrators provide time for staff to share their feelings and reactions on a voluntary basis as well as help staff develop support groups. In addition, teachers who had property damage or

personal injury to themselves or family members will need leave time to attend to their needs.

Engage in post-disaster activities that facilitate healing. La Greca and colleagues have developed a manual for professionals working with elementary school children following a natural disaster. Activities in this manual emphasize three key components supported by the empirical literature: (a) exposure to discussion of disaster-related events, (b) promotion of positive coping and problem-solving skills, and (c) strengthening of children's friendship and peer support. Specifically:

- **Encourage children to talk about disaster-related events.** Children need an opportunity to discuss their experiences in a safe, accepting environment. Provide activities that enable children to discuss their experiences. These may include a range of methods (both verbal and nonverbal) and incorporate varying projects (e.g., drawing, stories, audio and video recording). Again provide teachers specific suggestions or offer to help with an activity. (3)

- **Promote positive coping and problem-solving skills.** Activities should teach children how to apply problem-solving skills to disaster-related stressors. Children should be encouraged to develop realistic and positive methods of coping that increase their ability to manage their anxiety and to identify which strategies fit with each situation.

- **Strengthen children's friendship and peer support.** Children with strong emotional support from others are better able to cope with adversity. Children's relationships with peers can provide suggestions for how to cope with difficulties and can help decrease isolation. In many disaster situations, friendships may be disrupted because of family relocations. In some cases parents may be less available to provide support to their children because of their own distress and their feelings of being overwhelmed. It is important for children to develop supportive relationships with their teachers and classmates. Activities may include asking children to work cooperatively in small groups in order to enhance peer support.

Emphasize children's resiliency. Focus on their competencies in terms of their daily life and in other difficult times. Help children identify what they have done in the past that helped them cope when they were frightened or upset. Tell students about other communities that have experienced natural disasters and recovered (e.g., Miami, FL and Charleston, SC).

Support all members of the crisis response team. All crisis response team members need an opportunity to process the crisis response. Providing crisis intervention is emotionally draining. This is likely to include teachers and other school staff if they have been serving as crisis caregivers for students.

Secure additional mental health support. Although more than enough caregivers are often willing to provide support during the immediate aftermath of a natural disaster, long-term services may be lacking. School psychologists and other school mental health professionals can help provide and coordinate mental health services, but it is important to connect with community resources in order to provide such long-term assistance. Ideally these relationships would be established in advance.

Important Influences on Coping Following a Natural Disaster

Relocation.

The frequent need for disaster survivors to relocate creates unique crisis problems. For example, it may contribute to the social, environmental, and psychological stress experienced by disaster survivors. Research suggests that relocation is associated with higher levels of ecological stress, crowding, isolation, and social disruption.

Parent's Reactions and Family Support. Parents' adjustment is an important factor in children's adjustment, and the adjustment of the child in turn contributes to the overall adjustment of the family. Altered family functions, separation from parents after natural disaster, and ongoing maternal preoccupation with the trauma are more predictive of trauma symptomatology in children than is the level of exposure. Thus, parents' reactions and family support following a natural disaster are important considerations in helping children's cope.

Emotional Reactivity. Preliminary findings suggest that children who tend to be anxious are those most likely to develop post-trauma symptomatology following a natural disaster. Research suggests (4) that children who had a preexisting anxiety disorder prior to a natural disaster are at greater risk of developing PTSD symptoms.

Coping Style. It is important to examine children's coping following a natural disaster because coping responses appear to influence the process of adapting to traumatic events. Research suggests that the use of blame and anger as a way of coping may create more distress for children following disasters.

Long-Term Effects

Research suggests that long term difficulties following a natural disaster (e.g., PTSD), are most likely to be seen among children who experienced any of the following:

- Had threats to their physical safety.
- Thought they might die during the disaster.
- Report that they were very upset during the disaster.
- Lost their belongings or house as a result of the disaster.
- Had to relocate in the aftermath.
- Attended schools following the disaster that had multiple schedule changes, double sessions or a lot of disruptions.

Consequently, crisis response team members need to identify students who experience these risk factors and closely monitor their status. These students may require long-term coping assistance.

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Natural Disasters, Crisis Intervention and School Psychology: Melding Human Needs and Professional Roles

By Ted Feinberg, NASP

Assistant Executive Director

While stationed in Missouri, we were making a Red Cross food delivery to one of the areas devastated by massive floods. I encountered a very forlorn gentleman sitting on a tree stump, head in hand, looking about as depressed as any human being could be. In my role as a disaster mental health volunteer, I attempted to console this man by engaging him in supportive conversation. He was most appreciative of my "counseling" efforts and pointed to a small white house, about 50 feet away, that was in water up to the second floor bedroom windows. This was his home of 20 years and it had been immersed in stagnant, brown smelly water for a month. In my attempt to add some lightness to the moment, I suggested he reframe his way of thinking. He might now consider his house and surrounding land as waterfront property which might make it a more desirable selling point. With that suggestion, he looked up at me, smiled and said, "Are you interested in purchasing newly developed waterfront property?"

Floods are the most common and widespread of all natural disasters, other than fires. Most communities in the United States can experience some kind of flooding after spring rains, heavy thunderstorms, or winter snow thaws. Floods can be slow or fast-rising, but generally develop over a period of days. Floods and flash floods occur within all 50 states, though communities particularly at risk are those located in low-lying areas, near water or downstream from a dam. Flash floods usually result from intense storms dropping large amounts of rain within a brief period. They occur with little or no warning and can reach their peak in only a few minutes. Flood water can be extremely dangerous. The force of six inches of swiftly moving water can knock people off their feet. Flash flood waters move at very fast speeds and roll boulders, tear out trees, destroy buildings and obliterate bridges. Walls of water can reach heights of 10 to 20 feet and generally are accompanied by a deadly cargo of debris. Cars can be easily swept away in just two feet of moving water.

During October 1993, the NASP *Communique* published an article describing my experiences in and around St. Louis, Missouri as a Red Cross volunteer for the massive floods that hit that area of the country. The profound devastation caused by that flood and the images of the families and individuals impacted by this monumental disaster left an indelible imprint on my psyche and a strong desire to continue my professional involvement in crisis intervention.

Jumping ahead several years to the present, I find myself still connected to an ever increasing number of NASP school psychologists, all of whom share my belief that crisis intervention and school psychology are a natural pairing of human needs and professional roles. This article examines some of the crisis elements that natural disasters such as floods create for children and families, as well as some thoughts and ideas that may be of

assistance to any school district besieged by the ravages of floods or other natural disasters.

Common and Unique Issues

Brock (1998) discusses the characteristics of potentially traumatic crisis events. These are situations that are seen as extremely negative with the potential to create severe pain, both physical and emotional. They can occur suddenly and unexpectedly with relatively little time to adjust or prepare. Traumatic events can generate feelings of powerlessness and a perception of being out of control as well as the capacity to impact all aspects of a community's life, regardless of educational background or socio-economic level.

Do floods, as crisis situations, impact children, families and communities in similar or different ways than do other natural or man-made disasters? My personal experiences and a review of the existing literature suggest, as noted by Weaver (1995), that their impact is more alike than different. All crises dictate a somewhat similar protocol that involves helping people cope with the stress and changes to their lives resulting from the crisis situation. People need time to mourn their losses and be supported, to feel less victimized and more in control of their lives. Flood victims may be unique because their recovery can be thwarted as a result of the seemingly endless amount of time that flooding creates before cleanup can begin. Flood waters sometimes take quite a while to recede and the extended agony of waiting to see what is left after your home has been under water for a month aggravates an exceedingly stressful emotional situation. It is quite difficult to reestablish the normal routines of life when you may be living in a nearby shelter or neighbor's spare bedroom.

Within the general category of floods, flash floods present a different problem than do floods where the effected population has some warning. Obviously, the more preparation and planning that can occur prior to a disaster, the greater is the capacity to start the recovery process.

It is critically important for school psychologists to be aware that in large-scale flooding, often schools are destroyed along with homes and businesses. Attempts to maintain some semblance of an educational program may be difficult, if not impossible. Clearly, it is in the emotional and educational best interests of children to find alternative ways to deliver educational services and emotional support. School psychologists in flood-prone regions of the country may be helpful to their districts by encouraging the community-school leadership to consider alternative sites for the children in the event of flooding that damages or destroys the regular school facilities and routines.

Key Concepts of Disaster Mental Health

Wilson and Sigman (1996) completed an excellent analysis of many of the key factors associated with the Midwest floods of 1993. Their summary guide to disaster recovery suggests some essential ideas that can be helpful to professionals who get involved with crisis/disaster mental health activities:

1. No one who sees a disaster is untouched by it.
2. There are two types of disaster trauma: a) individual and b) collective.
3. Most people pull together and function during and after a disaster, but their effectiveness is diminished.
4. Disaster stress and grief reactions are normal responses to an abnormal situation.
5. Many emotional reactions of disaster survivors stem from *problems of living* caused by the disaster.
6. Disaster relief procedures have been called "The Second Disaster."
7. Most people do not see themselves as needing mental health services following disaster, and will not seek out such services.
8. Survivors may reject disaster assistance of all types.
9. Disaster mental health assistance is often more "practical" than "psychological" in nature.
10. Disaster mental health services must be uniquely tailored to the communities they serve.
11. Mental health staff need to set aside traditional methods, avoid the use of mental health labels, and use an active outreach approach to intervene successfully in disaster.
12. Survivors respond to active interest and concern.
13. Interventions must be appropriate to the phase of disaster.
14. Support systems are crucial to recovery.

Children's symptoms can vary greatly depending upon the amount of time that has passed since the occurrence of the disaster and the nature of the intervening events. The severity of symptoms tends to decline over time, but they can linger for many months after the event (La Greca, Silverman, Vernberg, & Prinstein, 1996). Although symptoms generally tend to decrease rapidly, extremely severe events or long-term family and community disruptions can prolong symptoms for years (Vogel & Vernberg, 1993). In some cases, they can even increase in severity (Shaw, Applegate, & Schorr, 1996). Symptoms vary by type of disaster as well. Fourth grade children whose homes were flooded following Hurricane Floyd were three times more likely to have symptoms than those experiencing just the hurricane (Russoniello, Skalko, O'Brien, McGhee, Bingham-Alexander, & Beatley, 2002). In some cases, children's negative symptoms are more strongly related to the stressful nature of the events following a disaster than the magnitude of the actual disaster (Garrison, Briant, Addy, Spurrier, et al., 1995).

It is important to note that there can also be gender differences in how children manifest symptoms. There is some indication that boys tend to become withdrawn and exhibit increased social and attention problems, while girls tend to experience greater anxiety and depression (Shaw, Applegate, & Schorr, 1996).

Helping Young Victims: What Adults Can Do

In a study of the ways parents, teachers and friends helped children who had been impacted by Hurricane Andrew, Prinstein, La Greca, Vernberg and Silverman (1996) found that the most frequently reported coping assistance came through the reestablishing of familiar roles and routines and the attempts to "normalize" children's everyday lives.

Significant adults in these children's lives were able to create distracting activities that attempted to shield them from emotionally troublesome images or thoughts. The study suggested the need for future investigations to determine whether or not more subtle forms of emotional processing such as discussions and stories about disaster experiences and associated stressors may help children to more effectively cope with their feelings related to the disaster.

Disaster Training International suggests that for families living in areas prone to natural disasters, adults can and should help children to be prepared. According to them, organizing learning activities about natural disasters can help children gain a sense of control over their lives and diminish their fears. Examples of their recommended activities follow (Cheal, 1997):

- Explore myths and legends about weather and have children make up their own.
- Learn about weather clues, such as the way people look toward animal behavior as one way of predicting the onset of winter.
- Start a science club to explore ways that humans and animals deal with extreme weather conditions.
- Draw pictures of different ways of crossing water.
- Make a mural that shows how a drop of water travels from the sea and back to it.
- Read about myths and legends about why floods occur.
- Have children write stories describing how they felt about a storm they were been.
- Have children become pen pals with others who have recently been in a violent storm.

Disaster Training International also recommends that each child in the family have a "Kids Activity Survival Kit." The Kit should contain such items as those listed below (Cheal, 1997):

- Children's books about natural disasters
- Children's favorite books
- Non-toxic markers and paper
- Scissors and glue
- Small toys such as a doll or action figure
- Toy vehicles such as a police car or fire truck
- Small people figures for use with the toy vehicles
- Board games and puzzles
- Favorite blanket or pillow
- Stuffed animals
- Pictures of family members and pets
- "Keep safe" box for the child's special things

Since first writing this article, numerous Internet resources have been made available to assist individuals in preparing for and responding to a variety of large scale crisis events. On the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) website, FEMA and the American Red Cross provide the following guidelines for making decisions about how to help children cope with natural disasters (www.fema.gov/rrr/children.shtm):

Preparation

1. Prepare for likely disasters by creating a *Family Disaster Plan* using the following steps:

- Find out which hazards are likely to occur in your community and how to prepare for them.
- Discuss with your family what to do in each circumstance.
- Make preparations by assembling a *Disaster Supplies Kit*, noting emergency contact numbers, installing smoke detectors, etc.
- Practice your plan with all the members of your family.

2. Teach your children about disaster warning signs and emergency warning systems like fire alarms and local community sirens.

3. Explain to your children when and how to seek help, for example, by calling 9-1-1 in the event of a medical emergency.

4. Make sure your children know important family information such as their family name, address, phone number, and where to meet in case of an emergency. Younger children may need to carry this information on a small index card to give to an adult.

Recovery

After a disaster, children mostly fear that it will happen again, that someone will be injured or killed, that they will be separated from their family, and that they will be left alone.

1. Keep the family together. Try to make children a part of efforts to get the family back on its feet rather than leaving them with relatives or friends and possibly provoking anxiety about their parents' return.
2. Calmly and firmly explain to your children what you know about the disaster and what is going to happen next. Be sure to get down to their eye level when talking to them.
3. Encourage your children to talk about the disaster, to describe what they're feeling, and to ask as many questions as they want. Be attentive to what they have to say and, if possible, include the entire family in the discussion.
4. Include children in recovery activities. By giving them tasks for which they are responsible, you will be helping them to feel that they are part of the recovery and that everything will be all right.

The following organizations also provide helpful information on responding to disasters on their websites:

- American Red Cross: www.redcross.org/disaster/safety/guide.html
- Center for Mental Health Services: www.mentalhealth.org
- American Psychological Association: www.apa.org/practice/kids.html
- American Academy of Pediatrics:
www.aap.org/terrorism/topics/disaster%5Fplanning.html
- National Center for PTSD:
http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/facts/disasters/fs_range_hurricane.html

Wilson and Sigman (1996) summarized some of the important actions to be taken before, during, and after a disaster:

Plan for a Disaster:

- Talk to children about the likely disaster in their community.
- Teach children about the safety precautions for each disaster.
- Prepare a family disaster plan.
- Explain how to call for help.

Provide Comfort:

- Take a child's fears seriously.
- Keep the family together.
- Include children in the clean up process.
- Allow children to make some decisions regarding the family.
- Leave time for play.
- Increase attention: Children may require more attention during this period. Try to meet these additional demands on your time, i.e., a child wanting to be held more should be held more.
- Maintain control.
- Reassure children that you will do your best to protect them in this difficult situation.
- Be understanding, but firm. Be aware that children may act out of fear or anxieties by having tantrums or provoking fights. Calm, consistent limit-setting is called for from parents and teachers.
- Seek help from local organizations.

Communicate:

Children will naturally be curious about what happened. Explain the facts about what happened and encourage the child to ask questions. Use these guidelines when talking with children:

- Use words or phrases that won't confuse children. For instance, use of the "sleep" for death can cause a child to fear going to bed.
- Make sure children understand your answers to their questions.
- Listen to children's feelings and accept them.

- Remember that children--just like adults--may react with unusual behavior such as wide emotional shifts.
- Help children talk with each other about what has happened and how they are feeling.

Sometimes a trained mental health professional is needed to help a child fully heal. Consider counseling if the child is having an ongoing sleeping problem, difficulty concentrating, or if fears surrounding the disaster seem to have become worse. A child who continually clings to adults several weeks after the event or who expresses a sense of permanent doom may need to talk about the experience with a trained professional. Vernberg and Varela (2001) have identified conditions that may indicate the need for intervention by a mental health professional:

- The child's exposure to trauma is extensive and frightening.
- A family member or other loved one is seriously injured or killed.
- Symptoms appear quickly and at high levels.
- The child has previously experienced high levels of anxiety or difficulty regulating emotions.
- Social support and protective functions within the family are compromised by the disaster.
- The challenges to familiar roles and routines continue for an extended period of time.

Todd-Bazemore (1998) identified six factors that mental health providers need to consider in delivering services to culturally diverse communities (summarized by Jacobs, Boero, Quevillon, Todd-Bazemore, Elliott, and Reyes, 2002):

- Find out about the social and political history of the community in need of services.
- Use culturally appropriate ways of gaining access to the community.
- Be aware of the influence of the community's spiritual healing practices and other unique cultural practices.
- Strive to understand the community's concepts of health, illness, and healing.
- Learn about the community's expectations regarding standards of competency.
- Become familiar with existing community resources available to address disasters and long-term challenges.

What Schools Can Do

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) provides suggestions on what to do to prepare for a flood: (www.nws.noaa.gov/om/brochures/ffbro.htm):

- Know the risk of flooding from local streams and rivers, their elevations above flood stage, and your emergency evacuation routes.
- Keep fuel in your car; gas stations pumps may not work if the power supply is off.
- Maintain a supply of clean drinking water, as water service may be interrupted.

- Keep an emergency food supply that requires little cooking and no refrigeration.
- Have a first aid kit handy.
- Keep a battery-powered radio, emergency cooking equipment, and flashlights on hand.
- Install check valves in building sewer traps to prevent flood waters from backing up into drains.

Each school should develop its own Crisis Response Plan. Waddell and Thomas (1999) identified the following components of an effective plan:

Immediate Reactions

- Decide how best to tell staff and students.
- Provide advance notification to staff, if possible.
- Identify parents who may be in need of special notification.
- Make decisions regarding scheduling of classes.
- Decide when school dismissal is warranted.
- Consider an extended school day when necessary.
- Make plans to protect students and staff from the media.

Intermediate Steps

- Provide support and counseling for students.
- Keep parents informed.
- Make decisions regarding how to handle memorial services, for example, permission of parents, use of school buses, provisions for making up missed school work, etc.

Long-Term Activities

- Provide additional support staff, if needed.
- Make sure the necessary resources are made available to support staff.
- Be aware of the possibility of delayed reactions, for example, at the anniversary of the event.
- Plan a special remembrance activity at the anniversary.

Schools may wish to consider sending key personnel to attend school safety courses. FEMA sponsors two-day courses designed to help educators plan, prepare, respond, and recover from a variety of potential hazards.

Concluding Remarks

Over the past few years it feels like we have all experienced directly or indirectly the effects of high profile, man-made disasters. School shootings, the explosion of the Columbia Shuttle, the terrorist attacks of Sept 11, 2001 and most recently, the war in Iraq. NASP has tried to keep current with all of these events by publishing ways in which children, parents and school personnel could get through these traumatic events with the best possible outcomes. This article was an attempt to revisit the impact of a naturally occurring phenomena, floods, that can take place in any community in the country and result in enormous destruction to property as well as injury and death to those in its wake.

I never cease to be amazed and humbled by the raw power of nature's fury or man's inhumanity but in both situations crisis trained school psychologists can be wonderfully helpful in reducing the toll of human suffering and emotional distress. I can think of no greater service or professional calling and I am most proud that NASP has become one of the premier go-to associations when crises of any kind involving children and teens occur in this country.

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School Crisis Planning: Questions and Answers

*By: Scott Poland, NCSP
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Member, NEAT Team*

Does your school have a viable crisis plan? Is there a team with well-defined roles? Does every school staff member understand the plan? The best time to initiate or revamp your school's crisis plan is now— not in the middle of a crisis! This article provides answers to commonly asked questions about establishing school crisis teams and procedures.

How do I get started?

A mandate for crisis planning is necessary from the top down. The school superintendent should hold building principals accountable for crisis planning and school safety. It is important that each school review any crises with which they have already dealt and consider these key questions:

- What worked well?
- What did not work?
- What did we learn?
- How can we prevent a crisis of this type in the future?

Crisis planning involves hard work and there is no shortcut. Many schools simply want to copy another school's plan or send out a listing of crisis team members. Each school needs to do the homework and spend time on crisis planning. Everyone needs to understand his/her role.

What theoretical model should guide crisis planning?

Using Caplan's model, there are three levels of crisis intervention:

- Primary Prevention: activities designed to prevent a crisis from occurring.
- Secondary prevention: steps taken in the immediate aftermath of the crisis to minimize the effects.
- Tertiary prevention: provides long-term follow-up to those most affected.

What are the leading causes of death for children?

1. Accidents
2. Homicide
3. Suicide

Unfortunately, the annual death rate is 1 in 1,000 high school students, 1 in 3,000 junior high students and 1 in 4,000 elementary students. Emphasizing primary prevention activities means creating curriculum programs to address the leading causes of death, including programs in:

- Safe driving
- Bicycle safety

- Gun safety
- Decision-making
- Anger management
- Violence prevention
- Suicide prevention

Who should be on a school crisis team?

Team members should have the desire to be on the crisis team and should possess personal characteristics such as remaining calm in a crisis and good speaking skills.

Should every school building have its own crisis team?

Every school should have key staff members who are involved in crisis planning. Three options in creating a crisis team include:

1. Building Crisis Team-- There are many advantages if a building is large enough to have personnel such as nurses, counselors/psychologists and security in addition to administrators. All building personnel are acquainted with each other, the student body and the community. Scheduling a meeting of the crisis team is not difficult. Building personnel may also work on primary prevention activities.
2. District Team-- It may be necessary for key personnel such as security, counseling and nursing to come from another location in the school system with the purpose of supporting the building administrator. A disadvantage is that personnel may not be well acquainted and may be unaware of the specifics of the affected school.
3. District/Community Team -- Key people such as law enforcement, medical and mental health personnel are not employees of the school system. Careful planning sessions are mandatory.

How large should a crisis team be?

A minimum of four and maximum of eight members are needed. Key duties to be covered include: medical, counseling/psychological, security, parent communication and campus communication.

How important is an emergency signal?

Every school must have a clear emergency signal that is understood by all staff. All school personnel must know the "lock down" procedures to insure student safety. School personnel should keep all students in a protected location until the building administrator gives an "all clear" signal or communication.

What constitutes a good evacuation plan?

All school personnel should know exactly where to direct students when an evacuation order is issued. Each school should make arrangements to use nearby neighborhood and community facilities for evacuation as much as possible. Additional suggestions:

- Create an administrative crisis box to take with you in the event of evacuation containing: a copy of emergency cards for each student and staff member, flashlights, bullhorns, portable phone, paper and writing instruments, crisis team badges and distinctive clothing such as a hat or vest to be worn by crisis team members.
- Classroom teachers should create a classroom tote tray containing activities to occupy

students during a lengthy evacuation to a nearby facility. Small children (Pre-K to 1st grade) may need to bring items from home that would comfort them such as stuffed animals, family photos, etc.

- Secretarial staff should have supplies such as bug spray, sunscreen and bottled water to be taken outside in the event of an evacuation.

Should I evacuate school if a bomb threat is called in?

Administrators make this decision based on these factors: age of caller, unrest in the community and weather conditions. Approximately 100 bombs of some type go off in schools each year. No data are available on the number of bomb threats received in the approximately 94,000 schools in the U.S. Some schools are requiring students to make up lost academic time from bomb threat evacuation by taking away scheduled holidays or by requiring students to do classwork while awaiting the signal to return to the school building. Close collaborative relations between local police and school administrators in all aspects of crisis planning are important, especially in bomb threat management procedures.

The school receptionist should have a standardized form to record time of day, background noises and voice characteristics of the person calling in the bomb threat. The caller should be asked logical questions about the type of bomb and when it is set to detonate.

What must be done first in the aftermath of a crisis?

The administrator/principal must take charge. Top priorities include assuring that medical and security needs are met and that identification information accompanies anyone who is injured/killed. Three waves of people will descend on the school and the building principal must delegate crisis team members to manage these three waves:

- Police and medical
- Media
- Parents

Address the following key practical questions:

- Do we close school early or cancel for the next day? (Hopefully not, as many students will be unsupervised at home.)
- Do we change the bell schedule and class schedule?
- How do we get facts about the crisis to parents, as well as information on how they can help their children? (Note sent home with students, schedule parent meeting, etc.)
- How do we isolate and support school personnel or students who are interviewed by police?
- How do we contain the media?

What are the key roles of various school personnel in dealing with large-scale emotionality?

Principal's Role in a Crisis:

- Direct the crisis team and take charge of the situation.
- Be visible, available, supportive.

- Dispel rumors by giving everyone the facts.
- Communicate with Central Administration and School Board.
- Contact family(ies) of the deceased.
- Provide updated information to all concerned.

Psychologist's / Counselor's/Social Worker's Role in a Crisis:

- Be available.
- Cancel other activities.
- Locate counseling space.
- Get counseling, secretarial assistance.
- Contact parents of affected students.
- Follow schedule of deceased student.
- Support the faculty.
- Contact feeder schools.

Teacher's Role in a Crisis:

- Provide accurate information to students.
- Lead class discussions.
- Dispel rumors.
- Answer questions.
- Model an appropriate response.
- Give permission for a range of emotions.
- Identify students who need counseling.
- Provide activities to reduce trauma and express emotions through artwork, music, writing.
- Set aside curriculum as needed.
- Discuss funeral procedures including customs and etiquette.
- Encourage parents to accompany their children to funerals.

Why are crisis drills important?

Historically schools have had fire drills as frequently as once a month. It is obvious that fires are not the only, or the most common, crisis situation in the schools. By simply reading the newspaper, one can learn the types of crisis situations that have occurred in the schools. School crisis plans must be more than pages in a notebook gathering dust on a shelf. Crisis plans must be an ongoing, evolving part of conducting school. Crisis drills make crisis plans come alive, and schools learn from them! Suggestions for conducting crisis drills:

- Begin with paper and pencil discussion activities.
- Have crisis team anticipate five different school crisis situations.
- Each team member writes down duties that he/she would anticipate performing; the team discusses each scenario.
- Each semester, choose one scenario to act out.
- Inform parents of the importance of crisis drills in local media articles.
- Take precautions against unnecessarily alarming students, staff and parents.
- Inform parents, local agencies that drills are being conducted.
- Avoid using dramatic props such as starter pistols or simulated blood.

- Place a sign in the area designating that a crisis drill is being conducted.
- Practice drills that involve moving staff and students to a safe location.
- Crisis team should receive written and verbal feedback about the management of the crisis.

What are recommendations from schools that have experienced severe crisis situations?

- You must recognize that it could happen to you.
- No two crisis situations are alike, but what you learn in one situation will help you deal with future situations.
- Each person must understand his/her role in a crisis.
- School crisis plans must be reviewed at least once a year.
- Everyone must be alert.
- School safety is an inside job that involves a committed student body, staff and community.

What are the key points in public relations?

Before a crisis occurs, focus on school safety planning in parent newsletters. Create a school safety task force that involves the community, parents, students and teachers. When a crisis occurs, it is important to:

- Mobilize quickly.
- Involve top administrators who go to the scene.
- Show concern to all.
- Share information.

How can we manage the media?

- Establish positive relationships with local media.
- Select and train a media spokesperson for each building or district.
- Write a media policy that clarifies what the media will and will not be allowed to do.
- The policy should be a cooperative one that sets limits such as no roaming halls or filming grieving students.
- Avoid refusing to cooperate with the media and be prepared to use your authority to ban them from campus if it becomes necessary. The excessive numbers of media personnel sent to Jonesboro, Arkansas, for instance, necessitated banning the media from school grounds.
- Recognize that you can utilize the media to dispense important information regarding community assistance.
- Emphasize preparatory actions taken by your district and the support being provided to staff and students.
- Grant reasonable interview requests.
- Clarify media procedures to all school staff.
- Designate a certain room to receive media representatives. The central office may be the best location.
- Central office personnel may need to manage media requests so that the building principal can attend to other duties.
- Provide a written statement supporting and clarifying verbal statements.

- Obtain parent permission prior to releasing any student photographs.
- Prior to releasing student's name to media, notify his/her family.

How can schools improve their communication systems?

- Have necessary equipment on hand: private phone line, portable or cellular phones, fax machines, computers, bullhorns and two-way radios.
- Modernize intercoms so that each classroom can communicate with the office and vice versa.
- Communicate with portable buildings, playgrounds via outside speakers.
- Have clear emergency signal that is understood by everyone. Clarify, simplify and rehearse the emergency signal.

But what if I don't have an intercom or a phone in my classroom?

Each teacher should designate a responsible student and train him/her how to get assistance in an emergency. The teacher has his/her name on a key ring in red and in blue. If there is a medical emergency, the teacher tears off the red tag that has the teacher's name on it and sends it with the responsible student for help. The blue tag means behavioral or safety emergency that requires administrative assistance. This process should be rehearsed.

How do children typically respond to a crisis or disaster?

Their responses fall into four main categories:

- Fear of the future
- Behavioral regression
- Academic regression
- Nightmares and/or night terrors

How can we help children after a tragedy?

It is important to give them the facts in age-appropriate terms and to give them permission for a range of emotions. Every child has a story to tell and we need to listen and answer questions. The [National Organization for Victim Assistance \(NOVA\)](#) Model of Group Crisis Intervention has many applications for use in the schools. Each student and teacher in a classroom sits in a circle and the facilitator begins by asking sensory perception questions, thus guiding students to a discussion of emotions, prediction of the future and identification of coping skills. Additional information on this model, with which many school psychologists are familiar, is available at 1-800-TRY-NOVA. It is also very important that students have the opportunity to express emotions through artwork, music and writing. Meetings between school staff and parents are important to help them understand the typical reactions of children and to provide the adults with guidance to help the children.

Resources

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Culturally Competent Crisis Response: Information for School Psychologists and Crisis Teams

“Traumatic events do not exist in a vacuum. Like other social phenomena, they should be understood within the social and cultural context in which they occur.” (Young, 1997, p. 7-14)

School psychologists are increasingly involved in providing crisis response within multicultural communities. Those who are committed to enhancing their skills in cultural competency are more likely to be effective caregivers when challenging situations arise. For example, reports from a 1989 Stockton, California schoolyard shooting in a predominantly Southeast Asian community found that school officials had difficulty communicating with parents, and that police and medical crews were transporting unidentified children to the hospital, resulting in unnecessary confusion and anxiety for the frightened parents. As a result, parents were forced to wait for several agonizing hours before learning the location and status of their children (Allen et al., 2004).

In another tragic example of the impact of culture on crisis, a Pakistani-American teenager unsuccessfully attempted suicide in her school’s bathroom following an arranged marriage orchestrated by her single mother (Lieberman & Davis, 2002). School officials then had the arduous task of notifying her mother, who had not assimilated with American culture and spoke no English. Suicide attempts among minority students are not uncommon; data indicates that African American, American Indian, Mexican American, and gay and lesbian youths may be particularly at risk (Lieberman & Davis, 2002).

Despite the importance of culturally competent crisis response, a recent survey of NCSP practitioners (Allen et al., 2004) found that there is limited awareness among school psychologists of how multiple factors and student diversity influence the provision of crisis intervention services. In actuality, culture influences what type of threat or event is perceived as traumatic, how individuals interpret the meaning of crisis, and how individuals and communities express traumatic reactions (Young, 1997). These factors, along with the scenarios listed above, illustrate the importance of considering culture in crisis response.

Developing Culturally Competent Crisis Plans

There are many ways that school psychologists can incorporate cultural competence into their overall crisis plans and preparations. To begin with, crisis plans should identify and address the diverse needs within the school community. These would include (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003):

- Identifying specific culture-related needs of the community, such as access to interpreters, religious figures, and healers.

- Maintaining a current profile of the cultural composition of the school/district community.
 - Include race/ethnicity, languages/dialects spoken, age, gender, religion, refugee/immigrant status, income and poverty levels, percentage of students living in rural vs. urban areas, history of trauma, torture, or war experience, and history of racial/ethnic relations within the greater community.
- Identifying formal and informal community resources that can help meet diverse mental health needs.
- Developing a list of community resources able to lend assistance as interpreters and translators in the event of a crisis.
- Identifying the meaning of suffering, pain, and death relevant to the norms of the community's cultural groups (Young, 1997).
- Anticipating and identifying possible solutions to cultural problems that may arise in the event of a crisis.
- Identifying the full names of the parents and guardians of all children in the school, since last names can differ within families.

The Role of the Crisis Team

The school- or district-wide crisis team plays an integral role in multicultural crisis response, and team members should be selected and trained accordingly. Ideally, team members should represent the cultural and linguistic makeup of the school community (Allen et al., 2004; Project Liberty). When this is not feasible, the team should train and develop strong working relationships with outside cultural brokers, interpreters, and relevant community members willing to assist in a crisis.

Ongoing team training topics can include awareness of cultural values and traditions, linguistics and literacy, immigration experiences and status, help-seeking behaviors, cross-cultural outreach techniques and strategies, and avoidance of stereotypes and labels (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003). Crisis team members should also examine their own cultures, worldviews, and biases, including how these may affect the provision of mental health services. For example, cultural issues such as communication (decision and way to communicate verbally and nonverbally), personal space (appropriateness of physical contact and proximity), social organization (the influences of family, kinships, tribes, and religious, political, and economic organizations), time (variability in interpretation and measurement), and environmental control (belief about external versus internal control) can affect responses to crisis (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003; Sandoval & Lewis, 2002).

In addition, crisis teams should establish relationships with community resources, including trusted organizations, service providers, cultural and faith-based community leaders, multicultural television stations, radio stations, and newspapers (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003). Gathering information from and establishing working relationships with these community resources can speed up and improve effective response efforts following a crisis.

To ensure continuing cultural competence, crisis teams should conduct regular evaluation of their crisis response efforts (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003). This can include a needs-assessment of the school and community, and investigation of any barriers that are present when providing services during a crisis.

Reactions to Crisis

When a crisis occurs, school psychologists and other responders should keep in mind that survivors react to and recover from crisis within the context of their individual backgrounds, viewpoints, and values (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003; Sandoval & Lewis, 2002, Young, 1996). Expression of emotion, description of psychological symptoms, help-seeking behaviors, natural support networks, and customs in dealing with trauma, loss, and healing often vary by culture. It is also important to consider historical influences such as racism and discrimination, war, and interment, as well as social and economic inequality when preparing a crisis response. These factors may cause minority groups to distrust offers of assistance, face majority anger and blame, and have limited access to resources. In addition, groups who have previously experienced trauma (e.g., refugees) as well as those who have limited access to resources may be more susceptible to harm from crisis.

Including Cultural Brokers

School psychologists should ensure that the crisis response is tailored to the population in need. One way to do so is to include crisis responders and cultural brokers (e.g., community leaders) from the affected minority group(s) before, during, and in the aftermath of any crisis situation. In addition, community-based groups can provide an important communication link with the cultural groups they represent (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003). It is worthwhile to consider involving civic associations/social clubs, neighborhood groups, faith-based organizations/interfaith groups, mutual aid societies/voluntary organizations, health care and social service providers, and nonprofit advocacy organizations in the crisis planning and response plan, as well as in training with school crisis teams. To ensure an organized response, crisis responders should coordinate their work with each other, as well as with public and private agencies.

Communications Following a Crisis

When a crisis occurs, disseminating timely information to the affected community is of utmost importance. To reach all members of the community, oral and written communication should be made available in languages other than English, including sign language interpreters as needed (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003). Form letters prepared in advance for predictable tragic events (e.g., student deaths) in multiple languages can be adapted quickly when such events occur. In addition, written material should always be supplemented with other forms of information, such as radio, television, or announcements in the communities.

Ideally, the primary language of crisis survivors should be used in delivering outreach and notification of other services. When native speakers are unavailable, interpreters with basic knowledge of crisis response who are also trained to accurately convey the tone, level, and meaning of the information presented in the original language should be recruited (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003). However, it is usually inappropriate to use survivors' friends and relatives as interpreters, and all interpreters should be sensitive to confidentiality issues. On an interpersonal level, responders should remain aware of culturally specific communication techniques such as the use of eye and physical contact and physical proximity, the integration of food and drink in discussions, the pace of conversation, and body language.

Providing Culturally and Linguistically Competent Services

Following a crisis, care should be taken to provide services that are accessible, appropriate, and equitable. Here are some tips for achieving these goals:

- Always convey respect and good will by dressing appropriately, participating in access rituals, and saying “please” and “thank you” (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003; Sandoval & Lewis, 2002; Young, 1997). Keep in mind that cultural conventions can vary significantly.
- Be aware of cultural social status and gender conventions. Try to match responders to students and families such that they will have a high status/level of acceptance within the culture in question (Sandoval & Lewis, 2002).
- Help reestablish customs, rituals, and social relationships to enable survivors to cope with the impact of a crisis (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003).
- Assess who plays a significant role in a survivor's family structure by asking the person to describe his or her home, family, and community.
- Ask survivors to describe what they need from you to be of assistance to them. Then, tell them truthfully what is within your capacity to do to lend assistance (Young, 1997).
- Acknowledge your limitations and differences. These may include the inability to speak or understand the language, as well as confusion over certain customs, rituals, or spiritual understandings. Try to convey your sincere desire to learn about these customs to be able to more effectively offer support (Young, 1997).
- Ask survivors if they would like to go to a place of worship or a cultural center, or if there are any ceremonies or rituals that are particularly directed at crisis in their culture (Young, 1997).
- Refer parents to culturally appropriate post-crisis resources, such as “*An activity book for African American families: Helping children cope with crisis*” (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and National Black Child Development Institute, Inc., 2003).
- Organize culturally appropriate commemorations and anniversary activities, as well as informational handouts to explain these rituals and customs to the greater community (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003).

- Use cross-cultural interventions including: group work, reduction of isolation, relaxation techniques, meditation, education about crisis in culturally relevant terms, and development of individual control (Young, 1997).
- Monitor access to services, including crisis counseling, and design specific strategies to reach the unengaged, as well as those whose traditions discourage seeking help (Project Liberty).

Crisis Response Evaluation

Once the primary crisis response phase has ended, school psychologists should initiate assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of the response, including cultural competence. This way, problems in the response process can be identified and resolved. Involving representatives from diverse cultural groups in process evaluation can further this objective (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003).

Focus and discussion groups, as well as other program evaluation methods, can be used to assess the following elements: leadership, understanding of cultural competence, organizational culture, training, cultural competence plan, and plan management (Athey & Moody-Williams, 2003, Table 2-6, p. 38). In addition, crisis teams should maintain logs of the ideas that worked well during the response, along with those that need improvement. This way, future responders can shape their interventions based on past success within the community.

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National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and National Black Child Development Institute, Inc. (2003). *An activity book for African American families: Helping children cope with crisis*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the National Institutes of Health. Available online at <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/hccc/activitybook.htm>

Project Liberty: Providing Culturally Competent Crisis Counseling Services. Available on-line at: <http://www.projectliberty.state.ny.us/Resources/PLCultural.pdf>

Sandoval, J. & Lewis, S. (2002). Cultural considerations in crisis intervention. In Brock, S. E., Lazarus, P. J., and Jimerson, S. R., (Eds.), *Best Practices in school crisis prevention and intervention* (pp. 293-308). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Young, M. (1997). The community crisis response team training manual (Second Edition). Washington, DC: National Organization for Victim Assistance, Washington, DC. NASP Handout adaptation (*Cultural Perspectives on Trauma and Critical Response*) by Kris Sieckert Available online at http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/neat_cultural.html

Additional Resources

Center for Trauma, Response, Recovery, and Preparedness (Cultural Competency and Disaster Mental Health) http://www.ctrp.org/resources_cultural_comp.htm

Del Valle, P. (2002). Traumatized refugee children. In Brock, S. E., Lazarus, P. J., and Jimerson, S. R., (Eds.), *Best Practices in school crisis prevention and intervention* (pp. 599-614). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Developing Cultural Competence in Disaster Mental Health Programs: Guiding Principles and Recommendations http://media.shs.net/ken/pdf/SMA03-3828/CulturalCompetence_FINALwithcovers.pdf

Jimerson, S. R. & Huff, L. C. (2002). Responding to a sudden, unexpected death at school: Chance favors the prepared professional. In Brock, S. E., Lazarus, P. J., and Jimerson, S. R., (Eds.), *Best Practices in school crisis prevention and intervention* (pp. 449-485). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

NASP Crisis Resources: <http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/crisismain.html>

NASP Culturally Competent Practice (includes crisis resources): <http://www.nasponline.org/culturalcompetence/index.html>

Rabalais, A. E., Ruggiero, K. J., & Scotti, J. R. (2002). Multicultural issues in the response of children to disasters. In A. M. La Greca, W. K. Silverman, E. M. Vernberg, and M. C. Roberts, (Eds.), *Helping children cope with disasters and terrorism* (pp. 73-99). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

Satcher, D. (1999). Overview of Cultural Diversity and Mental Health Services. In *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Available online at <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/chapter2/sec8.html>

The following web sites contain anecdotal information that can provide a starting point for learning about various cultural and religious traditions:

Death, funeral traditions, and mourning:

<http://www.obituariestoday.com/Resources/FuneralEit.cfm>

http://www.beliefnet.com/story/78/story_7894_1.html

http://www.beliefnet.com/story/45/story_4549_1.html

<http://www.funeral.com/funeral/index.jsp?dirID=33560>

<http://library.thinkquest.org/16665/burial.htm>

Funeral flower etiquette by religion:

<http://www.800florals.com/care/faiths.asp>

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Crisis Website Resources

Updated 7/8/2004

- Additional NASP Crisis Resources, www.nasponline.org/NEAT/911memorial.html
- Army Deployment Handbook, www.wood.army.mil/mwr/deploymenthandbook.htm
- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, <http://aacap.org>
- American Academy of Pediatrics, www.aap.org/terrorism/index.html
- American Red Cross, www.redcross.org
- American School Counselors Association, www.schoolcounselor.org
- American Psychiatric Association, www.psych.org/public_info
- American Psychological Association, www.apa.org
- Center for Disease Control, www.cdc.gov
- Department of Health and Human Services, www.mentalhealth.org/cmhs/EmergencyServices/after.asp
- Dougy Center for Grieving Children and Families, <http://www.dougy.org>
- Emergency Planning - Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, www.ed.gov/emergencyplan/
- Family and Home Network, Helping, Active Duty: Helping Military Families Cope, www.familyandhome.org/features/duty.html
- Federal Emergency Management Agency www.fema.org
- International Nursing Society, www.nursingsociety.org/NOA_children.html
- Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, <http://securebuildings.lbl.gov>
- National Association of School Psychologists www.nasponline.org
- National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder www.ncptsd.org/facts/specific/fs_children.html
- National Mental Health Association, www.nmha.org
- Office of Homeland Security, www.whitehouse.gov/homeland
- Project Cope, www.nymc.edu/wihd/projectcope/pc/guide1.html

U.S. Army Hooah4health,

www.hooah4health.com/environment/deployment/emotionalcycle.htm

Memorial Activities at School: A List of "Do's" and "Don'ts"

Memorial activities can be a valuable way for schools to help students and staff deal with trauma and loss. How a school approaches a memorial can make the difference in the healing nature of the process. Following are a few Do's and Don'ts to avoid further traumatizing students and promote a positive experience. For more information on memorials and helping children cope, go to www.nasponline.org

Do	Don't
<i>Do</i> prepare for the needs of youth both preceding and following memorial activities in the community or school.	<i>Don't</i> underestimate the resurfacing of intense common grief reactions, including sadness and anger.
<i>Do</i> keep parents and staff informed of all upcoming activities related to the memorial plan, and allow any student, with parental permission, to attend a memorial activity.	<i>Don't</i> require all students or staff to attend a memorial activity.
<i>Do</i> provide staff and parents with information regarding possible related behaviors and emotions that students may display.	<i>Don't</i> pathologize normal grief reactions. Conversely, do not minimize serious, atypical grief reactions that may require closer clinical investigation.
<i>Do</i> focus on the needs and goals related to the students, and include parents and community members in activities as appropriate.	<i>Don't</i> try to accomplish all things in the school context; there are multiple forums to which the school staff, administration, and faculty may contribute that do not occur at school.
<i>Do</i> be sensitive to developmental and cultural differences when developing memorials.	<i>Don't</i> assume that "one size fits all" when it comes to developing a memorial.
<i>Do</i> develop living memorials (e.g., tolerance programs) that address the problems that lead to the crisis event.	<i>Don't</i> allow the memorial to be a forum for expressions of hatred and anger toward the perpetrators of crises.
<i>Do</i> something to prevent other crises from happening. Try to move students from the role of "victims" to the role of "doers."	<i>Don't</i> focus the memorial on the uncontrollable aspects of the crisis.
<i>Do</i> emphasize signs of recovery and hope in any memorial activity.	<i>Don't</i> allow a memorial to simply recount tales of the traumatic stressor.
<i>Do</i> allow students to discuss, in small group settings, such as classrooms, how they feel about their memorial experiences.	<i>Don't</i> schedule a memorial at such a time that it will not allow students to discuss or process their experiences.
<i>Do</i> encourage communication (e.g., writing letters and exchange of ideas) related to memorial activities.	<i>Don't</i> force students to participate or share feelings and ideas.

Do provide a referral system (school and community based) to identify youth who display complicated grief reactions and ensure appropriate support services are available.	Don't expect that staff and faculty will be able to independently identify individuals in need of mental health assistance.
Do establish an infrastructure (plans and processes) to provide assistance and support to students in immediate need.	Don't anticipate that students will independently seek out the appropriate professional assistance.

NASP has made these materials available free of charge to the public in order to promote the ability of children and youth to cope with traumatic or unsettling times. The materials may be adapted, reproduced, reprinted, or linked to websites without specific permission. However, the integrity of the content must be maintained and NASP must be given proper credit

Memorials/Activities/Rituals Following Traumatic Events: Suggestions for Schools

School memorials, ceremonies or memory activities following a traumatic experience serve an important function in the healing process for both students and staff. Such activities provide the opportunity to express emotions through a variety of ways besides talking. In addition, a school memorial helps to bring closure to a period of grieving and serves as a point from which to move on with regular school activities. Memorial activities can take many forms, from tree planting or writing letters and cards, to more traditional “services.” It is best to plan a variety of activities rather than only one “big” event; some students will be more comfortable, and more comforted by, one activity versus another. Providing a range of opportunities to express feelings is essential.

Memorial activities following a large-scale traumatic event such as the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995 or the terrorist attacks of September 2001 have a somewhat different focus compared to memorials following a student or staff death or even multiple deaths following a school shooting or natural disaster. “Closure” may be difficult to achieve, even after several weeks, due to ongoing fear that the situation may recur or that traumatic events, such as war, may take place. In such situations, a significant purpose of a memorial activity is to bring people together in order to express feelings and concerns together—to reduce feelings of isolation and vulnerability. A further purpose is to encourage everyone to think about ways—even very small steps—that can be taken to increase feelings of security and reduce conflicts that can lead to violence at all levels.

Guidelines for Planning School Memorial Activities

Participation in memorial activities is important even when students or school personnel do not know any of the victims or their families. The following are key points for schools to consider:

- Proceed slowly and involve students, staff, families, and the community in your planning and decision-making. Remember, the planning and construction of the memorial in Oklahoma City for the victims of the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building took five years.
- Schools should form a committee that includes administrators, teachers, parents and students to plan memorial activities. It is very important to involve students in the planning process including those who had personal ties to the victims if possible.
- Memorial events can be planned as a series of activities, not just the more traditional permanent marker or structure in memory of those who died. Schools can hold group “services” as well as involve classrooms in creating their own tributes, artwork, cards, letters, etc.
- Memorial activities—at least the initial activity—should take place within one week of the event if possible.

- Demonstrate acknowledgement of and sensitivity toward issues of diversity including culturally specific rituals, traditions, beliefs, activities, and practices.

Suggested Memorial Activities

- A temporary memorial site can be established. Flowers, notes, poems, ribbons, stuffed animals, pictures and other objects can be brought by students and staff to a designated location at school to pay tribute to those who died and those who helped to rescue and support survivors. School and community input should be obtained to determine if a more permanent place for these objects is feasible or to otherwise determine an appropriate, sensitive way to dismantle the memorial site. The location of permanent memorials at school should be considered very carefully and locations other than main entrances are recommended.
- Schools and communities who have experienced significant traumas often look for what is termed as “the gift of hope”; i.e., activities and projects that will make a difference and prevent similar tragedies in the future. Following violent events, activities and curriculum that address tolerance and bullying would be appropriate “gifts.”
- Writing activities can be particularly helpful for students of all ages. Students can write and send cards, letters and posters to the families of the victims (in care of a support organization such as the Red Cross) or to those involved in rescue work (police and fire personnel). Older students might also write to local, state or national leaders.
- Be sure to involve all students, including those with disabilities. Activities can be tailored to the cognitive and emotional development levels of all students. Special education staff can be helpful in assuring that all students feel included and that activities are appropriate for them.

Developmental Considerations

Memorial activities should be planned to be appropriate to the developmental level of students involved.

- Young children need to do something to express their grief, even though they may not really understand all that has happened. Drawings—to hang up in the school hallway, to send to the firemen and policemen who helped victims, to send to school children in disaster areas—are an excellent way for young children to express and share their feelings. They can also perform songs or reading of poems as part of a school-wide memorial service.
- Adolescents need activities that provide them with a sense of contribution to the school’s and community’s efforts, not only in recognition of the event and honoring the victims, but in preventing such tragedies in the future. Involve middle school and high school students in all aspects of planning memorial activities, including performing as well as helping with setting up and cleaning up; gather their suggestions for prevention of such events—such as ideas about improving security (locally or more globally) and increasing tolerance and

peaceful conflict resolution. Students might be encouraged to write members of Congress or appropriate agencies with their suggestions. In response to terrorism or war-related events, older students might also benefit from studying the political and religious issues that might help explain the origins of hatred and fanaticism.

Specific Guidelines for School Memorial Services

- Involve students of all ages in planning the service.
- Keep the memorial service brief and appropriate to the age of the students. For elementary students, 15-20 minutes is appropriate; for older students, up to an hour.
- Include music and student performances. Playing soothing music as people enter and leave the service will help set and maintain a calm mood.
- Preview the service with students, parents and staff ahead of time. Teachers should help students anticipate how this will be different from typical school assemblies, and should discuss appropriate behavior.
- Have several brief speakers. Select individuals who are well known to students and who represent security and safety—people who students can recognize as able to provide reassurances and support (mayor, superintendent, local police chief or school liaison officer, etc.)
- Invite family members to attend.
- For memorial services/programs, all staff and students should attend (unless parents specifically object). Such programs can be very powerful in uniting the school community, and send the message that each individual is important. If some students choose to not attend, provide a quiet activity as an alternative.
- Involve classrooms by inviting them to bring and hang a class banner or poster to honor the victims or promote peace.
- Use symbols of life and hope in memorial activities. Balloons and candles can be used very effectively to promote a positive, uplifting message that acknowledges pain and sadness yet also is hopeful for the future.
- Following a school-wide memorial service, students should return to their classrooms for at least a short time prior to dismissal. This allows time to talk with each other, their teacher or a mental health staff member (if available) to “debrief” the experience.
- Provide a forum that allows the inclusion of diverse traditions and rituals that are specific to members of the community.

Follow-Up Activities

Particularly following events that will have no real closure for an extended time (i.e., because recovery efforts will be slow, because identification of the perpetrators may not be resolved quickly, because the impact of the event has long-term consequences, etc.), it is important for schools to consider an activity to address ongoing concerns. Schools might consider:

- Linking with other community efforts (such as food drives or other donation activities to children and families displaced by the attacks)
- Establishing and implementing conflict resolution, tolerance and other instructional programs that have long-term prevention goals
- Building a permanent memorial or establishing an ongoing memorial “fund” for disaster relief for current and future tragedies.

For further information on promoting tolerance among children and youth, contact NASP at (301) 657-0270 or visit NASP’s website at www.nasponline.org

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Visit the **FAMILY LINKS REGISTRY** to register yourself, a missing loved one or to view the list or call **1-877 LOVED 1S** (1-877-568-3317)

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Because of the public's generous support, the American Red Cross has been able to respond immediately whether the need was around the corner or halfway around the world...

But we continue to need your support as we provide relief for victims of local, national and international disasters. In the southeast, Hurricane Katrina has ripped apart thousands of lives and left thousands homeless. In response, the American Red Cross is launching the largest mobilization of resources for a single natural disaster involving thousands of trained disaster relief workers, tons of supplies and shoulders to lean on.

Additionally, donations from you and other generous supporters will ensure that we meet the demand of collecting and supplying more than 6 million units of blood for over 3,000 hospitals around the country, provide classes to nearly 12 million people annually including CPR, First Aid and other life-saving skills, keep military families around the globe connected and prevent 1.2 million measles – related deaths by vaccinating 200 million children in Africa by the end of 2005.

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Please be sure to complete the entire donor portion of the form and to include a copy of your gift receipt (if available). If you would like to designate the gift to a specific disaster, please indicate that on the form. Last year was a record year for responding to disasters, large and small. From floods and tornadoes to wildfires and residential fires...from hurricanes that devastated entire communities throughout the southeast U.S. to a catastrophic earthquake and the tsunami that roared through southern Asia and eastern Africa countries destroying lives, families, homes and livelihoods.

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Your contribution means we can continue to provide these vital services. Please make a [contribution](#) today... and provide hope and relief for tomorrow. Thank you.

***Website for The American Red Cross is: www.redcross.org