



When Bad Things Happen: Preparing for Crises, Critical Incidents, Disasters

By Michael Discus

In the headlines we might read:

- Elementary student killed by vehicle as school is dismissed
- Middle school student shoots self at school
- Popular teacher dies from cancer
- Three high school students die in motor vehicle accident
- Teacher dies of heart attack in front of class
- Student brings gun to school and threatens student
- Cougar sighted near school grounds
- Elementary student disappears from school and drowns
- Teacher accused of having sex with a student
- Law enforcement searches for meth lab near school

Ask yourself:

- ◆ Do I accept that bad things happen?
- ◆ Do I accept that bad things will happen that affect **my** school?

Depending on how you answer these questions influences how you prepare for, respond to and manage crises, critical incidents or disasters that can impact you, students, staff and parents. All the incidents above happened in

(Continued on page 2.)

Emergency Response Quiz

True or False?

My school (or my district):

1. Has a written emergency response crisis management (ERCM) plan.
2. Has an ERCM plan which is reviewed and updated on an annual basis.
3. Provides orientation and training on the ERCM plan for all staff and substitutes.
4. Has completed an assessment of vulnerabilities on emergency response capacity, hazardous materials use/storage, transport hazards, natural hazards, nuclear/military sites, social/emotional risks.
5. Has established teams for crisis response, medical/first-aid, search and rescue, student/parent reunion, support/security, damage assessment.
6. Has clear expectations and written working agreements with community partners, such as law enforcement agencies, fire departments, ambulance services, county emergency management, mental health professionals and the Red Cross.
7. Has written procedures for communicating and working with news media representatives.
8. Has clear procedures to account for students during a crisis.
9. Has communicated with students and parents about the ERCM plan.
10. Uses the Incident Command System for decision making when responding to a crisis.
11. Practices its ERCM plan, including unannounced drills and drills during passing times, lunch periods and activities before and after school.
12. Conducts an operational review after every incident and drill to assess strengths, gaps and ways to improve the ERCM plan and response.
13. Provides psychological first-aid and support for students, staff and parents after a traumatic event.
14. Has a list of community resources and information for families about how to talk to their children after a traumatic event.
15. Has established a threat management program and a team to address, assess and manage students who threaten violence.

Scoring

- ◆ The goal is to answer “true” for all 15 statements.
- ◆ Wherever you answer “false” indicates a gap in your ERCM plan and work is needed to improve and strengthen it.
- ◆ If you don’t know if a statement is true or false, who in your school does know?
- ◆ What action or next steps would help make each statement a reality for your school?

Things Happen...

(Continued from page 1.)

Washington state. Denying that they happened, or hoping they won't happen in your school or community, are not options in today's world.

In 2002, the state Legislature passed SB 5543 which mandates that all school districts must have Comprehensive Safe Schools Plans. This state directive emphasizes that, whether schools are urban, suburban, rural, large, medium or small, they each need to develop a comprehensive emergency response crisis management plan.

ESD 113 collaborated with the eight other educational service districts in Washington to obtain a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education to improve and strengthen the emergency response and crisis management plans of targeted school districts. These funds have helped the selected districts develop better working relationships with local community partners such as law enforcement agencies, fire departments, ambulance services, county emergency management, the Red Cross and mental health services.

The focus of the project for ESD 113, funded by the first crisis management grant, was Rainier, Rochester, Tenino, Tumwater and Yelm school districts in Thurston County. A second grant was awarded and ESD 113 is now working with Grapeview, Hood Canal, Mary M. Knight, Pioneer, Shelton and Southside school districts in Mason County. Information learned from participating districts will be used to help other districts in the ESD 113 Student Assistance consortium.

As facilitator for a portion of the grant assisting districts in Thurston County and for the grant aiding the Mason County districts,

I have observed that districts and schools have different stages of development with their emergency response crisis management plans. Some are further along with the four phases, but all are working to improve. Some have better established working relationships with community partners, while others need to further develop those partnerships. Some conduct basic fire drills that are announced and held during a regular class period, others do unannounced fire and intruder drills at different times of the school day. Since crises, critical incidents or disasters do not happen at scheduled times, schools need to practice and drill during a variety of times including when students are passing from one class to the next, participating in before- or after-school activities and eating lunch.

As I've worked with districts, here are some of the comments I've heard from staff:

- ◆ "When we started, we thought we had a plan."
- ◆ "We have bits and pieces in place."
- ◆ "Some staff have deep pockets of knowledge about our plan, some do not."
- ◆ "We definitely have gaps and more work to do."
- ◆ "Makes us think about what we would do 'if X happens' – better to do that now than during a real emergency."
- ◆ "Safety has to be a priority – it affects all our students' ability to learn and perform."

The purpose of "A Closer Look @Emergency Response & Crisis Management" is to raise your awareness about the need for developing a comprehensive emergency response crisis management plan for your district and for each school in your district, to provide useful

information, to offer tools and resources to help you make a comprehensive ERCM plan a reality, and to encourage you to have an ongoing conversation among stakeholders (staff, students, parents, community partners) about your ERCM plan.

Think about insurance – people have vehicle, home, medical, life and disability coverage. They even are willing to pay some out-of-pocket costs for insurance. Why is it so important to have insurance? For protection, piece of mind, just in case. While we may dislike having to pay for insurance, we see the value of having adequate coverage while at the same time hoping we don't have to use it. Few of us want to have a car accident, an extended illness or injury requiring surgery, damage to our home or even death – just to get a return on our investment!

A district/school emergency response crisis management plan is like insurance for crises, critical incidents and disasters. You hope you don't have to use the plan, but when bad things happen, you are prepared to help students, staff and parents. Your ERCM plan – safety, security, support and recovery – is not an elective; it is a core life curriculum. Help make your district and school ERCM plans a reality.

Michael Discus is the ESD 113 emergency response crisis management consultant and trainer. For more information about the ERCM planning process and what help may be available to your school or district, contact Rob Vincent, director of ESD 113's student assistance and treatment program, at rvincent@esd113.k12.wa.us or (360) 586-4037.

Preparing for a crisis: A practical guide

Taking action now can save lives, prevent injury, and minimize property damage in the moments of a crisis. If you do not have a crisis plan in place, develop one. If you have one, review, practice, and update your plan. Although every school's needs and circumstances are different, this checklist provides general guidance that can be adapted to each district's or school's circumstances.

Mitigation & Prevention

The goal is to assist schools in identifying potential risks and vulnerabilities and in developing a plan or identifying strategies to avoid a crisis or lessen its impact.

- Connect with community emergency responders to identify local hazards.
- Review the last safety audit to examine school buildings and grounds.
- Determine who is responsible for overseeing violence prevention strategies in your school.
- Encourage staff to provide input and feedback during the crisis planning process.
- Review incident data.
- Determine major problems in your school with regard to student crime and violence.
- Assess how the school addresses these problems.
- Conduct an assessment to determine how these problems – as well as others – may impact your vulnerability to certain crises.

Preparedness

The goal is to facilitate, through planning and training, a rapid, coordinated, effective response when a crisis occurs.

- Determine what crisis plans exist in the district, school, and community.

- Identify all stakeholders involved in crisis planning.
- Develop procedures for communicating with staff, students, families, and the media.
- Establish procedures to account for students during a crisis.
- Gather information about the school facility, such as maps and the location of utility shutoffs.
- Identify the necessary equipment that needs to be assembled to assist staff in a crisis.

“Preparing is a little like crying wolf. We proceed along with our drills but they’re not meaningful until an event happens. Then all those things we thought were trivial become critical and all those things we overlooked become glaring. We need to be prepared.”

– Superintendent

Response

The goal is to be able to identify if a crisis is occurring, categorize its type, and respond effectively and with confidence.

- Determine if a crisis is occurring.
- Identify the type of crisis that is occurring and determine the appropriate response.
- Activate the incident management system.
- Ascertain whether an evacuation, reverse evacuation, lockdown, or shelter-in-place needs to be implemented.
- Maintain communication among all relevant staff at officially designated locations.

- Establish what information needs to be communicated to staff, students, families, and the community.
- Monitor how emergency first aid is being administered to the injured.
- Decide if more equipment and supplies are needed.

Recovery

The goal is to respond effectively to the needs of the school and return to learning as quickly as possible. This includes both securing the building/facility infrastructure as well as providing emotional support for students, parents and staff.

- Strive to return to learning as quickly as possible.
- Restore the physical plant, as well as the school community.
- Monitor how staff members are assessing students for the emotional impact of the crisis.
- Identify what follow up interventions are available to students, staff, and first responders.
- Conduct debriefings with staff and first responders.
- Assess curricular activities that address the crisis.
- Allocate appropriate time for recovery.
- Plan how anniversaries of events will be commemorated.
- Capture “lessons learned” and incorporate them into revisions and trainings.

Source: Adapted from Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities, U.S. Department of Education, August 2004. For the full guide, visit: <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/crisisplanning.pdf>

Handling a Crisis

The first 30 minutes

The procedure followed in the first 30 minutes of a crisis is crucial to effectively dealing with the incident and in establishing how people perceive the crisis and their attitude about your actions. Here is a checklist to help you work through that crucial period. Your initial actions may vary depending on the crisis and its extent. Also, this is not a priority listing as many of these actions will need to happen simultaneously.

- Define the problem – verify the facts – don’t speculate.
- Implement the school chain-of-command.
- Implement your emergency response crisis management plan.
- Notify the principal.
- Notify the superintendent.
- Notify the crisis response team.
- Notify counselors and mental health resources.
- Notify staff and schedule information updates.
- Write an announcement for students.
- Inform students in individual classrooms – not large groups.
- Write a letter to parents that will be sent home with students at the end of the day explaining what happened, what is being done, available support and how they can help their children.
- Communicate with the news media. In an emergency, the quickest way to reach the greatest number of people in your community may be through the media.
- Post accurate information and updates about the incident and response on the district’s/school’s Web page.
- Notify the school board.

What if?

A popular teacher and coach was diagnosed with cancer last year and was in and out of school while receiving treatment. She came back this school year and said the cancer was in remission. Students, players and staff thought everything was fine. This past weekend, the teacher unexpectedly died due to the cancer.

- What reactions might you see among students, players and staff?
- What questions or concerns might they have?
- How will the school provide psychological first-aid?
- What information and tips for helping their children will be given to families?

“Children and youth rely on and find great comfort in the adults who protect them. Teachers and staff must know how to help their students through a crisis and return them home safely. Knowing what to do when faced with a crisis can be the difference between calm and chaos, between courage and fear, between life and death.”

*Practical Information on Crisis Planning,
U.S. Department of Education*

Test Your Emergency Response Plan

Schools should have emergency response materials in each classroom, such as information posted as to what to do in case of a fire, evacuation route and class roster; emergency supplies in a “grab and go” kit or garbage can; and a quick response emergency guide about what to do in case of a bomb threat, earthquake, intruder, hazardous material spill or power outage.

- ◆ What emergency response materials are “expected” to be in each classroom?
- ◆ Where are materials to be posted? Stored?
- ◆ Check each classroom to see if the “expected” materials are there.
- ◆ Based on what you find, what needs to be done so that your students and staff are prepared and ready to respond to emergencies?
- ◆ Develop an action plan and timeline to implement the necessary changes.

Be prepared to communicate under pressure

Communicating the nature of a crisis and what you're doing about it is an important part of dealing with a crisis. Remember, the person who speaks for the school or school district must be seen as a leader who is decisive and credible.

Here's a checklist of communications topics to consider before a crisis hits:

- Criteria for determining who (external and internal audiences) needs to know what and why. Consider and treat representatives of the news media as partners in handling a crisis.
- Assignment for who calls whom.
- List of communication channels that are appropriate for each type of crisis.
- Resources that may be needed such as counseling, transportation or public agency assistance and who to contact.
- Emergency contact lists with names and phone numbers.
- Access to appropriate communication devices such as maps, emergency procedures, evacuation routes and telephone lines.
- Someone who can assist with regular functions while you're involved with the crisis.
- A written plan distributed to all who have any type of responsibility when a crisis does hit.
- Help for your front-line phone people so that they understand the vital role they will play in an emergency. Show them how to be prepared to keep good records of media calls. Provide

them information about how to handle calls from the news media and families, and train them in how to deal with worried, upset and/or angry callers.

- A "fast facts" sheet for each school in the district that includes such information as:
 - School name, address and phone number and administrators' names and phone numbers;
 - Number of students and number of staff;
 - Grade levels included in the building; number of classrooms,
 - Age of building, special features of the school; and
 - Programs and achievements

that are prominent at the school.

- A complete list of the names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses for the contacts for all the support groups for each school. Parent support groups, neighborhood churches, youth groups who meet in your building, service clubs who volunteer, business partners — list the main contact person for any group that has connections to each school building.
- A complete list of the phone numbers and e-mail address for the key communicators for your district and for each school.

What if?

A student comes up to you and says another student brought a gun to school. What do you do?

Questions to consider:

- What is the code for a lockdown?
- What are you expected to do when the code is given?
- How do you know when the lockdown is over?

When working with the media

1. Be prepared.
2. Provide information as soon as you have it.
3. Anticipate questions.
4. Stay calm.
5. Be in control with short, direct answers.
6. Never say, "No comment."
(This can suggest that you are either uninformed or have something to hide. If you do not know the answer, it is better to say, "I don't know," than to be either evasive or give an incorrect answer.)
7. Don't speculate, but make sure reporters have as much information as possible so that they in turn won't speculate.
8. Say what you want to say, but don't be pushed into saying what the reporter wants you to say.
9. Before an interview, stop, check your appearance, reread your notes and take a deep breath.
10. Always be honest.

Helping children following a traumatic event

When a tragedy occurs, children may become scared, confused and experience disbelief. They are likely to be worried about their future and, most importantly, about their family and other significant people in their lives.

Following are some guidelines for dealing with children in the days and weeks following a traumatic event:

- ◆ Determine your child's risk for problems. Those most at risk are children who have some personal experience with the tragedy; may have been close to the area; have family or friends who have been hurt or killed; or have had previous mental health problems.
- ◆ Provide reassurance. Children will be affected by a parent's mood and reaction. Calm parents encourage calm in their children. Parents can show children that they too are sad but should temper their own intense emotions.
- ◆ Keep in mind that children's reactions depend upon their age, personality and coping style. Some children want to talk about the details, some are quiet and concerned, some may show an increase in their activity level, and some may prefer to get along with business as usual.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to talk about the tragedy. Start by finding out what the children already know and have seen. Listening to the children and answering their questions helps them deal with issues in their own way. Children are likely to be concerned about things of immediate importance, such as "Is school safe?" and "Can we still go visit Grandma?"

- ◆ Be truthful and honest in answers, using language the child can understand. Hiding information causes children to feel confused, reluctant to turn to adults for help and mistrustful of other information.
- ◆ Reassure the children of their safety and assure them that you and many others are working to make sure they are safe. Reassure them about practical issues in their own lives such as "Mom will still take you to school" and "The police and firefighters are putting out fires so we are safe."
- ◆ Have more than one conversation. A child's understanding and questions about difficult situations change over time. Be available and look for teachable moments for further exploration.

- ◆ Expect variations in a child's mood. Different reactions may occur as time passes and new events occur. The situation takes on new meaning as aspects of life may change for the short-term or forever.
- ◆ It is common for children to be more clingy, to be concerned about separation and to feel the need to be in close proximity to parents or even want to sleep with them. Consider how your own anxiety might be contributing to a child's fears. If sleeping together is allowed for the short term, it is helpful to return to normal bedtime routines as soon as possible.
- ◆ Working parents should make arrangements so that the child is not left alone after school during the time of the crisis.
- ◆ Be mindful of how issues are discussed with and

A special word to parents

Remember, as parents you may also be impacted by a tragedy, by concerns for your children or by being involved with helping during the crisis aftermath. While wanting to be strong and available to your children, be aware of the impact on you. Get support. If you don't take care of yourself, you won't be able to help your children.

- ◆ Allow and encourage expression in private ways, such as through journals or art.
- ◆ Maintain as much of a usual routine as possible. Familiarity is comforting to children and provides a sense of normalcy.
- ◆ Monitor exposure to media and limit access if necessary. Repeated viewing by young children can be confusing, causing them to believe that events are reoccurring. For older children overexposure can be overwhelming and leave them feeling helpless.

near children. Prejudice and violence should not be encouraged as ways to solve problems. Seeking to place blame or to exact revenge does not repair hurt feelings or sadness.

- ◆ Realize that children who have had difficulty before the crisis may show a re-emergence of their problems either temporarily or over time.
- ◆ Realize that children may be more vulnerable if other stresses, such as divorce or financial problems, were

(Continued on page 7.)

ESD 113 / June 2005

ESD 113 offers training in Critical Incident Stress Management/Debriefing:

Helping People and Schools Recover after Traumatic Events

When trauma happens, what do you do? How do you help those impacted?

Schools are not immune to trauma and the disruption that follows. Knowing what to do when traumatic events occur and how to provide psychological first-aid makes a difference helping students, staff and parents recover.

To increase your competency and comfort in responding to traumatic events and supporting those impacted, the ESD 113 Student Assistance and Treatment program offers an intensive training called Critical Incident Stress Management/Debriefing. Learn how to anticipate the impact and plan your response. Help people talk about the event and identify resources and coping skills using a facilitated process called Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD). The instructor is Michael Discus, ESD 113 emergency response and crisis management consultant.

CISD has been used with schools, emergency services

personnel, businesses, banks, social service agencies and government organizations. This training is for counselors, administrators, intervention specialists, psychologists, nurses, teachers, school safety teams and student assistance teams.

Participants in the CISD workshop learn how to:

- ◆ Define a critical incident and potential impact;
- ◆ Identify signs of acute stress reaction;
- ◆ Diagram an incident, anticipate responses, identify relationships and plan support;
- ◆ Use a seven-phase facilitated process to help people discuss their thoughts, reactions, stress and support;
- ◆ Differentiate objective reality from subjective experience;
- ◆ Know what to say or do, and what not to say or do; and

- ◆ Support school crisis responders.

Quotes from participants

“I found this training so valuable in giving me a foundation of how to respond even though I have been counseling for 11 years. Thank you!”

“One of the most valuable trainings I’ve had. In this world of disasters, every school district needs to be prepared for the unthinkable. Michael gives you the tools.”

“I have been hired to develop the crisis intervention plan for the district and this outlines the debriefing process so perfectly. I can apply this CISD process to every crisis that comes my way as a counselor.”

“I’m much better prepared to work with a school tragedy as a result of this workshop.”

For information about the CISD training, contact the ESD 113 Student Assistance & Treatment Program: Rob Vincent, director, at rvincent@esd113.k12.wa.us or (360) 586-4037 or Jan Hansen, secretary, at jhansen@esd113.k12.wa.us or (360) 586-4040.

Helping children...

(Continued from page 6.)

occurring in the family prior to the crisis. They may need extra support and reassurance to feel in control.

- ◆ Attend to the children’s and family’s basic physical and mental health needs. Eating, sleeping and participating in enjoyable activities are necessary and beneficial.
- ◆ Facilitate collecting of keepsakes and mementos.
- ◆ Support a child’s preference for public and private participation in memorial rituals, activities, services and activities seeking donations of time and money.

- ◆ Stay involved in the children’s lives and monitor their adjustment over time. If you are concerned about your child, issues should be explored further with a counselor or mental health professional.
- ◆ Use available community, school, social and religious support networks and services.

From “Caring for Kids After Trauma and Death,” The Institute for Trauma and Stress at The NYU Child Study Center, 2002. For a copy of the booklet, visit http://www.aboutourkids.org/aboutour/articles/crisis_guide02.pdf. Share these tips with the families of your students and with school staff members.

“Schools are not immune to critical incidents and the disruption that follows. Natural disaster, motor vehicle accident, suicide, fire, vandalism, rape, shooting, robbery, terminal illness – it’s not a question of if such events will happen, but when.”

Michael Discus, ESD 113 Emergency Response Crisis Management Consultant/Trainer

The Media & Bad News

Both print and electronic media seem to thrive on bad news. As far as they're concerned, the routine operation of a school district is the norm. That isn't news. News is the unusual occurrence, an emergency or crisis. By taking time to plan before a crisis, you'll be able to deal with the news media more effectively.

- ◆ Review district policies and procedures pertaining to allowing reporters access to students and classrooms. Protect your students' and staff members' right to not have the school day unduly interrupted.
- ◆ Make it easy for reporters to get in touch with a designated spokesperson.
- ◆ Know what is public information, and what isn't.
- ◆ Include in your crisis plan:
 - Who is responsible for coordinating media information in a crisis?
 - How is information fed to the coordinator — and when?
 - Who is the district spokesperson? How does that responsibility change if someone is not available? (Do all with this responsibility know what to do?)
 - How will communications be coordinated with law enforcement or emergency service agencies?
- ◆ Cultivate trust with the reporters who regularly cover your school district.

When the crisis hits...

Look at the crisis or bad news as an opportunity to establish or strengthen positive ties with the media.

- ◆ If you are aware of a potentially negative situation, consider going on the offensive by telling the reporters before it becomes public. This gives you

an opportunity to manage the situation more effectively.

- ◆ “Take five” to figure out the simple message you want to communicate and key all of your comments to meeting that objective.
- ◆ As soon as possible, put together a fact sheet.
- ◆ Be available!
- ◆ Never lie.
- ◆ Be able to deliver your most salient points in 45 seconds or less. Make every word count.
- ◆ Answer questions fully, but don't get lulled in to offering more information than you want by a reporter's silence.
- ◆ If necessary, write out all statements to be released in connection with the crisis. Don't ad lib or speak on the record without referring to the statement.
- ◆ If you want to get the same information to all media, call a quick news conference.
- ◆ Keep people within your district well briefed. Don't let them read about it in the newspapers before they hear it from you, if possible.
- ◆ If you don't have an answer, say so. But get back as soon as possible with the answer.

- ◆ Admit it when you make a mistake or the district goofs and then explain what you're doing to rectify the problem.
- ◆ Provide regular updates of information.
- ◆ Get as much information out as possible. The less people know, the more they speculate.
- ◆ Do not offer personal opinions on or off the record.
- ◆ Be wary of taking reporters into your confidence. Even if you make comments “off the record,” a reporter can put it “on the record” if he or she can extract the same information from someone else.
- ◆ Instruct your staff to never — repeat, never — transfer a reporter's call from one phone to another and then to another. If necessary, take a reporter's phone number and deadline information and then have the appropriate person return the call as soon as possible.
- ◆ While you can tell a reporter what's important to you, never presume to suggest how a story should be slanted.
- ◆ Never ask a reporter to see a story before it is printed.
- ◆ Avoid saying “no comment.” Have some kind of answer or comment to make.

Your first response

When a crisis hits, your first response to the news media should:

- ✓ **Acknowledge the crisis.** (Avoid details since you probably have not had time to gather all of the facts.)
- ✓ **Express concern** for those affected.
- ✓ **Describe the immediate actions** being taken by the district or school. (If all you can say is that you are gathering facts, then that's all you should say. In some situations, you can say that you are working with local emergency services groups.)
- ✓ **State when you expect to have more information** and how you will get that information to the news media.

Suggestions for educators

Meeting the needs of students

In the aftermath of a crisis or traumatic event, everyone involved in education faces a great challenge: helping our children to feel safe and secure.

There may be children whose lives have been directly affected by the event and will never be the same. Children may see terrifying images on television and the Internet. They may be reading newspapers or have heard stories on the radio about the crisis and its aftermath.

Advice for principals

- Evaluate the counseling resources you have on campus and consider what services and assistance may be available in your community. If you need help with counseling, faith-based and community organizations can help.
- Meet with the faculty of your school as a group and individually. Many of your teachers and staff may be feeling stress and anxiety, and your leadership can help to comfort them and build a strong sense of camaraderie that will assist them in meeting the needs of their students.
- Encourage teachers to listen to the questions and concerns of their students, and to answer their questions honestly with age-appropriate facts. Remind them that they can overwhelm young children with too much information.
- Share suggestions with your faculty about how to discuss a crisis with the students in their classrooms, and how to look for signs of distress or special needs so they know where to direct extra help.

- Spend time walking through your building and visiting classrooms. This leadership activity strongly reduces anxiety of both your teachers and students.

Advice for teachers

- Listen to your students and watch their behavior. Sometimes the quietest child may be the most frightened. Some children may daydream or have trouble concentrating on their schoolwork. Some may act out. Others may be just fine.
- Take the time to reassure your students that their homes and schools are likely to be safe places. Show them that their school is functioning normally, and tell them that their government is working and that it will continue to protect them.
- Help students discuss the known facts and separate fact from rumor. Avoid speculating or exaggerating graphic details. Try not to be an alarmist.
- Incidents may occur where children of a specific nationality or culture are threatened or taunted. This is an excellent opportunity to help children understand that most individuals who are from other countries are fine and good people who live in and love the United States as much as they do and that one should make judgments on an individual basis.
- Maintain structure and stability through the daily schedule and engage in classroom activities that do not focus on the recent

crisis. Children are comforted by their normal routine, and “back-to-normal” activities will help them.

- Remember that the images on television may be frightening, even to adults. Reduce or eliminate the presence of television in the classroom.
- If the situation is a national crisis, remind your students about the value of living in a country that respects individual liberty and the rule of law. Talk about the principles that led to the independence of our country, and why they are still important today.
- Engage in activities that give your students comfort. For example, say the Pledge of Allegiance, sing patriotic songs, or read books about courage.
- Encourage your students to participate in constructive activities relative to the tragedy. They can write notes to those in mourning or write about acts of courage or bravery. Give them the opportunity to come up with ideas about how they can help those in need.
- Teachers can also take care of themselves and their colleagues. Though some will show it more than others, teachers will feel the effects of a crisis or emergency just as their students do.

Source: U.S. Department of Education. For more information about meeting the needs of students during a crisis, visit their Web site at <http://www.ed.gov>.

Tips for school employees

How to help yourself & your family

There are a number of steps you can take to help restore emotional well being and a sense of control following a traumatic experience, including the following:

- ◆ Give yourself time to heal. Anticipate that this will be a difficult time in your life. Allow yourself to mourn the losses you have experienced. Try to be patient with changes in your emotional state.
- ◆ Ask for support from people who care about you and who will listen and empathize with your situation. But keep in mind that your typical support system may be weakened if those who are close to you also have experienced or witnessed the trauma.
- ◆ Communicate your experience in whatever ways feel comfortable to you – such as by talking with family or close friends, or keeping a diary.
- ◆ Find out about local support groups that often are available such as for those who have suffered from natural disasters, or for women who are victims of rape. These can be especially helpful for people with limited personal support systems.
- ◆ Try to find groups led by appropriately trained and experienced professionals. Group discussion can help people realize that other individuals in the same circumstances often have similar reactions and emotions.
- ◆ Engage in healthy behaviors to enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress. Eat well-balanced meals and get plenty of rest. If you experience ongoing difficulties with sleep, you may be able to find some

relief through relaxation techniques. Avoid alcohol and drugs.

- ◆ Establish or reestablish routines such as eating meals at regular times and following an exercise program.
- ◆ Take some time off from the demands of daily life by pursuing hobbies or other enjoyable activities.
- ◆ Avoid major life decisions such as switching careers or jobs if possible because these activities tend to be highly stressful.

Source: American Psychological Association. More information is available from their Web site at <http://www.apa.org>.

Share these tips with teachers as well as the support staff at your school or district.

Ready-to-print guides for families

The Injury Prevention Program of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has prepared a two-page guide to help families prepare for a disaster. They suggest that families get together and follow four steps to safety readiness.

The AAP has also prepared a 35-page Family Readiness Kit for families to use at home to help prepare for most kinds of disasters. Print copies of these publications to share with the families of the students in your school or district, or encourage families to visit the Web sites for a copy.

For a printable version of the two-page guide, visit the AAP Web site at <http://www.aap.org/family/frk/aapfrk8.pdf>.

For a printable version of the 35-page Family Readiness Kit, visit <http://www.aap.org/family/frk/frkit.htm>.

What if?

The school day has just ended. Students are boarding buses or leaving in private cars. In full view of most of the students, a 6-year-old student is struck by a car and suffers massive head trauma. Students, parents and staff are in shock. Some seem to be “frozen,” some are screaming for help, others are crying. Bus drivers are unsure about whether to take students home or not.

Given your role, what do you do?

If discussing this scenario during a staff meeting, ask participants to consider what to do if other details are added, such as:

- The driver of the car is a high school junior picking up his brother.
- Emergency personnel arrive, provide medical care and pronounce the student dead at the scene.
- Reporters arrive and begins filming and interviewing people.
- You’re asked what the plan is to support students, staff, parents.
- Later, students want to plant a tree in memory of the student that died.

Tips for families

How to take care of your children's needs

The intense anxiety and fear that often follow a disaster or other traumatic event can be especially troubling for children. Some may regress and demonstrate younger behaviors

“There are thousands of fires in schools every year, yet there is minimal damage to life and property because staff and students are prepared. This preparedness needs to be extended to all risks schools face. Schools and districts need to be ready to handle crises, large and small, to keep our children and staff out of harm’s way and ready to learn and teach.”

*Practical Information on Crisis Planning,
U.S. Department of Education*

such as thumb sucking or bed wetting.

Children may be more prone to nightmares and fear of sleeping alone. Performance in school may suffer. Other changes in behavior patterns may include throwing tantrums more frequently, or withdrawing and becoming more solitary.

There are several things parents and others who care for children can do to help alleviate the emotional consequences of trauma, including the following:

- ◆ Spend more time with children and let them be more dependent on you during the months following the trauma – for example, allowing your children to cling to you more often than usual. Physical affection is very comforting to children who have experienced trauma.

- ◆ Provide play experiences to help relieve tension. Younger children in particular may find it easier to share their ideas and feelings about the event through non-verbal activities such as drawing.
- ◆ Encourage older children to speak with you, and with one another, about their thoughts and feelings. This helps reduce their confusion and anxiety related to the trauma. Respond to questions in terms they can comprehend. Reassure them repeatedly that you care about them and that you understand their fears and concerns.
- ◆ Keep regular schedules for activities, such as eating, playing and going to bed, to help restore a sense of security and normalcy.

Source: American Psychological Association. More information is available from their Web site at <http://www.apa.org>.

What is a critical incident?

How do people react?

A critical incident is any event that has the potential to cause psychological and physical distress in those involved in or connected to the incident.

People react differently to critical incidents. Reactions are influenced by the amount of warning before the incident, whether they are directly involved in it, the closeness to those injured or killed, age, gender, culture, race, past experience, and current losses. Reactions may happen during the event, immediately after the event or be delayed. People may feel overwhelmed, out of control or as if they are going crazy. They may experience physical, mental, emotional, behavioral and spiritual reactions. This does not mean weakness or failure.

If not recognized and managed, reactions can interfere with a person’s ability to function and affect his or her relationships and health. Thus an important part of recovery is educating people about a critical incident so they recognize and understand their reactions and those of others.

Discuss coping skills and resources for support. Contact a physician for medical attention or a mental health professional for therapy.

For training on Critical Incident Stress Management/Debriefing contact Rob Vincent, director of the ESD 113 Student Assistance & Treatment Program, at rvincent@esd113.k12.wa.us or (360) 586-4040.

“You cannot afford to wait until the day of an emergency/crisis to start developing a response plan or relationships. To prepare for emergencies, schools need to establish an emergency response plan: a comprehensive, detailed, and organized process for responding to, managing, and resolving a situation.”

Ed Clarke, director, Dept. of School Safety and Security, Montgomery Co. (MD) Public Schools, and author of “Impact of the Oct. 2002 Sniper Shootings on the Montgomery County Public Schools”

County Emergency Resources

Contact the emergency management group in your county to help strengthen your district and school emergency response crisis management plans.

Here are ways you can work with them:

1. Attend a County Emergency Management Planning Team meeting to build a relationship with community partners. (The team may be called something different in each county.)
2. Obtain a copy of your County Emergency Management Plan.
3. Ask for help reviewing your district/school emergency response crisis management plans.
4. Ask for help with planning and conducting drills.
5. Inquire about providing training like Incident Command System.

A Closer Look is a periodic publication of Educational Service District 113.

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Dept. of Public Services
Emergency & Risk Management Division
310 W. Spruce, Suite 212
Montesano, WA 98563
(360) 249-3911
<http://www.co.grays-harbor.wa.us/info/DEM/>

Lewis County Sheriff's Office

Division of Emergency Management
350 N. Market Blvd.
Chehalis, WA 98532
(360) 740-1151
<http://www.co.lewis.wa.us/Sheriff/DEM/DEM.htm>

Mason County Sheriff

Emergency Management Division
410 W. Business Park Road
Sanderson Industrial Complex
Shelton, WA 98584
(360) 427-7535
<http://so.co.mason.wa.us/emergman>

Pacific County Emergency Management Agency

300 Memorial Drive
South Bend, WA 98586
(360) 875-9340 or (360) 642-9340
<http://www.co.pacific.wa.us/pcema/>

Thurston County Emergency Management

2703 Pacific Ave. SE, Suite B
Olympia, WA 98501
360-754-3360
<http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/em/>

"Schools need to plan and prepare how they will respond to help students, staff, parents. Safety and psychological first-aid are not electives – they are core curriculum. How confident and effective will you be if you use a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants approach?"

Michael Discus, ESD 113 Emergency Response Crisis Management Consultant/Trainer

Web Resources

- ◆ OSPI School Safety Center
<http://www.k12.wa.us/safetycenter>
- ◆ U.S. Department of Education
<http://www.ed.gov/emergencyplan>
- ◆ READY.GOV
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
<http://www.ready.gov>
- ◆ Federal Emergency Management Agency
FEMA for Kids
<http://www.fema.gov/kids/>
- ◆ National Education Association
<http://www.nea.org/crisis/>
- ◆ National Center for Child Traumatic Stress
<http://www.nctsn.org>
- ◆ National Center for Children Exposed to Violence
<http://www.ncccev.org>
- ◆ Crisis Management Institute
<http://www.cmionline.org>
- ◆ Resources for bereaved families & professional caregivers
<http://www.griefwatch.com>
- ◆ National Organization For Victim Assistance
<http://www.try-nova.org>
- ◆ International Critical Incident Stress Foundation
<http://www.icisf.org>
- ◆ National Association School Psychologists (NASP) Crisis & Safety
<http://www.naspcenter.org>
- ◆ American Red Cross
<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster>