



## ACTION STEPS

**Expect to be surprised.** Regardless of how much time and effort was spent on crisis planning, the members of the crisis team should know that there will always be an element of surprise and accompanying confusion when a school is confronted with a crisis.

**Assess the situation and choose the appropriate response.** Following the plan requires a very quick but careful assessment of the situation. Determine whether a crisis exists and if so, the type of crisis, the location, and the magnitude. Because the team has practiced the plan, leaders are ready to make these decisions. After basic protective steps are in place, more information can be gathered to adjust later responses.

**Respond within seconds.** When a crisis actually happens, make the basic decisions about what type of action is needed and respond within seconds. An immediate, appropriate response depends on a plan with clearly articulated roles and responsibilities, as well as training and practice. With proper training, district and school staff and students will respond appropriately within seconds.

**Notify appropriate emergency responders and the school crisis response team.** One common mistake is to delay calling emergency responders, such as the police or fire departments. In the midst of a crisis, people often believe that the situation can be handled in-house. It is better to have emergency responders on the scene as soon as possible, even if the incident has been resolved by the time they arrive, than to delay calling and risk further injury and damage. For instance,

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it is better to have emergency responders arrive at a school to find a fire put out than to arrive too late to prevent loss of life or serious property damage.

Notifying a district's or school's crisis team allows them to begin the necessary measures to protect the safety of all persons involved. Unless informed otherwise by the incident commander, school crisis team members should proceed with their responsibilities.

**Evacuate or lock down the school as appropriate.**

This step is crucial and should be one of the first decisions made, regardless of the order in which initial decisions are implemented.

**Triage injuries and provide emergency first aid to those who need it.**

The plan should assign emergency medical services personnel and school staff with relevant qualifications to determine who needs emergency first aid. Designate a location for EMS to treat the seriously injured on the scene.

**Keep supplies nearby and organized at all times.**

If you move to another location, remember to take your supplies with you. Monitor the amount of supplies and replace them as needed.

**Trust leadership.**

Trust the internal crisis team members and external emergency responders who have been trained to deal with crises. Trust will help calm the situation and minimize the chaos that may occur during a crisis.

During a crisis, leaders need to project a calm, confident, and serious attitude to assure people of the seriousness of the situation and the wisdom of the directions being given. This leadership style will help all involved to respond in a similarly calm and confident manner, as well as helping to mitigate the reactions of anyone who might deny that a crisis has occurred.

In certain situations it may be necessary to yield leadership to others in the plan's designated command structure. In some jurisdictions laws state the protocol for the command structure. This structure may vary from state to state and even from community to community within state. For instance, in a fire, the expertise of firefighters should lead the way, with others filling designated roles such as manager of family-student reunification.

**Communicate accurate and appropriate information.**

During a crisis, districts and schools will communicate with the school community as well as the community at large. Use the channels of communication identified in the plan. For instance, all information released to the media and public should be funneled through a single public information officer or appointed spokesperson. This will maximize the likelihood of presenting consistent and accurate information to the public.

The crisis team should communicate regularly with staff who are managing students. A school's most important responsibility, the safety of the students entrusted to the school by their families, cannot be fulfilled during a crisis without timely and accurate information to those caring for students.

At a minimum, families need to know that a crisis has occurred and that all possible steps are being taken to see to the safety of their children. Additional details about assembly and shelter procedures may also be

provided, as determined by the plan or those managing the crisis. At some point, families will also need to know when and where their children will be released.

**Activate the student release system.** Always keep in mind that the earliest possible safe release of students is a desired goal. Often student release will be accomplished before complete resolution of a crisis.

**Allow for flexibility in implementing the crisis plan.** It is impossible for any crisis plan, no matter how complete, to address every situation that may arise during a crisis. With proper training and practice, emergency responders and staff will be able to respond appropriately and to adapt the school crisis plans to the situation.

**Documentation.** Write down every action taken during the response. This will provide a record of appropriate implementation of the crisis plan. Also necessary is recording damage for insurance purposes and tracking financial expenditures related to the incident. Keep all original notes and records. These are legal documents.

