

## Assist in School Emergencies

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Every day 53,000,000 plus children—20 percent of the total US population—attend school or day care<sup>1</sup>. Keeping children safe and healthy during school hours is central to the mission of each school district. As a parent/caregiver, you have a key role in helping your school district deal with child safety.

The way each community uses “crisis” depends upon their own history, culture, and way of doing business. An emergency is generally thought to be any situation that requires an immediate police, fire, or medical response to preserve life or property. Emergencies include a serious injury or illness (e.g., loss of consciousness, difficulty breathing, severe pain or bleeding), a fire, a chemical spill, a drowning, a fight, an assault or immediate danger of assault, a crime in progress, a situation involving weapons, a suicide attempt, etc.

Whether the incident is an unexpected event that can be managed by using existing resources and capabilities, or one that is considered a disaster—an incident that requires an increased level of response beyond the routine operative procedures, including increased personnel, equipment, or supply requirements—parents/caregivers, local responders, and school personnel must work cooperatively to:

- **Mitigate/Prevent:** Form partnerships with the entire community to assist school personnel in reducing the risk to life and property.
- **Prepare:** Plan for and practice putting strategies in place, including training staff and students and developing crisis response procedures
- **Respond:** Each partner (school, local responders, parents/caregivers, media, medical staff, community counselors/faith-based groups) implements their responsibilities to strategically and effectively address any emergency or crisis; and
- **Recover:** Restore the learning environment, both physically and emotionally after a crisis.

“Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2011” (National Center for Education Statistics) reported “that 83% of public schools *reported no serious violent crime*; 13% of public schools reported at least one violent incident to the police. The rate of serious violent

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<sup>1</sup> National Strategy Forum, 2003, pg 4.

crime at school was 4 (per 1,000 students) compared to a rate of 8 away from school. Of the students in grades 9–12, 8% reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property. Ten percent of males and 5% of females reported an incident with a weapon. Between 1993 and 2009, the percentages of students carrying a weapon at least one day onto school property declined from 12% to 6%. Almost a third (31%) of the students reporting being in a physical fight sometime during the previous year versus 11% who reported being in a physical fight on school property. Within city schools only 10% of teachers reported being threatened with injury (5% said they had been attacked by a student), compared to just 6% in rural or suburban schools.”

The report further notes that “These numbers completely contradict the beliefs among the general population, law enforcement, and politicians that public schools have become “war zones” or anything approaching that description.... Between 1993 and 2009, the percentages of students carrying a weapon at least one day onto school property declined from 12% to 6%. Almost a third (31%) of the students reporting being in a physical fight sometime during the previous year versus 11% who reported being in a physical fight on school property. Within city schools only 10% of teachers reported being threatened with injury (5% said they had been attacked by a student), compared to just 6% in rural or suburban schools.”

### **Teach Safety at Home**

There are several ways parents/caregivers can help their child be safe at school. Perhaps one of the most important ways is to model how to treat others with kindness and respect. Following are some other techniques suggested on the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website, [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov).

- ✚ Help your child understand bullying. Talk about what bullying is and how to stand up to it safely.
- ✚ Listen to your child. One of the best times to do that is at the dinner table. Tell each other about the day. Ask about their friends, their homework, their feelings.
- ✚ Instruct your child to seek help from school staff when they see others being bullied or if they are being bullied themselves.
- ✚ Talk to your child about strangers near the school or who might be hanging out around the bus stops. Encourage your child to walk in groups.
- ✚ Monitor internet activity, especially social networking sites. Educate your child on internet safety.
- ✚ Educate your child on school emergencies and common response actions. Reassure them that reunification with family will occur as soon as it is safe.
- ✚ If a fellow classmate is hurt, killed, or dies, help your child through the grieving process.

## Common Response Actions

During a crisis, your school's emergency response plan will have precise procedures for the following types of emergency response:

- + Lock Down
- + Evacuation
- + Shelter-In-Place
- + Room Clear
- + Bomb Threat
- + Drop, Cover, Hold
- + CBRN Shelter in Place
- + Relocating Students
- + Releasing Students
- + Blood Borne Pathogens

See "Resources" below for a description of these response actions.

Following are a list of things you can do related to each of the four stages of emergency management:

### ***Mitigate/Prevent:***

- + Know the behavioral expectations for children while they are in school as well as the consequences for non-compliance. Talk to your child about the importance of these rules for everyone's safety.
- + Suggest that your school conduct safety audits and other ways to monitor safety-related areas including the social and emotional climate.
- + Encourage building a culture of respect and responsibility.
- + Observe your child with their peers. Watch for clues that your child or their friend is troubled. If you suspect your child or one of their friends is being bullied, speak to your child about it. If necessary, speak also to the assistant principal about it.
- + Help establish front porch observers—parents and grandparents of children in the school—who are home and can watch children walking to and from bus stops. Report any suspicious behavior to the assistant principal, and if necessary the police.
- + Monitor your child's internet involvement to ensure your child's protection. See resources below for information on cyber bullying, and also human trafficking.

### ***Prepare:***

- + Volunteer to work with the community group planning for school safety procedures and protocol. Parental input into things such as visitor check-ins, locking doors during school hours, and conducting background checks for all staff including subs strengthen the plans for the school.

- ✚ Help the school distribute information on your school's safety procedures and protocol to other parents in the neighborhood who have children in the school.
- ✚ Advise your school of any health concerns your child may have, and enable your school's teacher with the resources they need to provide aid to your child in the event of an event where they must shelter-in-place.

***Response:***

- ✚ Adhere to the school's emergency management plan. This includes picking your child up from school. There will be a reunification or student release process established during the planning phase. This process usually involves: 1) determining the time when students can be released safely; 2) establishing a safe location to release students to the parent's care; and 3) requiring a photo ID or other identification for picking up a student. These procedures are intended to keep your child safe.

***Recover:***

- ✚ Help your child understand the situation. Learn warning signs of extreme distress over a crisis (such as a suicide or homicide of a classmate) and seek medical help for your child.

**Parent Child Reunification Process**

If you hear there is a crisis at school, don't panic. Monitor your email, phone, and other methods the school has set up for emergency contact. Check to see where the reunification center is for your school, and go there when notified. Release may not occur immediately. Release must be done carefully, so organization is important. If you have questions, contact the district office rather than the school. The district office will have been in contact with the school and have the information you need. When parents deluge the school's phone system with calls, it can impair the emergency management process. Make sure to take photo ID when you go to the reunification site.

As hard as it might be to stay away from the school during an emergency situation, in most cases it is the best thing you can do to help keep the children safe. When it is determined by the Incident Commander to be safe enough to release students, all students will be released to their emergency contact person. Following is a common procedure:

- ✚ A designated location is always established for parents to reunite with their children following an emergency. This may be the school or another location in cases where the school building was evacuated.
- ✚ At the reunification site, school administrators and police and fire officials account for students and provide aide to those who need it immediately.
- ✚ Students are released only to authorized individuals listed on their School Emergency Card who show proper identification.

- ✚ Following a school crisis, specially trained school and district crisis team members and social workers are available to provide counseling and outside referrals to students, staff members and others who may need it.

## **Coping with the Aftermath**

Trauma in childhood can be devastating. When children witness or are involved in a scary situation, they need time to process and heal. Families often turn to faith-based leaders and community counselors for assistance during these times. The school counselor or social worker can help to identify those community resources for your family.

During these times, children need parents/caregivers to be more patient and tolerant than ever. They need to feel the security of their family/home. Maintaining usual routines, limiting chaos in the household, and seeking professional help if necessary are some things you can do to help your child overcome the distress they feel following a traumatic event.

## **Resources**

### **Bullying**

<http://www.stopbullying.gov/prevention/talking-about-it/index.html>

### **School Crime**

- ✚ National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences: School Crime, <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=49>
- ✚ National Insittute of Justice, <http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/school-crime/welcome.htm>

General Steps to Follow in Multiple Response Actions  
[insert pdf here]

U.S. Department of Education Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools,  
Technical Assistance Center  
[http://rems.ed.gov/index.php?page=resources\\_Repository\\_Browse](http://rems.ed.gov/index.php?page=resources_Repository_Browse)

### **Ohio Department of Health**

<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/en/healthpreparedness/emergencypreparedness.aspx>

Federal and Ohio Emergency Management Agencies and Materials

<http://www.ready.gov/>

<http://www.ready.Ohio.gov/>

<http://ema.ohio.gov/>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Disaster Kit  
<http://store.samhsa.gov/product/SAMHSA-Disaster-Kit/SMA11-DISASTER>