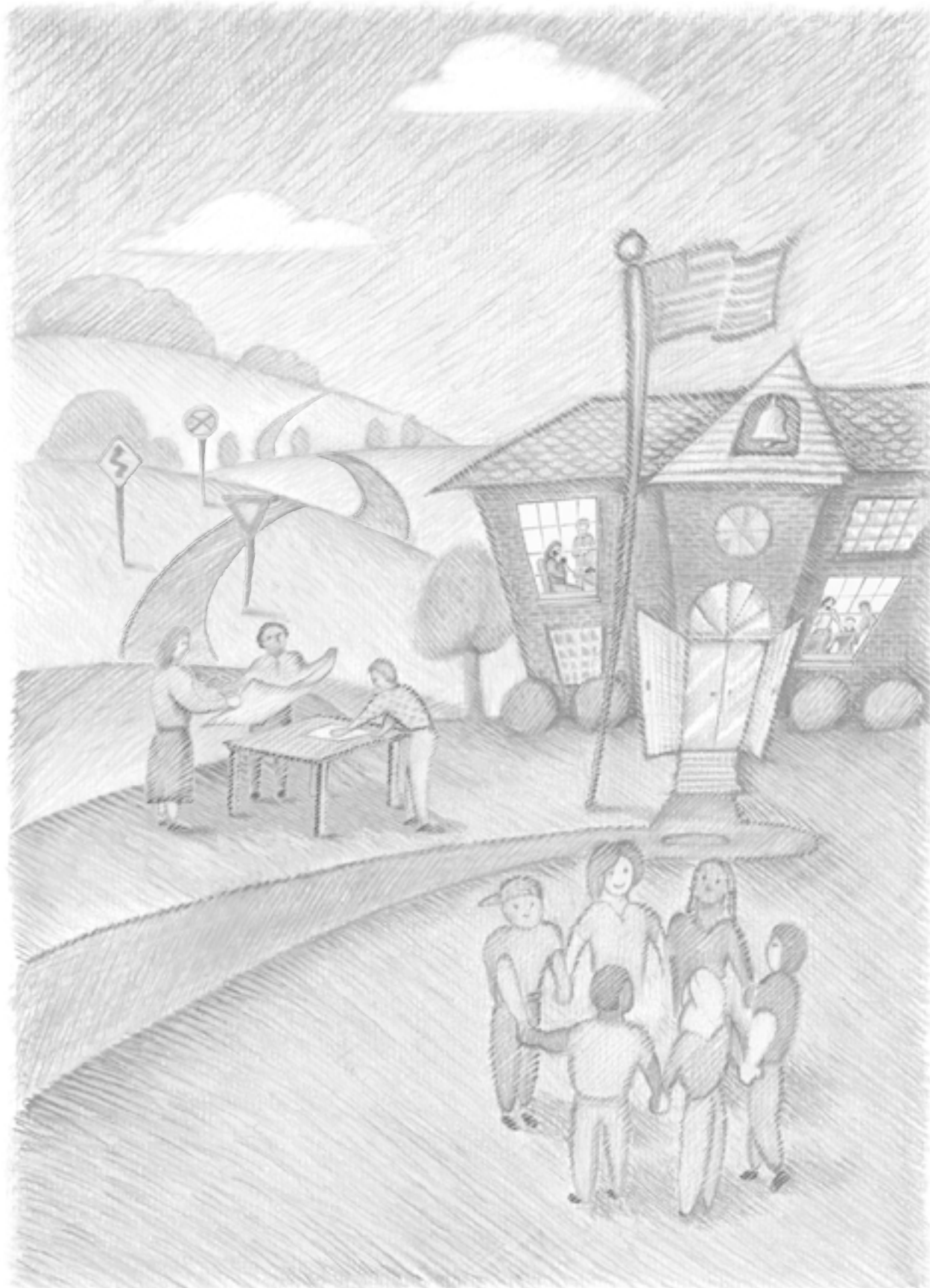


HANDS-ON ASSISTANCE — **TOOLS** FOR EDUCATORS



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HANDS-ON ASSISTANCE — **TOOLS** FOR EDUCATORS
NEA CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE & TOOLKIT

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE & TOOLKIT



NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

National Education Association

The National Education Association (NEA) was founded in 1857 to “advance the interest of the profession of teaching and to promote the cause of education in the United States.” With nearly 2.5 million members, NEA is the nation’s largest professional employee organization. It is also a leader in school reform, seeking a quality education for all children in safe schools where they can learn the basics, practice values such as responsibility and teamwork, and prepare for the jobs of the future.

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The NEA Crisis Communications Guide and Toolkit was prepared by Rebecca Fleischauer in NEA Communications with assistance from Richard Verdugo from NEA’s Human and Civil Rights unit and Jerald Newberry, Executive Director of NEA’s Health Information Network. For more information about the Guide and Toolkit, please contact NEA Communications at 202-822-7200.

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Hands-On Assistance—Tools For Educators

Book 4 of 4 in the NEA Crisis Communications Guide and Toolkit



THE FOLLOWING TOOLS INCLUDE SAMPLES, TEMPLATES, and ready-to-copy fact sheets to help respond to a broad array of crises. Review the contents and use the resources to create your own “ready” files.

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NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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Don Cameron, Executive Director

Dear Friend,

Over the years, a series of extraordinary events brought severe trauma to many of our members, the students they teach, and the communities they serve. These human and natural disasters have proven that schools are not immune from tragedy and children are not spared from unspeakable suffering.

Yet this adversity has also proven something more important — the perseverance and positive will of school communities. Countless school staff, students and parents have refused to give in to despair and cynicism and let fear win. For the sake of children and their future, they have declared "Yes we can," and "Yes we will heal, hope, and triumph." I am so proud of their determination and will.

Those of us who have dedicated our lives to teaching and helping children, know that as an association we must do all we can to honor and sanctify their experience. We must do all we can to encourage children to heal and grow and to extend their hands to others who are suffering. This guide and toolkit aims to provide such a service. I pray that it will never be needed, but take some comfort in knowing it is there.

This Crisis Communication Guide and Toolkit has been developed and produced in honor of the victims and survivors of school tragedies. Each tip, resource, idea, and example emanate from those who have "been there" and want others to benefit from their experience. The National Education Association is enormously grateful for the generosity shown by so many who have shared their best practices in crisis response. I believe we are all better educators and human beings for having the benefit of their wisdom and inspiration.

I especially wish to thank Dexter Meyer, Jeanne Beyer, Deborah Fallin, Jane Goff, Jim Hodges, Phil Moeckli, Marty Bull, Jane Hammond, Jon DeStefano, Rick Kaufman, Marilyn Saltzman, Christian Anderson, Debbie Benfield, Valerie Preston, Myra Reichart, Kevin Pearson, Michelle Pollok, Cynthia Menzel, the National Association of School Psychologists, Gary Marx, and many others who have enriched this guide with their insights.

With deep gratitude,

Bob Chase
President



Introduction

THE NEA CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE AND TOOLKIT provides resources to empower members facing crises and to guide their school communities toward hope, healing, and renewal.

A substantial body of knowledge and experience is available about crisis response. Our colleagues in states who have experienced crisis firsthand have been extraordinarily generous in sharing their experience. This guide was drafted with the direct input of state and local association staff who want others to benefit from the difficult lessons they've learned.

A crisis is perhaps the ultimate “teachable moment.” The Chinese symbol for crisis means “opportunity blowing on an ill wind.” As educators, our members are uniquely qualified to promote opportunities for learning and growth.

This guide can help members achieve three basic objectives:

- to improve your organization’s ability to respond in a crisis by supporting planning and preparation,
- to come to the immediate aid of affected and vulnerable students, staff, and community members, and
- to vigorously advocate for children and school staff in healing and rebuilding.

This crisis guide and toolkit can be used in many ways. It can be a resource to be consulted, as you need it. It can be the basis for revising your district’s own crisis manual. It can guide you in conducting practice and drill sessions. And it can assist you in customizing resources for your association’s ready file (on paper and disk).

As an association member, you are not likely to have primary responsibility for crisis management. School district administrators, law enforcement, and rescue personnel are in charge in a crisis. However, the association has an important role to play and can act as a powerful agent for healing in your school communities.

The resources provided in this guide and toolkit can help identify communication opportunities to promote growth and healing. Using these resources, the association can help support or take the lead in providing care depending on need and circumstance.

Icons Used Throughout this Guide



Take Action

A step to take or action to perform



Get Assistance

Contact information or reference materials



State Example

Real-world examples from state associations who've weathered crisis



Remember

Important ideas to note

Tool

References on how to use the tools in book 4

*'Hope' is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul —
And sings the tune without words
And never stops — at all.*

— EMILY DICKINSON

Tool I—School Safety Checklist

Tool for Educators



About the Tool

Give your school a thorough safety inspection. Use this checklist as a guideline to determine your school's strengths and weaknesses. Pay particular attention to school staff training and the security of school buildings and grounds.

WORK WITH STUDENTS

- ☐ Schools should establish an environment conducive to learning by promoting respect for others.
- ☐ Assistance should be available to troubled students, and staff should be trained to identify early warning signs of violent behavior. Check your school's counselor-student ratio. Counselors and other professionals should have time to work with students who may be troubled.
- ☐ Schools should provide anger management and peer mediation training for students.

EMPOWER SCHOOL STAFF

Implement Discipline Codes and Enforcement Policies

- ☐ Realistic, fair, and consistently enforced policies should be implemented dealing with violence and vandalism in your school.
- ☐ Teachers and administrators should know the school's safety and discipline code, be aware of their responsibility to enforce school rules and policies and state regulations and law, and understand the rights of students and staff under the law.

Create Staff Alert Systems

- ☐ Schools should have an incident reporting system for students, staff, and community members to relay threats and/or information about school safety. The reports should be regularly monitored, evaluated and open to the public.
- ☐ Staff should have two-way communication with the school office from every room in the school building.
- ☐ The school district should have a comprehensive crisis response plan that deals with various forms of school emergencies. The plan should be regularly updated and practiced.
- ☐ In-service training should be available for teachers and staff in classroom management, violence prevention, and emergency response.

Define Staff Safety Responsibilities

- ☐ School staff, students, and community members should forge an active, working relationship with local law enforcement with sustained lines of communication.
- ☐ Specific staff should be assigned to security and should be responsible for securing buildings during school hours and after-school activity.
- ☐ School staff should be trained to resolve disputes peacefully.

IMPLEMENT COMMON-SENSE BUILDING SECURITY MEASURES

Create a Thorough School Ground Coverage and Patrol Schedule

- ☐ Law enforcement or security personnel should monitor school facilities during school hours and school grounds should be patrolled after school hours.
- ☐ Hallways, bathrooms, lunchrooms, and other areas where students gather should be appropriately supervised by school staff who are authorized to enforce school discipline codes.
- ☐ School buildings should be designed with crime prevention in mind, including landscaping, fencing, parking, lighting, and door locks. Exterior lighting should be properly directed to eliminate any blind spots.
- ☐ Weekend and evening use of school facilities should be encouraged, with access limited to designated, supervised areas.
- ☐ Local residents should be encouraged to report suspicious activity to school officials or police.

Control Building Access

- ☐ A thorough visitor procedure should be implemented with staff responsible for a complete accounting of school visitors' comings and goings.
- ☐ A policy for intruders, loiterers, or non-students on campus should be implemented and violators should be arrested.

Create and Maintain Lock and Alarm System

- ☐ Locks should be maintained regularly and changed when necessary and access to keys should be strictly monitored.
- ☐ An alarm system should be implemented and routinely maintained and tested. School staff should be aware of the school's alarm system capabilities and understand its operation.
- ☐ The number of false alarms should be kept below two for any six-month period.
- ☐ Selected areas of the school should be "zoned" by an alarm system to indicate specific areas being entered by an intruder.
- ☐ Back-up power should be supplied to keep the system operating in a power failure.

Tool 2–Phone Tree

Samples and Templates



THE CRISIS RESPONSE PHONE TREE SHOULD **include all staff**—including cooks, bus drivers, custodians, and other support staff—and **should be reviewed with all staff each year**.

Depending on the size of the faculty and staff, create a chart such as this. Each person on the list calls the next person and reads the message. If that person is not home, leave a message, skip them and call the next person on the list. The last person on the phone tree should call the first person to ensure that the tree is completed and that the message was accurate.

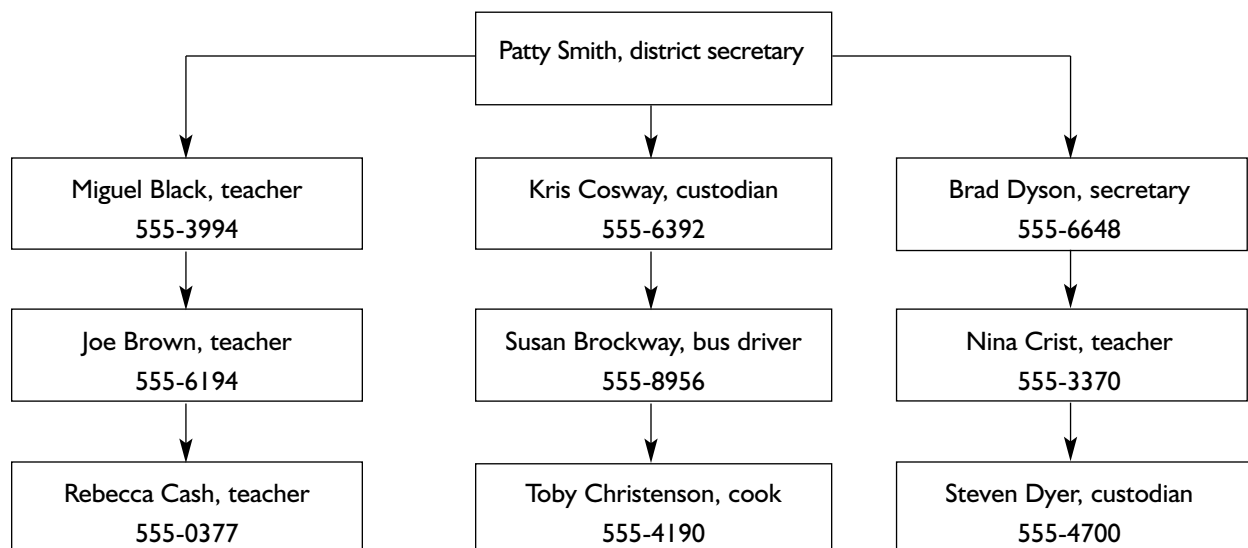
Making the Calls

- Begin with a statement such as, “I’m sorry to have to call with bad news...” or “due to the impending storm...”
- Ask the person to get paper and pencil to write specifics if they will be calling another person.
- Give facts about the event, identifying critical information needs: what happened, who’s ok and who’s hurt; action taken to respond, and how to help and get help.
- Notify them of the upcoming all-staff meeting and note that further details will be available at the meeting.
- Remind them not to speculate in their phone tree calls—that they should just pass on essential information.

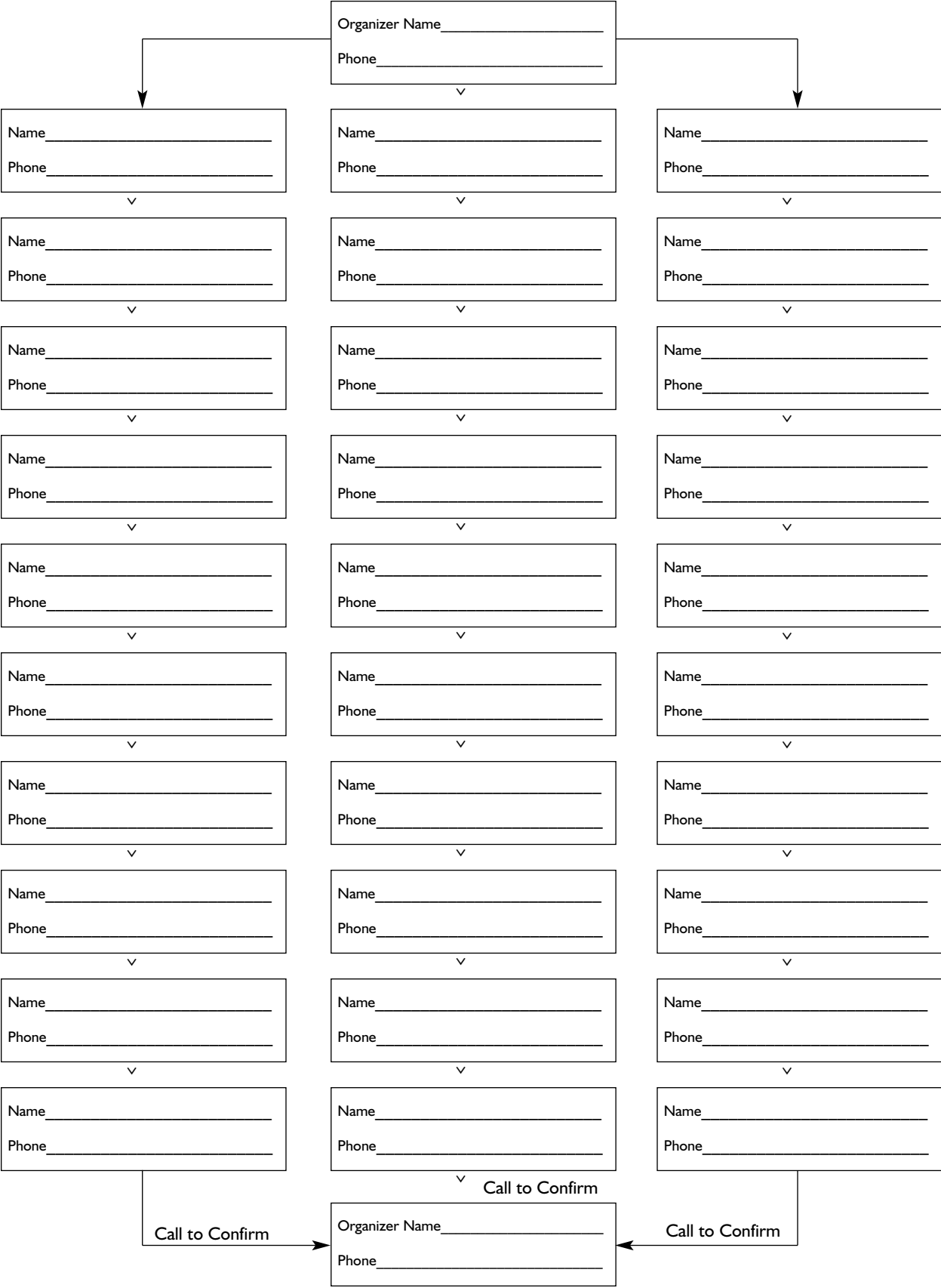
About the Tool

This tool provides information about phone trees, a sample phone tree, and a template phone tree. The purpose of a phone tree is to provide a structure for reaching all staff quickly with important information. Phone tree calls to staff provide information to prepare them for the hours and days ahead and keep rumors from spreading. The calls also allow staff to reach out to assess one another’s condition and offer care and assistance. School administrators and local associations use such phone trees.

SAMPLE PHONE TREE (PARTIAL)



TEMPLATE PHONE TREE



Tool 3—Creating Efficient Information Channels

Tool for Educators

COMPUTER FILES

Have agreed-upon guidelines for saving and naming documents and organize them on a shared network for everyone in the communications office to access. Placing documents on a shared network is vital to sharing information quickly and effectively. Many times communication crisis response team members will be fielding questions and requests for information via phone. Being able to navigate filing systems and having access to important network documents will provide necessary information efficiently, eliminating the need to take messages, search through files, and return calls. In a crisis, the extra seconds, minutes, and hours that this planning will save will make your operation more responsive and proficient.

Naming and retrieving documents is also critical to crisis response. All members of the crisis communication team should easily understand the title given to a press release or other important document. Too often the file name may be meaningful to its author, but could be obscure for others. Other communication staff who need to quickly access a file should not be in the position of reading minds and guessing where a document was placed or scrambling for a document that is not saved on a shared drive—and thus is inaccessible to other crisis responders.

Some things to think about in creating systems for online filing include the following. Remember that the most important thing is that the system you create would make logical sense to anyone who steps into your operation.

- **Name files logically.** Save file name space by creating a list of abbreviations for commonly used titles. For instance, you might start the file name of all press releases with the initials “PR,” media advisories with “MA,” forms/templates (for fax cover sheets, phone messages, etc.) with “TEMP,” letters to staff with “Let ST,” letters to parents with “Let PA,” etc. This allows files to be named in shorthand that makes sense. For instance, in this system, “PR 11 10 Scope of damage” would indicate a press release, released on November 10, detailing the scope of damage, “TEMP Phone messages” would indicate the blank template for phone messages, “Let ST 11 11 Mtg info” would indicate the November 11 memo to staff detailing information about the general staff meeting. These are just examples—it is important that your shorthand makes sense in your operation.
- **Store files logically.** Put a system in place that requires all information to be stored on a shared drive. Set up each computer to default to that drive when saving a new file. Prohibit volunteers and staff from saving files to disk or to the local drives. This ensures that everyone has access to all files; in addition, it ensures that all files are backed up.
- **Create and use a system of folders and subfolders.** For instance, you might create folders titled LOGISTICS (into which you put logistical information about the crisis center setup), VOLUNTEERS (for volunteer lists, schedules), PRESS INFORMATION (which might have subfolders for fact sheets, press releases, media



About the Tool

This tool includes guidance for creating organized, efficient information channels. It is vital to response time and effectiveness in handling a crisis to have systems in place for organizing information. Again, a little planning now can save time, energy, and problems when crisis strikes. A guiding principle should be making sure that others will be able to navigate and use resources and documents produced by the communications center.

advisories, photo op rules), VICTIM INFORMATION (which might have subfolders for victim biographies, condition reports, funeral arrangements, memorial plans), DISASTER MITIGATION CONTACTS (which might include a list of agency contacts, disaster relief application information, and people locator information), and STAFF INFORMATION (which might have subfolders for meeting agendas and announcements, schedules, staff lists). Sometimes it is also helpful to have a folder for DRAFTS so that volunteers and staff realize that they should not use information saved into that folder, as it is in progress.

- **Create a system to separate public “for release” information from private information.** Sometimes just creating a PRESS INFORMATION folder is enough to handle this challenge. Take advantage of the power of your computer applications to eliminate duplication—for instance, victim biographies may be stored in the VICTIM INFORMATION folder, but a shortcut can be stored in the PRESS INFORMATION folder. This helps all staff in determining what can and cannot be released—if the file exists in the PRESS INFORMATION folder, it can be released. It also allows victim information to all be stored in one place.
- **Make sure everyone using the system understands the system.** Create a quick one-page fact sheet on naming and storage conventions. Make sure that new volunteers are quickly briefed by veterans.
- **Create a system and schedule for backups.** Put one person in charge of backing up the entire system at least once a day. Ensure that there are always two generations of backups in case the most recent is lost. This is another important reason for not saving files to local or floppy drives—all files on the network will be backed up, others will not.

HARD COPY FILING SYSTEMS

Similar principles apply to hard copy filing systems as apply to computer filing. For instance, it is important to name and file paper accurately; to logically name filing drawers, hanging files, and manilla files within the hanging files; to keep the files up-to-date and neat; and to make sure that all staff understand how to use the files.

A few additional things that are especially critical for hard copy files include the following.

- **Define responsibility for filing.** It’s important to make one or a limited number of people responsible for managing the hard copy filing systems. With hard copy files, the danger is that the paper will stack up and not be filed, then someone will need something quickly and it will not yet be filed. Hard copy filing needs to happen quickly and accurately—making one person responsible is the surest way of eliminating stacks of paper labeled “to be filed.”
- **Clearly mark originals.** With hard copy files, there is always the danger that someone will take the original, or the last copy, and then the file will be lost. Suggestions include maintaining originals in a separate file or three ring binder or noting on the original (using a sticky note or some other such method) that this is the original and should not be removed.
- **Make multiple copies of frequently needed documents.** The beauty of hard copy filing is that there can be multiple originals in the file that can be easily pulled. For heavily used documents, it is often a good idea to make multiple copies to store in the file for people to pull. Again, someone needs to be made responsible for maintaining adequate quantities, making more copies when necessary, and carefully guarding the original.
- **Consider an index of what is in each drawer.** An index that is handwritten can be easily updated by hand as files are created or removed. If there is staff to do this, it can be an invaluable resource.
- **Consider a “log in/log out” sheet** for key files or originals. This way each file can always be tracked down.

Tool 4—School-Based Crisis Response Roles

Tool for Educators

TEACHER-SUPPORT STAFF ROLE

- Identify close friends and affiliations surrounding trauma or victims and connections that radiate out through the hurt or injured individual's life. (For example, participation in sports may create relationships with schools across the state.)
- Be vigilant about ripple effects on students. This is especially true for teachers and support staff in neighboring schools or even those across the nation who've watched fellow school communities suffer.
- Give students opportunities to talk about issues, but don't force them to do so.
- Ensure that students receive accurate information and understand it.
- Recognize varying religious beliefs.
- Model an appropriate response—a calm demeanor and take-charge attitude will help students feel more safe and secure.
- Listen carefully to students and answer questions the best that you can. (Recognize that you will not have many answers and try not to get hung up on handling the situation “perfectly.”)
- Give students permission to show a range of emotions.
- Know the warning signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (see **Tool 7**) and be vigilant to signs in yourself, your students, and your colleagues.
- Identify students who need counseling and use student response forms for those who may be less expressive of their needs. (See **Tool 21**.)
- Provide activities to reduce trauma, such as safe expression through writing or art projects.
- Set aside curriculum as needed and/or infuse curriculum with opportunities for learning, healing, and integrating experience into future coping skills.
- Discuss funeral procedures with children. Many children have not yet experienced death and funerals. (See **Tool 32** for information on children's concept of death.)
- Let the association know about your needs. They are your advocates.
- Take care of yourself and use the back-up support provided.



About the Tool

This tool includes guidance from the National Association of School Psychologists about roles that school staff at the building level can use to provide care and direction.

Knowing what is expected can go a long way to bolster confidence for staff at the building level who have the daunting task of facing children affected by trauma.

It's important to remember that “victims” in a trauma include not only the direct victims, but also the families of direct victims, close friends of direct victims, school staff, the entire community, the state, and even the nation. The reach of trauma stretches far and wide, even into the hearts and minds of children who watch TV and listen to adults talk about current events.

These roles can apply to school staff who are not immediately affected by crisis, but who may experience ripple effects in their classrooms.

PSYCHOLOGIST/COUNSELOR ROLE

- Be available—cancel other activities.
- Identify extra mental health resources from within the community that can be available at critical moments, i.e., back-to-school, funerals, and memorial services.
- Be alert to factors that contribute to copycat behaviors in immediate communities and communities across the nation.
- Locate counseling and secretarial assistance.
- Provide individual and group counseling.
- Contact all affected schools inside and outside the district.
- Contact parents of affected students.
- Follow the schedule of the deceased and visit classrooms of close friends.
- Support the faculty.
- Keep records of affected students and staff and provide follow up.
- Educate staff and community about the signs of post-traumatic stress disorder and watch for signs exhibited in staff and students.
- Call upon colleagues in the community to provide extra support and backup within the schools and the community.
- Ensure that parents, staff and students are able to seek out help outside of school hours through drop-in centers, hotlines, etc.

SUPERINTENDENT/PRINCIPAL ROLE

- Direct intervention efforts.
- Be visible, available, and supportive.
- Empower staff.
- Provide direction to teachers about setting aside curriculum and/or infusing event into curriculum.
- Communicate with central administration and other affected schools.
- Ensure that adequate transportation and routes to move students to safety exist and are approved by law enforcement and rescue crews.
- Contact family of the deceased.
- Inform staff and students about funeral arrangements.
- Ensure memorials are appropriate.
- If needed, tap extra counseling resources in the community.

Tool 5—Building a Crisis Response Team

Tool for Educators

CHARACTERISTICS OF CRISIS TEAM MEMBERS

Judie Smith's *School Crisis Management Manual*, distributed by NEA, outlines some characteristics to consider when selecting crisis team members. They include the following.

- Ability to handle stress with a minimum of other stressors present in their personal lives.
- Ability to remain calm when others are upset and emotional.
- Ability to follow instructions and work well with a team.
- Flexibility.
- A willingness to accept responsibility.
- Familiarity of the community or ability to establish rapport quickly and meaningfully.
- Willingness and ability to “be with” survivors who may be suffering tragedy and enormous loss without being compelled to “fix” the situation.
- Knowledgeable about the functioning and organization of a school and the association.
- Availability.

Availability is especially critical. The very nature of a crisis is that it is unexpected. All team members must be able to set aside other duties and responsibilities to join the crisis team as quickly as possible. They must have advanced permission from their supervisors to drop other assignments immediately and follow the directions of the crisis team leader or coordinator. A well-prepared district team can arrive at the school within an hour.

ASSEMBLING THE CRISIS RESPONSE COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Some disasters require the assembly of a crisis response team, which can take many forms depending on the size of the trauma. Sometimes it can be one or two people who ensure that school staff and students receive the support and information they need and advocate for extra resources. Sometimes the team can be much larger.

At a district level, school administrators may need to assemble a **crisis response communications team** to manage the media requests and the physical presence of media and to build communication channels to parents and the community that continually stream needed information. The association should be involved in developing and shaping the work of such a team and may even provide staff to serve on the team.

When 750 national and international media descended upon Columbine High School following the 1999 shooting, the very talented and capable school district communication staff of four could simply not manage the media crush alone. They assembled a communication team of volunteers and staff people from inside and outside the school community to field calls and help manage communication efforts.

In a crisis, there is an urgent need to quickly inform and answer questions. The absence of information and communication lines creates a void that feeds anxiety, fuels misinformation and rumors, and often results in mistakes in media coverage. There is an obvious role for the association in getting the word out to parents, the media, and the broader public.



About the Tool

This tool includes guidance for association members in identifying the kinds of roles school staff can play in a crisis.

For illustration, following is a brief description of a core communications response team membership. It is modeled after communication teams that assembled in Jefferson County (Littleton), Colorado; Oklahoma City; and Midwestern states hit by record floods in 1997. These roles can be combined or further delineated. The following list is merely one combination.

This team generally takes its direction from the lead spokesperson(s) (usually the principal, superintendent, or district communications director), who regularly communicates with the school administration and the school district cabinet as designated by the district's crisis plan. The cabinet is usually comprised of the superintendent, principal, building managers, association leadership, and school board leadership. It is important for the association to be aware of these roles and to create a feedback loop to help shape communication messages produced and ensure that the association perspective and needs are recognized.

SPOKESPERSON(S)

The spokesperson is the source of all official school district comment—generally the principal, superintendent, or school district communications director. He or she **addresses reporters** at all scheduled press briefings; **provides all official comments** for press attribution; **manages strategic message development**; and **counsels top management** (with critical input from information coordinator, media coordinator, liaison to victims assistance and liaison to law enforcement).

MEDIA COORDINATOR

The media coordinator **manages media queries**—including prioritizing requests according to deadlines, the type of request, and whether or not it is from a local or national outlet (local should get first priority as they are often part of the school community and will be covering the event long after the national media leave). If the number of queries becomes too large for the official spokesperson to respond to, he or she seeks out alternative sources (with approval of the spokesperson). He or she identifies opportunities to **promote the school message** and anticipates the direction media queries will take so the district can prepare and respond. In coordination with spokesperson and information coordinator, the media coordinator works toward **strategic message development** and counsels top management.

INFORMATION-COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

The information-communications coordinator **manages information flow**. He or she seeks out and **organizes information updates**, such as the time and place for all—community meetings, hotline phone numbers, instructions for donations, press briefing schedules, etc., and **channels it** to internal and external audiences. *Internal channels* include district staff e-mail groups, listservers, blast faxes, and school voicemail. *External channels* include the media, parents, and the broader public.

The information-communications coordinator also **maintains the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document**—a recording of questions fielded by phone bank volunteers and their answers. The document aids in orienting new volunteers, gauging public need for information, and providing media with answers that have been vetted and approved.

He or she also **maintains the master schedule**—a document containing all scheduled meetings and events for the day. The schedule is usually blown up to poster size and placed prominently for phone bank volunteers to reference. The information-communications coordinator also **updates and compiles the daily fact sheet**—a listing of all significant messages for the day and source of information on a broad array of topics—and provides sign off for distribution. (See **Tool 12**.)

MEDIA MONITOR AND RESEARCH DIRECTOR

The media monitor and research director **monitors media coverage** and seeks to **correct inaccuracies**. The media monitor provides summaries of coverage for all outlets for the spokesperson(s). The media monitor and research director is also responsible for **maintaining research files**. (Often interfaces with computer systems technician, webmaster, and information coordinator.) He or she is generally familiar with where district files are stored.

CLERICAL AND SYSTEMS OPERATIONS COORDINATOR

The clerical and systems operations coordinator **oversees all distribution systems**, including e-mail and fax for external and internal audiences. He or she establishes a routine procedure for ensuring appropriate **proofreading, signoff, and quick delivery** of information products. The clerical and systems operations coordinator is **responsible for systems operation**—he or she programs fax machines, assigns and coordinates copying jobs, and distributes fact sheets to media and other external and internal audiences.

LIAISON TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES’ PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICERS

The liaison to law enforcement agencies’ public information officers **ensures that law enforcement representatives receive all communication products** produced by the district communication office and **attend briefings** for updated information on anticipated press briefings and announcements. He or she **provides regular updates and reports** for spokesperson(s). The information obtained from law enforcement may influence district communication and message development.

LIAISON TO VICTIMS’ FAMILIES AND COUNSELING UNITS

The liaison to victim’s families and counseling units **ensures that victims’ advocates and victims’ families receive all communication products** from district communications office. He or she also obtains information on the concerns and needs of victims and **provides regular updates and reports** to spokesperson(s). The information obtained from the victims’ liaison plays a major role in shaping the district’s communication direction and message development. This is a critically important role. The Federal Aviation Administration has a response team and program devoted to working with plane crash victims and their families. Connecting with victims and being responsive sets the tone for healing.

COMPUTER SYSTEMS, WEB PAGE TECHNICIAN

The computer systems, web page technician oversees the maintenance and operations of the crisis communication operation’s **computer network** (if located off-site); **backs up files** at the end of the day; and posts all new and approved communication products for the **web page**. He or she creates an avenue for answering **e-mail queries** and facilitates **electronic bulletin boards** or chat rooms.

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

The volunteer coordinator **oversees all volunteer activity**, including recruiting, training and scheduling volunteers to staff media query phone bank, coordinate special events, undertake writing projects, and act as a media escort. He or she **establishes procedures** to quickly inform volunteers answering phones of actions and new information. He or she also **prepares briefing folders** for new volunteers, including daily fact sheets, key messages, telephone numbers, and web site addresses.

LIAISON TO ELECTED OFFICIALS AND MANAGER OF SPECIAL EVENTS

This key team member **ensures that elected officials and community group leaders are informed of all district communication activity**. He or she also coordinates any elected officials' roles in memorial services, creating memorials, and other special events and provides a **communication channel** between elected leaders and district administration. This liaison is sensitive to the perceptions and reality of action that could potentially be considered political and advocates on behalf of school community needs.

DONATIONS COORDINATOR

The donations coordinator implements systems to **collect and distribute donations** and works with the information coordinator to **communicate needs** and **educate the public** about how donations are being used. The donations coordinator is usually someone with business and political connections who can quickly marshal resources, such as storage space or equipment.

State Example



During the North Dakota floods, a community received a truckload of perishable goods. Community members who were occupied with a more pressing issue—sandbagging and removing valuables from flooded homes—did not have the resources to store and distribute goods. The donation coordinator, a respected community leader, negotiated with local businesses to store goods. In Oklahoma City the governor appointed a respected local attorney to coordinate memorials and handle the legalities of donation funds.

Tool 6—For Teens: Your Reaction to Stress

Fact Sheet—Ready to copy



About the Tool

Copy and distribute this fact sheet for teens to help them understand and deal with reactions to stress. Teens may suffer confusion about what they are feeling and need reassurance that a wide range of emotions is normal.

YOUR REACTION TO STRESS

Trauma can change the way you view your world. You may feel unsafe and insecure about situations and places you normally would enjoy. Your reactions to trauma will depend upon how closely you were involved with the people involved in the trauma, your personality makeup, your normal way of handling situations, and the type and amount of support you have in your life. It is common for youth, like you, to have difficulty controlling your emotions or to become disinterested in normal activities. A constructive way to view this situation is that you are normal kids involved in an abnormal circumstance.

It is natural for you to first experience some sort of denial. Fears, worries or nightmares are common following a trauma. Sleep disturbances or eating difficulties may happen. Also, you may begin to regress emotionally or act younger than your age. You may become more clingy, unhappy, or needy of parental attention and comfort. Feelings of irritability, anger, sadness, or guilt may often emerge. Somatic complaints such as headaches, stomachaches, or sweating are not unusual. You may repeatedly relive the trauma by acting it out in activities or dreams. Other youth, like you, may seek to avoid all reminders of the trauma by withdrawing from relationships, refusing to discuss their feelings, or avoiding activities that remind them of the people or places associated with the trauma. Some loss of interest in school, misbehavior, and poor concentration are other common reactions.

These symptoms may range from mild to severe. More severe symptoms may indicate that you are experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder or depression. You need to be aware of how you are coping and try to seek assistance.

What Can You Do to Feel Better?

The following list of suggestions may assist you in getting back on track.

- **If you find that you are experiencing self-blame and guilt.** Try to figure out which events you can control and which are uncontrollable. You didn't ask to be involved in this crisis...you just are. Try to be positive and focus on the good that you can do to help other youth avoid experiences like yours.
- **If you feel helpless or hopeless.** Write or share your current feelings with others. *Share your experience.* You are not alone. You need others and others need you. Try to participate in school and community events, memorial services, and future school violence prevention activities.
- **If you are losing interest and feeling down.** Try to arrange an interesting activity every day. Plan for future special events. Discuss enjoyable topics. Focus on the future....you do have one.

- **If you lose your appetite or find yourself gaining or losing weight.** Don't force yourself to eat. Cook your favorite foods and make meal-time a pleasant occasion.
- **If you experience sleep difficulties.** Keep regular bedtime hours; do relaxing and calming activities one hour before bedtime such as reading or listening to soft music; end the day with a positive experience.
- **If you feel that you can't concentrate and you feel restless.** Change the activities that may increase your restlessness; participate in some activities that make you feel relaxed; increase your physical exercise and recreation activities.
- **If you feel overly scared or fearful.** Participate in planned activities with your friends or family. Keep yourself active and busy.
- **If you feel angry or you might want to strike back at yourself or someone else.** Know that your feelings are normal. Express your feelings in appropriate ways such as talking to friends, family, and other adults that you trust; working out frustration and anger with physical exercise; or creating a living memorial to your friends such as memory books, poems, or other artistic creations. Remember your emotions are normal responses to trauma—dealing with them requires good judgement, self-control, and positive support from others.

If you continue to feel emotions you are concerned about, contact your school's psychologist, school social worker, school counselor, or community mental health center.

NOTE: This handout is adapted from *Trauma and Children* (Authors: Lazarus, P.J.) and *Depression in Children* (Authors: Saklofske, D., Janzen, J., Hildebrand, D., and Kaufmann, L.) *Handouts for Parents*, published by the National Association of School Psychologists, Andrea Canter and Servio Carroll, editors, 1998. (301) 657-0270, www.naspweb.org.

Tool 7—For Parents, Staff, and Media: About Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Fact Sheet — Ready to Copy



About the Tool

Copy and distribute this fact sheet for parents, staff, and the media to help caregivers support victims of trauma. Information about common reactions and what to do to provide support can be empowering.

FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS, STAFF, AND MEDIA: ABOUT POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Children’s Reaction to Trauma: What Adults Can Do to Help

Trauma can change the way children view their world. Assumptions about safety and security are now challenged. Children’s reactions will depend upon the severity of the trauma, their personality, the way they cope with stress and the availability of support. It is common for children to regress both behaviorally and academically following a trauma. A good way to view the situation is that they are normal children in an abnormal circumstance.

It is natural for children to first experience some sort of denial that the situation really happened. Fears, worries, or nightmares are common following a trauma. Sleep disturbances or eating difficulties may happen. Also children may begin to regress emotionally or act younger than their chronological age. They may become more clinging, unhappy, and needy of parental attention and comfort. Feelings of irritability, anger, sadness, or guilt may often emerge. Somatic complaints such as headaches, stomachaches, or sweating are not unusual. Children and adolescents may repeatedly relive the trauma by acting it out in play or dreams. Other students may seek to avoid all reminders of the trauma by withdrawing from others, refusing to discuss their feelings, or avoiding activities that remind them of the trauma. Some loss of interest in school, misbehavior, and poor concentration are other common reactions.

These symptoms may range from mild to severe. More severe symptoms may indicate that a child is experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder or depression. **The National Association of School Psychologists suggest that children process their emotions and reactions to a trauma within 24 hours to 36 hours following a crisis in order to prevent post-traumatic stress disorder.** The process is called a “group crisis intervention” or “debriefing.”

Group Crisis Intervention: Aftercare to Process Trauma

A trained crisis responder or counselor (call 1-800-TRY-NOVA) generally facilitates the intervention or debriefing, asking the group who experienced the trauma together to sit in a circle. Following the model from NOVA (National Organization for Victims’ Assistance), the process begins with survivors thinking about and articulating their sensory perceptions during the trauma—what they saw, heard, tasted, smelled, and touched. They are then asked to think about and articulate the accompanying thoughts and emotions.

This helps survivors understand how unconscious associations are made with certain sights, sounds, smells, and experiences. In addition, by sharing aloud, individuals realize that others experienced similar reactions and emotions. It

is a bonding exercise that provides feelings of safety and security. Finally, individuals in the group are asked to think about the future and imagine upcoming events. They then discuss how they will cope with future events and share their sources of strength and support systems.

The goal of the group crisis intervention is to provide three urgent needs.

- **Safety and security**—freedom from fears and terrors associated with the event; sensory perceptions and how thoughts and feelings are encoded.
- **Validation and ventilation**—need to tell the story of their experiences and understand the patterns of trauma reaction, and then recognize the human commonality of that pattern.
- **Predict and prepare**—facing the future and preparing for how they might cope. Identifying sources of strength.

The process helps survivors regain some sense of control or mastery over their lives. By providing a forum to help participants predict future events and their reactions to them, victims are better prepared to respond. The debriefing is critical in laying the foundation for a support system and provides comfort through sharing common feelings. It can ameliorate long-term adverse affects, add structure to a crisis, and help contain chaos and confusion.

What Can Adults or Caregivers Do To Help?

The following list of suggestions may assist you in responding to a child's symptoms.

- **Children who experience self-blame and guilt.** Adults should help the child separate events that the child can control from those that are uncontrollable. Additionally adults can encourage their child to talk positively about themselves.
- **Children who experience helplessness and hopelessness.** Adults can ask the child to write or speak about current feelings and record pleasant thoughts three to four times a day in order to increase pleasant thoughts over a period of four to six weeks.
- **Children who lose interest and experience a “blue mood.”** Adults could arrange one interesting activity per day; plan with the child for future special events; discuss enjoyable topics.
- **Children who lose their appetite or experience weight problems.** Adults should not force eating. Sometimes it helps to prepare favorite foods and work to make meal-time a pleasant occasion.
- **Children who experience sleep difficulties.** Adults should keep children on a regular bedtime schedule. One hour before bedtime, they should engage the child in relaxing and calming activities such as reading or listening to soft music. Try to end the day with a positive experience.
- **Children who are agitated and restless.** Adults should change activities that cause agitation. Teach the child relaxation techniques—massage may help. Encourage physical exercise and recreation activities.
- **Children who experience excessive fears.** Adults can help by minimizing anxiety-causing situations and uncertainty and being supportive and reassuring. Planning may reduce uncertainty.
- **Children who demonstrate aggressive behavior and anger.** Adults should use a kind but firm approach to let the child know that the behavior is unacceptable. Let the child know that their emotions are normal, but encourage the child to express his or her anger in appropriate ways. Do not react in anger; be consistent with your responses to inappropriate behavior. Let the child know that many emotions are normal responses to trauma, such as sadness, guilt, loneliness, fear, pain, and isolation.

If a child's symptoms persist or you are concerned about a child's reactions, contact the school's psychologist, school social worker, school counselor, or community mental health center.

NOTE: This handout is adapted from *Trauma and Children* (Authors: Lazarus, P.J.) and *Depression in Children* (Authors: Saklofske, D., Janzen, J., Hildebrand, D., and Kaufmann, L.) *Handouts for Parents*, published by the National Association of School Psychologists, Andrea Canter and Servio Carroll, editors, 1998. (301) 657-0270, www.naspweb.org.

Tool 8—School Information Sheet

Samples and Templates



About the Tool

This tool provides samples of school information sheets. The purpose of the school information sheet is to provide general background information about a school and/or a district. This information is often already prepared for school web sites or brochures. In the event of a crisis, it can provide basic information to reporters who may be new to covering your school, preventing mistakes and extra phone calls. Such informational guides should also be produced to provide information about the local association.

SAMPLE SCHOOL INFORMATION SHEET #1

Jefferson County Public Schools Facts and Figures, August 1999

~~Students:~~ 89,000

~~Area:~~ 780 square miles, same boundaries as Jefferson County

County Population: 498,000

Schools: 92 elementary schools, 18 middle schools, 16 senior highs, 8 options schools, 10 charter schools

~~Student/Teacher Ratio:~~ 43.5 teacher per 1,000 elementary students; 42.5 teachers per 1,000 secondary students

~~Cost per pupil:~~ \$4,899

High Standards for All Students: The district vision states, “Students and their proficiencies are the central focus of this district. We value the full development of the intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical potential of each individual.”

The district has adopted content standards in the areas of reading, writing, math, science, history and geography. The district is pilot testing standards in the areas of art, music, physical education, foreign language, civics and economics. By setting high standards and developing ways to measure success, the district is ensuring that all students learn the basic skills and are able to use them in real-life applications.

The district’s primary focus is on student literacy—reading and writing. An example of an English language arts standard is: Students apply conventions of language for effective communications. For students in grades K-4, that means they learn to apply basic punctuation and capitalization rules correctly; use correct subject-verb agreement; spell frequently used and phonetically predictable words correctly; and consult resources to assist with correct spelling.

To measure a student's progress in this area, the teacher might use a number of tools: national standardized tests, state assessments, classroom spelling tests, class exams that include multiple choice and short essay questions, and writing assignments.

Technology: The district is committed to preparing students for the 21st century by providing a strong foundation in technology. The five-year, comprehensive technology plan includes a computer leasing program that will enable all schools to have one computer for every five students. Computers will be replaced every five years when they become obsolete.

Graduation Requirements: To receive a high school diploma, students must complete 22 units in grades 9-12. These units include language arts, 4 in a prescribed sequence; social studies, 3 in a prescribed sequence; mathematics, 2; science, 2; approved electives, 11. In addition, students must take a semester course, Lifetime Fitness Design, or demonstrate physical fitness on a test.

School Calendar:

Registration of New Students August 10, 11, 12
School Starts August 16
Labor Day Sept. 6
Thanksgiving Holiday Nov. 25/26
Winter Break December 20-31
Teacher Training Day – No School January 3, 2000
Martin Luther King Jr. Day January 17
President's Birthday February 21
Spring Break March 13-17
School Ends May 25

Getting Involved: The district is strongly committed to community involvement, and it is the participation of county residents that provides continued educational excellence.

To ensure that community members have the opportunity to participate in educational decision making, the district has over 200 committees. One of the district's goals is cooperative decision making—engaging stakeholders in building consensus on major issues facing schools and the district. School committees include a parent support group, cooperative decision making committee and/or accountability committee in each school.

Districtwide committees deal with such issues as textbooks, budget, cultural diversity and school improvement. These committees are appointed by and report to the Board of Education. To become involved in a citizen committee, contact your local school principal.

Transportation: The school district provides bus transportation to elementary students who live more than a mile from school, junior high students who live two miles from school, and senior high students who live two-and-a-half miles from school. For information about transportation, call 555-2223.

Bus schedules and pick-up points for alternative schools are available at local schools.

Choices for Students: Because the district realizes that students have diverse needs, Jeffco offers the following alternative educational opportunities open to all interested students in the county on a space-available basis. For details about these programs, see the district's Choices brochure, available from Communications Services, 555-6808.

Open Enrollment: Jeffco students may attend any school in the district when space is available. Students who enroll in a neighborhood school outside their attendance area are responsible for transportation to and from school. Open enrollment applications should be filed by March 1 for the following school year.

If space is available, Jefferson County accepts students from outside the district. The school principal makes the decision about accepting open enrollment students.

Special Needs: About 10,500 students with special emotional, intellectual or physical needs are assisted by the district's special education and related services staffs. The district's least restrictive environment policy calls for students to be educated with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible in the least restrictive setting where the student's needs can be met with appropriate services and support. In Jefferson County, a typical classroom in the neighborhood school, is the initial reference point for identifying, planning and delivering services to students with special needs. Supports, delivered within the typical classroom are considered first. However, the intensity of the student's needs increases, an array of service delivery options is considered.

The determination of the least restrictive environment is individualized, based on the student's specific needs. In instances where education in the neighborhood school is not possible, the district's preference is to provide the student's education in a location as close as possible to the student's home. When a student's needs are being served in a setting other than the regular classroom, the goal is to return the student to the typical classroom as soon as possible. For information, call 555-6666.

Diversity: One of the district's goals is to value diversity, and encourage respect and understanding in our school community. The district has a Multicultural Learning Center and a Council on Cultural Diversity that explore ways to enhance learning opportunities for all students. The district adopted an Equal Employment Opportunity Plan in 1995. To contact the Multicultural Learning Center at Stein, call 982-7405.

Board of Education: The Jefferson County Board of Education is composed of five members elected to four-year terms. Elections are held every two years. Board members come from a specific area of the county but are elected at-large. Board members are not paid and give freely of their time to serve the community. The Board of Education sets policy for the school district and hires the superintendent to serve as chief administrative officer. The superintendent directs the educational and business activities of the school district.

The Board of Education meets the first and third Thursdays of the month at 7 p.m. in the Board Room of the Educational Services Center, 1829 Denver West Drive, Golden, CO 80401. The public is encouraged to attend.

SAMPLE SCHOOL INFORMATION SHEET #2

Columbine High School, August 1999

Articulation Area: Ken Caryl Middle School; Columbine Hills, Dutch Creek, Governor's Ranch, Leawood, and Normandy Elementary Schools

Location: About one mile east of the intersection of Wadsworth Boulevard and Bowles Avenue.

Hours: 7:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Grades: 9-12

Enrollment: 1,870

Students Per Classroom: 27

Colors: Navy Blue and Silver

Mascot: American Revolution REBEL

Motto: Stretch for Excellence

Facilities: A successful bond election in October, 1992, provided Columbine High School with \$13.4 million to remodel and expand. A twenty-member design committee worked with the architectural firm, Davis Partnership, for a year and one half to design a 2,000 student, twenty-first century high school. The building phase supervised by Weitz-Cohen Construction was completed in the fall of 1995. We now have excellent facilities in addition to our long history of excellence in all areas. We thank the voters of Jefferson County for this privilege.

Learning Environment: The academic success of students attending CHS is a record in which all can take pride. The basic curriculum is that found in all Jefferson County high schools. In addition, a wide variety of electives encourages students to delve more deeply into areas of special interest. Columbine students consistently score higher than state and national norms on SAT and ACT college entrance exams.

Mission Statement: At Columbine High School we will teach, learn and model life skills and attitudes that prepare us to: work effectively with people; show courtesy to others; prepare for change; think critically; act responsibly; and respect our surroundings.

Special Programs: Forensics, debate, publications, outdoor lab, peer counseling, mock trial team, video productions, alternative cooperation education (ACE), vocational work experience programs, integrated American studies.

Foreign Languages: Spanish, French, German

Honors and AP Classes: Advanced placement English, American history, calculus, and biology; advanced level French and Spanish.

Art, Drama, Music: Drawing, painting, photography, jewelry, ceramics, sculpture, acting, choir, marching band, music theory, strings, jazz band, concert band, percussion band, wind ensemble.

Special Education: Cross-categorical programs for students with significantly limited intellectual capacity (SLIC) and educational handicaps (EH) are available.

Guidance/Counseling: Six counselors and a post-graduate center are available to students and parents.

Graduates: On average, 85% of our graduates attend either two- or four-year institutions. In 1996, there were 162 academic scholarships, 22 athletic scholarships, and 54 other scholarships awarded.

Athletics: Participation in athletics is an important part of life at CHS. The continued success of various teams, both male and female, is testimony to the quality of the entire athletic program. We are the home of the 1987, and 1991 state baseball champions, the 1986 and 1993 boys state soccer champions, and the 1997 boys state basketball champions.

Parent Involvement: Parents are a vital component of the strong, collaborative partnership existing at CHS.

Activities: Approximately 35 organizations provide opportunities for students to participate in clubs that might explore a given subject area more intensely or provide membership in a group where students share a common interest.

History: Columbine is named for the South Jefferson County area in which it is located. The school opened in 1973 and was remodeled in 1995.

College Entrance Exams: 1995/96 Mean SAT Scores: Verbal 522, Math 544. Mean ACT Scores: English 21.2, Math 22.1, Reading 22.2, Science Reasoning 22.7, Composite 22.2.

Tool 9—For the Media: An Open Letter On Covering School Crisis

Letter — Ready to Copy



NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Robert F. Chase, President
Reg Weaver, Vice President
Dennis Van Roekel, Secretary-Treasurer

1201 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036-3290

Don Cameron, Executive Director

Open letter to our fellow "teachers"—A Message from the Classroom to the Newsroom

"Because we have an ethical responsibility that goes beyond providing objective reporting. In some ways, it's knowing when our members have become so big that our presence becomes part of the problem. It's knowing when to leave people alone. It's the responsibility to be gentle to those in pain, the responsibility to know when we have overstepped our bounds as witnesses because the news stories are beckoning us. And it's ultimately the responsibility to hold that mirror up, not just to the world we cover, but to ourselves."—Ginger Conroy (20-year TV news veteran), American Journalism Review, July/August 1999

Dear colleague,

As teachers in the classroom, we write to our fellow "teachers" in the newsroom whose capacity to teach and inform is virtually unmatched. With an abiding appreciation of this influence, we would like to work together to better meet the challenges we mutually face.

Among many dire consequences, the tragic school shootings at Columbine High School created an unprecedented nexus between the classroom and the newsroom. It was a bond no one was prepared for, but provided significant lessons. As we start this school year, we suggest that the nation's schools and the news media learn from these lessons and forge a partnership whose goal is a more informed and empowered public. In the spirit of that partnership, we offer the following:

- School staff and students are going back to school determined to let learning triumph over fear and violence. Schools are one of the safest places a child can be*, and communities, families, and teachers are locking arms to keep students from harm. Despite last year's shootings, violence in schools is actually on the decline. We aim to work with you to provide perspective, avoid distortion and infuse our communities with constructive information about school safety.
- We urge newsrooms everywhere to review the very thoughtful guidelines produced by the Radio and TV News Directors Association (RTNDA) for live coverage. Their careful guidance can help news directors make sound decisions about covering crises without jeopardizing student and law enforcement safety. We thank the RTNDA for producing such a valuable document.
- Please be careful when interviewing school staff, students and other minor children. Mental health officials and victims' advocates advise that students and staff affected by a school crisis receive immediate care. The time frame suggested is within six to eight hours. Although reporters have a very important job in gathering information from the scene, we have learned that interviews with students immediately following a crisis can cause unintended damage. The first person a student should talk to following a tragedy of such proportions is a counselor, not a reporter. Schools and the National Education Association are training extra support for school officials to help media access the information they need in the event of a school crisis. In turn, help us meet the needs of our students and staff.

* The chance of a child being killed at school are less than one in a million, according to the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice.



- Evaluate carefully when you need to be there. A crush of media descended upon Jefferson County Colorado, including reporters travelling from distant markets merely to have a "local presence" on the scene. Unbeknownst to many grieving families, providing an interview to one reporter soon lead to a barrage of requests from hundreds more reporters seeking to ensure they were not outdone by their competitors. It is impossible to thoughtfully answer the same questions over and over and emotive for every media outlet. Please consider establishing cooperative arrangements with networks or agreeing to pool coverage to limit the number of reporters and blunt their competitive frenzy.
- The rush to immediately "find meaning" in senseless acts of violence can be degrading and desensitizing. As 20-year TV news veteran Ginger Casey advised in a recent *American Journalism Review* article, "Reporters, in the end, are not oracles. They are witnesses." As educators and 2.4 million of your viewers, instant analysis of a very complex situation is unnecessary and often insensitive. Unlike newscasts and sitcoms, the answers to school violence cannot be revealed at the end of a 30-minute segment. They require constant vigilance and an endless pursuit of understanding.

Like our community schools, the media often provides a force that unites us as our human family in our joy and suffering. Coverage ranging from the U.S. Women's soccer victory celebrations to the Columbine shootings that sparked an outpouring of donations and support are evidence of that unity. Let us remember that because news is both a lens that reflects and shapes, its role as a teacher can have a profound impact for good and bad. As teachers in the classroom and teachers in the newrooms, let's work together to examine our roles and to learn from mistakes made. We welcome your thoughts.

Sincerely,



Bob Chase, NEA President

Tool 10—Emergency Contact List

Samples and Templates



About the Tool

The purpose of an emergency contact list is to have the names and contact numbers of all key crisis team personnel in one place.

The emergency contact list should include all crisis team staff and external resources and should be reviewed and updated periodically. Every person listed on the emergency contact list will not need to be called for every emergency.

TEMPLATE EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

School District Resources

- District security _____
- Health services _____
- Fire and ambulance _____
- Counseling services _____
- Social services _____
- District administration _____
- Local association leader _____
- Employee relations/personnel _____
- Communications/public relations _____
- National Weather Service contact _____
- Other _____

Community Resources

- Child welfare/child protective services _____
- Crisis center _____
- Mental health services _____
- Poison control _____
- Rape crisis center _____
- Runaway hotline _____
- Other _____

Tool II—Initial Press Statement

Samples and Templates

TEMPLATE INITIAL PRESS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT: (name of contact)
(phone number of contact)
Date of release

Headline—Insert your primary message to the public

Dateline (your location)—Two-three sentences describing current situation. _____

Insert quote from local president or leading administrator demonstrating leadership and concern for victims. “ _____
_____ ”

Insert actions being taken. _____

List actions that will be taken. _____

List information on possible reactions of students and ways parents can help. _____

Insert quote from local president or leading administrator providing reassurance. “ _____
_____ ”

List contact information. Ways to get more information.
Other resources. _____



About the Tool

This tool provides a template and a sample of an initial press statement. The purpose of the initial press statement is to answer the basic questions: who, what, where, when. This statement should also provide whatever guidance is possible at this point, express the association and administration’s concern, and detail how further information will be disseminated. If possible, the statement should give phone numbers or contacts for more information or assistance. Please remember that these samples and templates are meant to provide you with guidance. One template will not work for every situation.

SAMPLE INITIAL PRESS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT: Mary Kelley
555-6684 (phone); 555-6633 (pager)
October 10, 2001

Tretorn School Family Locks Arms for Children and Community

Tretorn, AL—The Tretorn school family is locking arms for children and community today, bracing for the advancing Hurricane Flo. Superintendent Mary Lawkins released school employees and students at 11:00 a.m., allowing them to join their families to prepare for the storm. “Our first priority is to make sure that all students and staff are safe,” said Lawkins. “We want our employees to attend to their families, secure their property, and prepare for the oncoming storm.”

Students whose families are unable to pick them up from school will be provided supervised care, classroom activities, and lunch at the school until the regularly scheduled release time of 3:30 p.m. Buses will transport students at 11:15 a.m. and again at 3:30 p.m.

Any decision with regard to school tomorrow will be announced through the news media and the school crisis response hotline (555-8900) late this afternoon and tomorrow morning. School employees who need information regarding Friday’s work schedule should call the school staff voicemail or tune into local radio and TV stations for updates. Employees and the news media may also access the Alabama state hurricane web site at www.state.al.us/flo.

“We are doing everything we can to ensure all of the available resources are in place to help our community prepare for this storm,” said Lawkin. “The state has emergency response personnel monitoring the situation and will be ready to begin assessing and repairing damage as soon as the storm has passed.”

Media coverage of the storm has produced anxiety in many children, especially those who remember the wrath of Hurricane Roger last year. All children in every classroom had the opportunity to talk to a school psychologist from the crisis team today. Parents may expect children to want to discuss their feelings and concerns when they get home from school. As difficult as it can be, talking about feelings will help them deal with their fears and draw on coping resources. “As educators, community members, and others who care deeply about children, we must do all we can to comfort our students and show them full support from adults and community. In the midst of boarding up windows and securing our property, please remember to attend to the fears and concerns of our students,” said Lawkins. “We are a hearty bunch here in Tretorn. We’ve weathered storms in the past, and I am confident we will pull together and pull through Flo as well.”

Following are some useful phone numbers for parents and the public:

Volunteering: (888) 835-9966

Information about federal disaster aid: FEMA Alabama
Hotline 1-800-462-9029

Assistance: Red Cross Helpline 1-800-958-2351

Donations: For credit card contributions, call 1-800-HELP-NOW

Youth Advocacy/Mental Health and Counseling: (606) 877-9800

Tool 12—Daily Update Fact Sheet

Samples and Templates



About the Tool

This tool provides a sample of a daily update fact sheet. The purpose of the daily update fact sheet is to provide information on a regular schedule during a crisis. It can be distributed via fax to a preprogrammed list of staff contacts and media recipients; it can also be posted on the web site daily. The information should be factual and current. The fact sheet should be distributed at the same time every day and may be distributed more than once a day if new information surfaces. The fact sheet should always indicate when and how readers can get more information.

HUDSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

1:00 p.m. Saturday, January 12

Latest information

At 10:15 a.m., Thursday, January 10, a gunman entered Hudson Middle School, holding several children and a teacher hostage, killing one teacher and one student and injuring five students. A 35-year old female teacher and a 16-year old student is dead, four students are listed in satisfactory condition at St. Alexis hospital, and one student was treated and released. Privacy laws prohibit the school from releasing the names of the victims. Please contact law enforcement for identification of the victims.

Hudson County Public Schools is holding a community meeting tonight at 6:00 p.m. at the Redeemer Baptist Church to provide information about the shooting and actions being taken to promote healing and safety. A national expert on crisis response will tell parents how to help children deal with trauma.

Parent Information Line—555-6789

A parent hotline is being staffed by community volunteers, including retired administrators and teachers, mental health professionals and others who were trained by NOVA (National Organization of Victim Assistance). The hotline will operate from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The volunteer operators are answering literally hundreds of phone calls daily.

This Week's Press Briefing—2:30 p.m.

Superintendent Mary Beth Blue will hold a briefing for the press on Monday, January 14, at 2:30 p.m. outside the central administration building at 2000 West Central Drive. Ms. Blue will update reporters on student and school staff activities planned for the week and district action to provide counseling and assistance to students and their families.

NOTE: No media will be allowed on Hudson Public School grounds until the press briefing on Monday. Media who violate these parameters set up to reduce interference in student learning and school-work routines will not be allowed to attend the 2:30 briefing. Thank you for your cooperation.

Reporters seeking information throughout the day may call the communications office at 555-7890 or e-mail rholtgren@k12hudson.org

Community Healing Web Site—www.wewillheal.org

Members of the community are encouraged to participate in an on-line memorial to the victims of the Hudson school shooting. Please send your thoughts, pictures, poems, songs, and other expressions. Web site visitors may also ask grief counselors or school officials questions on-line and receive information about how to help loved ones cope and recover from crisis.

How Community Members and Others Can Help

The staff and students of Hudson Public Schools are overwhelmed by the generosity of our local, state and national communities. At this time, we suggest that you consider monetary donations or notes and expressions of condolence, rather than sending any gifts.

Condolences

Expressions of sympathy (notes, cards, etc.) for the Hudson School community may be sent by e-mail to ccerene@k12tretorn.org or postal mail:

Messages for Hudson
Communication Department
Hudson Public Schools
P.O. Box 33333
Hudson, PA 80550

Counseling Available

Counseling is available for all community members in need. If you or someone you care about needs help, please call 555-7890.

Funeral Arrangements

Funerals and memorial services are scheduled throughout this week. The schedule and logistical information is as follows:

Steven Tomkins
Funeral, January 15 at 2:00 p.m.
Morningside Village Baptist Church
1414 East Street West

Emily Rankin
Visitation, January 16 at 10:00 a.m.
Funeral, January 16 at 2:00 p.m.
Ribbonsall Evangelical Church
345 Rington Boulevard

Tool 13—Letter to Local Association from the State President

Samples and Templates

SAMPLE LETTER #1 TO LOCAL ASSOCIATION FROM THE STATE PRESIDENT

Dear members of our association family,

We are deeply saddened by your loss and extend our sincere condolences to you during this difficult time. Know that you are in the thoughts and prayers of millions of NEA brothers and sisters throughout our nation, and please don't hesitate to call on us for help and support.

In addition to leaning on those in our education family, professional counseling is available through Monroe counseling services at 321/555-4444. We encourage you to seek out this counseling, even if you think it may not be “for you.” We have also scheduled a series of meetings for school staff to gather information and advice. Enclosed you will find a fact sheet on common emotional reactions to trauma and steps you can take to provide comfort and healing. (See **Tool 7**.)

Memorial services for the victims, family, and school community will be held on October 17. Superintendent Jane Leftal, Governor James Stein, Monroe Mayor Mary Hall, and other distinguished guests will honor and remember how special each and every lost life was to our school community. In addition our members will honor their memory by wearing green and gold ribbons and reading verses and poetry.

In the face of such tragedy, you have shown our community and the entire nation what it means to be an educator. We have seen the uncommon courage and selflessness of the teachers and staff of Monroe High School, who never forgot their responsibility to the young people in their care. We are truly blessed to have such devotion to children in our public education family.

Let us vow not to give in to despair or cynicism, and instead work together to forge an alliance with families, schools, and communities to keep our children safe.

In solidarity,

Ms. Fran Winsom
President



About the Tool

This tool provides a sample of a letter to the local association from the state president. Immediately following the crisis, the state association president may consider sending such letters to the local association and members across the state. This promotes unity and lets the local association know that state resources are there to provide support.

SAMPLE LETTER #2 TO STATE ASSOCIATION MEMBERS FROM THE STATE PRESIDENT

April 29, 1999

To Our Members —

In the days since April 20 and the horror at Columbine High School, Colorado teachers and support staff have been in the thoughts and prayers of millions of NEA members throughout America. I take comfort in knowing that and I hope you do, as well.



One of our fellow members lost his life helping kids on April 20. Columbine High School teacher Dave Sanders was a terrific teacher, respected by students and loved by the girls he coached. During the awful violence, Dave warned hundreds of students, calmed them, and led dozens to safety. The students say he did not stop, even after he was shot. He crawled, bleeding, through the halls to help them until he collapsed in a classroom. For the next few hours, the students tried to stop the bleeding and save their teacher. And in the end, Dave Sanders gave his life to his students.

Dave Sanders is but one Columbine hero. As students and staff recall that terrible day, we will learn of other courageous teachers, support staff, and students who saved others' lives.

We encourage you to contribute, in Dave Sanders' memory, to the Jefferson County Education Association Scholarship Fund. Begun when Christa McAuliffe died in the shuttle disaster, the fund gives scholarships to students planning to be teachers. Mail your check to the JCEA-Christa McAuliffe Excellence Scholarship Fund, 1030 Wadsworth Blvd., Lakewood, Colorado 80215.

At CEA's annual Delegate Assembly on April 22, we held a memorial service. NEA President Bob Chase was there, along with JCEA president Jane Goff, Superintendent Jane Hammond, school board members, and Governor Owens. Many encouraging words were said, but none more comforting than those of Bob Chase who said, "Schools should be sanctuaries. The statistics tell us that school is still the safest place in America for a child, but I take cold comfort from these statistics because the sanctuary has been violated again. For those of us who have dedicated our lives to teaching and helping children, it is almost too much to bear. But, of course, you and I know that we will go on, we have to go on, because we will not abandon our children or our schools."

We passed a resolution written by JCEA delegates; it is on the other side of this letter. We also passed a new business item to form a Colorado coalition on school safety. This will be done with the help of students, parents, business leaders, clergy, education organizations, government leaders, and citizens.

CEA leaders and staff are working closely with JCEA and the school district to help the Columbine community and all of Colorado begin to heal. NEA and other state affiliates have offered resources to help Coloradans renew our commitment to children and school safety. We encourage you to wear blue and silver ribbons in honor of our Columbine members and their students, and send notes and cards of support to them to: Messages for Columbine, Communications Services, Jefferson County School District, P.O. Box 4001, Golden, Colorado 80401-0001.

Let us not give in to despair or cynicism. Let us instead work together to forge an alliance with families, schools, and communities to keep our children safe.

In solidarity and hope,

Beverly G. Ansfahl
President

Colorado Education Association
1500 Grant Street, Denver, Colorado 80203
303-437-1500 800-351-5939

**SAMPLE LETTER #3 TO SCHOOL STAFF
FROM THE UNISERV DIRECTOR**



GEORGIA ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATORS

Promoting Excellence in Georgia's Public Schools

August 31, 1999

Dear Heritage High School Educator:

I would like to extend a special welcome back to all of the educators at Heritage High School. I hope that your first weeks back at Heritage High School have been filled with positive experiences.

I would like to extend a thank you from myself and the Georgia Association of Educators for your commitment to the education and safety of our children. It takes a lot of courage to go on after a tragic event like the one that happened at the end of the last school year. Your presence shows that you are a dedicated and caring education professional that is committed to providing an excellent education for our students.

If there is anything that I can do to make this year a better one, please give me a call. Have a great year!

Sincerely,

Michelle Pollok
GAE UniServ Director
3951 Snappinger Parkway
Suite 400
Decatur, GA 30035
Phone: (404)289-5867 x306
Fax: (404)286-9464
Email: MPollokGAE@aol.com

Tool 14—Memo to Faculty on Media Interviews

Samples and Templates



About the Tool

The purpose of the memo to faculty on media interviews is to provide information to the faculty on handling requests for media interviews. Adapt the sample memo as a template for your own memo.

MEMORANDUM

Attn: Burke staff

From: Jane Yall, Burke Education Association President

Re: Media interviews

The school district has received numerous media requests for interviews with teachers. Most of you have expressed a desire for protection from media intrusion. However, if you would like to be available for an interview, please contact me. The school district would like to help facilitate all interviews, or if you are more comfortable, I can help put you in touch with reporters.

In an effort to channel media requests to those interested and protect those who aren't, the school district and association would like to identify teachers who are willing to provide media interviews. It is important for the voices of teachers and school staff to be heard in the media. If you decide to grant an interview please let media coordinator Sue Rogan know of your decision. This helps Sue in understanding the full scope of interviews that are occurring and lets her know you are willing to be interviewed in case she gets other requests.

Following are some considerations you may want to consider before granting an interview.

- 1) You have the right to express your concerns, thoughts, and feelings to a reporter and you have the right to refuse an interview.
- 2) Reporters have the right to ask you for an interview and to ask questions based on their or their editor's view of "newsworthiness."
- 3) Identify your purpose for agreeing to an interview. Are you confident this goal will be fulfilled? Why?
- 4) If you choose to participate in an interview, do some preparation work to make sure it fulfills your goals.
 - Ask the reporter for the context for the story and how your comments will likely be used.
 - Ask the reporter about others being interviewed for the story, so you can see how your comment might be framed.

- Clearly articulate your reasons for participating in the interview and set conditions to protect yourself. (e.g., identify topics you are not comfortable talking about and those that you wish to stress and seek an agreement that these parameters will be respected)
- Consider the implications of your interview. What will be the short-term and long-term results? How will your family and colleagues react to your message?
- Write down the messages you would like to communicate and make sure that you repeat them often. Use bridging phrases to provide opportunities to articulate your main points. (e.g., It's important to remember that., The bottom line here is..., This issue hinges on...)
- Make sure that your comments focus on your main points. Do not count on "off the record" comments being kept confidential. Think carefully how your words may be used IN and OUT of context. Don't leave room for confusion or for your words to be taken out of context.

Tool 15—Memo to Press Outlining Parameters for Coverage of Funerals and Memorials

Samples and Templates



About the Tool

The purpose of the memo to press outlining parameters for coverage of funerals and memorials is to provide guidance to the press on rules of coverage. This is a very important memo to send prior to the first funeral or memorial service. Use the following sample as a template in creating your own memo.

ATTENTION: EDITORS AND NEWS DIRECTORS

Media Coverage of Memorial Services and Special Events

Memorial services and funerals are critical in helping families, schools, and communities heal. In order to allow students, staff, and families privacy in their grief and the opportunity to focus on the service without fear of media intrusion, please review and adhere to the following parameters for coverage. For more information, contact Barbara Greenstone, media coordinator, at 555-0303.

Pool Coverage

All funerals and memorial service will be handled with pool coverage. Media outlets selected for pool coverage for funerals and memorial services is as follows.

Television—Channel 8 (ABC)

Radio—WKPP

Print and Still Photography—*The Tribune*

Members of the pool will meet their assigned school official escort two hours before the service is to begin. The escort will provide information about speaker names, location of ceremony, and designated photo sites, and other questions media may have. The escort will also provide media credentials and press ribbons that all staff in the media pool must conspicuously wear throughout the service to help identify members of the media who are approved for the pool. Media must follow the instructions of their assigned escort or they will lose their pool privileges.

Location of Media in Events

The pool designees for each event will be escorted into and out of the services by a member of the Juliard County School Media Team. There will be one designated location for media. Once positioned in the cordoned area, media may not leave the location until a member of the communications staff grants approval. No cameras, including the pool camera, will be permitted at the entrance to the services—

media not staying behind the designated perimeter will be removed from consideration for future pool coverage opportunities.

Parameters on Coverage

Photography is limited to wide shots, shots of people's backs, photos of pictures or fixtures in the room, such as flags or school emblems; and headshots of speakers. Photos of mourners' faces are prohibited. Any violators will be removed from the service immediately.

Media should not approach any of the attendees for an interview. In the event that a attendee approaches a reporter and would like to make a comment, the reporter must make arrangements for the interview to occur off the premises, so that other families are not intimidated or distracted by the presence of media interviews being conducted prior to or following the service.

The Federal Aviation Administration has declared a "no-fly" zone in the airspace above the memorial service site. In addition to being a violation of privacy, news helicopters can be trauma triggers for students and staff who associate the sound of helicopters with a traumatic event.

Identifying Members of the Media at Events

All media wishing to cover the events from within the buildings must be pre-approved and credentialed by the Juliard County School District Media Team. Reporters not wearing their credentials and press ribbons signifying that they are approved members of the pool, will be asked to leave.

Tool 16—Memo to Press Outlining Parameters for Coverage of the First Day Back at School

Samples and Templates



About the Tool

The purpose of the memo to press outlining parameters for coverage of the first day back at school is to provide guidance to the press on rules of coverage. This is a very important memo to send prior to the first day back at school to clarify expectations of media who want to cover activities.

PARAMETERS FOR MEDIA COVERAGE OF KNOX HIGH SCHOOL'S FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

Knox High School is committed to making the first day of school a day focused on learning, growth, continued healing, and a “new normal.” In the past month, our students have survived immense suffering and turmoil. They have grown and changed in ways unthinkable. In recognition of their tremendous efforts and progress, we intend to provide maximum support and opportunities to keep the eyes of our school community fixed on sustaining this growth and progress.

Although many images shown by the media this week continue to portray our students as they were six months ago, that is not an accurate picture of our students as they go back to school August 27. As a medium focused on the “new” and the fresh, we ask you to recognize this reality and refrain from coverage saturated with the past.

Recognizing the media interest in Knox’s first day and the access necessary for coverage, Knox has established the following ground rules. As a condition of coverage of any kind on school district property or air space, media must be credentialed by the district and follow all rules.

The school district reserves the right to cancel all access to the school at any time and to remove any media representatives from school grounds if the rules are violated.

Locations for Media Set Ups

- The south parking lot will be made available for media use starting at 11:00 a.m. Thursday, August 26. Live truck parking is as designated on the attached map with eight spaces allocated for four national networks and all local TV outlets. Additional live trucks will not be accommodated in the lot.
- All media will be met at the parking lot entrance by a school district communication staff member who will distribute media credentials to all approved media. Media representatives must have credentials visible at all times.

- Reporter stand up locations facing the school entrance and banner are marked in orange paint. This is a large area capable of accommodating all stations. However, space will be allocated on a first-come, first-serve basis. Photographers can mark their tripod locations with markers on masking tape.
- Any and all interviews must take place in this stand up area or off school grounds.
- The east end of the parking lot will be the site of all press conferences.
- Adjacent to the press conference area is the designated print media location.
- The parks and recreation department is providing portable toilets and trash receptacles for the media area. Media are asked to help with the cost.
- No scaffolding, staging material, boom cameras, or cranes will be allowed on the property.
- No other location on school property (including airspace) will be open to the media. Twenty-four-hour security will patrol the entire school grounds and surrounding neighborhood.

Pool Coverage of Opening Ceremony and Pep Rally

- One still photographer and print reporter, one videographer and reporter, and one radio reporter are assigned to pool coverage of the opening ceremony and pep rally. A member of Knox communication office will escort each media representative.
- Members of the pool will meet their assigned Knox school official escort at 6:45 a.m. on Monday. The escort will provide information about speaker names, location of ceremony, and designated photo sites, and other questions media may have. Media must follow the instructions of their assigned escort or they will lose their pool privileges.
- The designated media pool may cover the opening ceremony, pep rally, and students entering the school only.
- Members of the pool may cover the ceremony and pep rally from designated locations only. They may not obtain any interviews and are asked to focus on the event.
- Please be respectful of emotional or grieving students and staff and refrain from taking their pictures.
- Media not in the pool must remain in the designated East parking lot location. This is the only location where media not in the pool may locate. Media found elsewhere on the grounds will be removed and lose access privileges.
- All media must vacate school grounds by 10:00 a.m., Monday following student and staff re-entry into school.

Tool 17–Volunteer Orientation Guide

Samples and Templates



About the Tool

The purpose of the volunteer information guide is to provide orientation information for volunteers. This sample can be used as a template to create your own volunteer orientation guide. To the extent possible, this piece should provide basic information and instructions to free staff from having to train each volunteer individually.

SAMPLE VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION GUIDE

Welcome to the Johnson County Communications Crisis Response Center. We thank you for volunteering your time and energy to **pitch in** and help the community. This orientation guide is designed to help you **plug-in** and become familiar with our operation. Your work is extremely important. Quite simply, we couldn't do this without you.

Crisis Communication Center

The Johnson County Crisis Communication Center is the central transmitter of news and information related to Hurricane Shelley. Our goal is to relay accurate, constructive information to aid our school community in dealing with the storm and the clean up and school repairs left in its wake.

Roles and Responsibilities

Following is a description of the roles and responsibilities of our crisis team work. Depending on the ebb and flow of the day, and the ratio of new volunteers to seasoned veterans, we may consider rotations in order to give volunteers breaks and variety of work.

Phone Bank: Procedures for Answering the Phones

Before you begin working on phone bank duty, it is important to take some time to read through the material in your volunteer orientation folder, particularly the Frequently Asked Questions section. (See **Tool 20**)

Phone bank volunteers will be assigned one of the fourteen desk positions. You will want to keep your volunteer orientation folder, contact lists, and message-taking sheets close by for easy reference.

Greeting

The greeting for answering the phone is "Johnson Crisis Communications, may I help you?"

-1-

The Frequently Asked Questions document will contain most of the answers to questions you will receive. Please try to stick to the script and don't be pressured to provide "on-the-record" quotes. Do not speculate on questions for which you do not have verified answers.

If you are asked for your name, respond: *"I am a volunteer helping the district fulfill media requests and am not an official district spokesperson. All statements attributed to the district must come from a district spokesperson. If you will give me your name and telephone number, I will see that it gets to a district spokesperson. Thanks for your cooperation. As I'm sure you can imagine, we are fielding thousands of calls a day."*

M e s s a g e T a k i n g

Messages are taken on color-coded sheets—purple for media, yellow for school staff, parents, and citizens.

If the call is for Max Heightner, the communications director, please ask for the caller's name and the purpose of their call. If Max is unavailable and the call is from a member of the media, take a message on the purple double-sided media query sheets. (See **Tool 18**.) If it is from a school district administrator, ask if you can transfer the call to Mick Dreight, the communication's director's assistant. Otherwise, take a message on the yellow message sheets and place in Max's incoming phone message folder.

If the call is a parent or citizen with a question or request, please consult the FAQ document to obtain answers to the most frequently asked questions. If the question is a new question, take a message on the yellow message sheet and deliver it to research staff to follow up on. When a verified answer is obtained, make sure the FAQ document is updated to reflect the new information.

F i e l d i n g M e d i a Q u e r i e s (p u r p l e)

If the call is from a member of the media, please record questions and requests on the purple double-sided query sheets. If the request is for Max, chances are he will already be on the phone and/or in meetings. Our goal with the media is to provide fast, accurate, responsive information that meets reporters' deadlines. Therefore we have created a system for organizing and responding to media as quickly as possible. Reporters will pressure you to leave your desk to track Max down. Try to resist this pressure and stick to the system.

The priority for responding to media is as follows—local first, regional second, major nationals third, international and tabloid news magazine last.

The direction for coding and organizing requests using the two-sided query sheet (see **Tool 18**) is as follows. One side of the query sheet is designated for requests for information or answers to a specific questions, the other side is designated for requests for interviews and includes information such as the type of medium (radio, TV, print), the deadline for the interview, the context for the interview and story (what is the story about and who else will be consulted), and how long the interview will likely last.

As you get the requests, file them in the designated folders—local, regional, major national, and other. Try not to accumulate too many requests at your desk, particularly if they are local requests. Even though the phones continue to ring, you must deliver them to the designated folders within 5-7 minutes. If avail-

able, the media coordinator assistant will make regular rounds to pick up your media query sheets.

Fielding Calls from the Public (yellow)

If the call is from a parent, school staff, or citizen, do your best to resist having to return calls and answer all questions while they are still on the line. Some questions may need more research. Take these messages on the yellow forms and make sure to fill in all fields.

Daily "to-do" lists

Throughout the day, communication center coordinators keep a running list of tasks and items that need attention. However, many duties are routine tasks for which volunteers will be asked to help. They are as follows.

M o r n i n g

- ☐ Finalize the master schedule of all events for the day and make schedule available to all crisis communication staff, particularly those at the phone bank;
- ☐ Finalize the daily fact sheet (**Tool 12**). Fax and e-mail to appropriate lists and post on the web.
- ☐ Make sure each phone station is supplied with adequate message taking sheets, the latest FAQ's, fact sheets, master schedules, press releases for the day, and phone lists.
- ☐ Monitor the contents of morning newspapers, wire stories, radio and television reports and complete a report for the communications director.

A f t e r n o o n

- ☐ Attend all interagency public information officer briefings and take notes for communications director.
- ☐ Prepare and distribute all updated schedules, fact sheets, etc. for all interagency public information officers and post on the web site.
- ☐ Prepare and copy updated fact sheets for distribution at press briefings.
- ☐ Attend all school district press briefings, take notes, and tape all comments for later reference.
- ☐ Research questions from phone bank and update Frequently Asked Questions document.

E v e n i n g

- ☐ Complete master schedule for the next day, proof and obtain sign off from the communications director.
- ☐ Remove all out-of-date information from volunteer folders and replace with new.
- ☐ Backup all computer files if automated backup is not part of the system.
- ☐ Convene all-coordinator briefing to ensure all media requests have been fulfilled and assemble "to-do" lists for following day.

Tool 18—Media Interview/Information Request Form

Samples and Templates

SAMPLE MEDIA INTERVIEW FORM

Interview request for: Stephanie Pierson, local president
Media outlet and reporter name: Stanley Peterson, WKRH-TV (NBC affiliate)
 TV
 Newspaper
 Magazine
 Radio
 Other _____
Phone/pager: 555-3885 extension 543 (phone); 555-8855 (pager)
Deadline/date of interview: Tomorrow (Friday, Feb 15), 7:00 am
 Live
 Taped
Location and logistics: On school property
 In person (requested location? At station/onsite? Onsite, up to us where)
 By phone
Topic and story context: Educators' reaction to decisions made about alternative school sites for buildings destroyed by the storm.
Anticipated length of interview: 3-5 minutes
Context for information request (what is the story about, how is it being framed, who else are they talking to in obtaining information?):
Will also be speaking to Debbie Jones' father
Message taken by: Stacy Keith
Date and time of request: Thursday, Feb 14, 4:30 pm



About the Tool

The purpose of a media interview/information request form is to ensure that volunteers and others answering the phones collect the necessary information from media calling to get information or request interviews. It is usually helpful to create a two-sided form, with interview requests on one side and informational requests on the other. It is also important to create a system for managing the forms—for instance, requiring volunteers to give the original to the media coordinator and make a copy for a master request file.

SAMPLE MEDIA INFORMATION FORM

Media outlet and reporter name: Donna Lambert, The Times
Phone/pager: 555-4378 (pager)
Deadline: 3:00 p.m. today (Friday)
Specific question(s): Can we get yearbook photos of Mr. Boykin and Tiffany Slater? How long had Mr. Boykin taught at McKinley?
Context for information request (what is the story about, how is it being framed, who else are they talking to in obtaining information?): Focus on victims
Message taken by: Stacy Keith
Date and time of request: Friday, Feb 15, 1:00 p.m.
Q and A recorded in FAQ document: Yes

TEMPLATE MEDIA INTERVIEW REQUEST FORM

Media Interview Requests (SIDE ONE)

Interview request for: _____

Media outlet and reporter name: _____

TV

Newspaper

Magazine

Radio

Other: _____

Phone/pager: _____

Deadline/date of interview: _____

Live

Taped

Location and logistics: _____

In person (requested location? At station/onsite?) _____

By phone

Topic and story context: _____

Anticipated length of interview: _____

Context for information request (what is the story about, how is it being framed, who else are they talking to in obtaining information?): _____

Message taken by: _____

Date and time of request: _____

TEMPLATE MEDIA INFORMATION REQUEST FORM

Media Information Requests
(SIDE TWO)

Media outlet and reporter name: _____

Phone/pager: _____

Deadline: _____

Specific question(s): _____

Context for information request (what is the story about, how is it being framed, who else are they talking to in obtaining information?): _____

Message taken by: _____

Date and time of request: _____

Q and A recorded in FAQ document: _____

Tool 19—Web Page

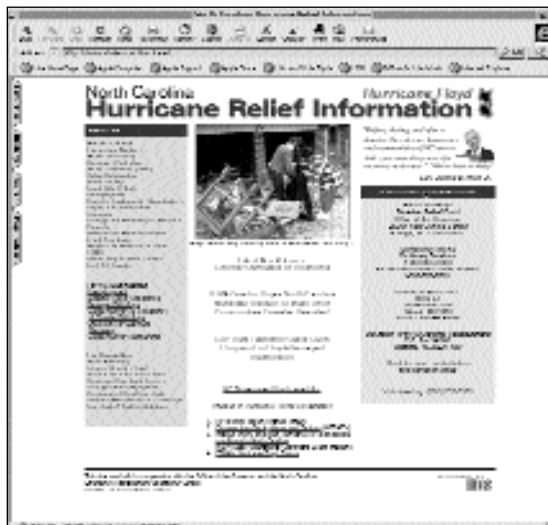
Samples and Templates



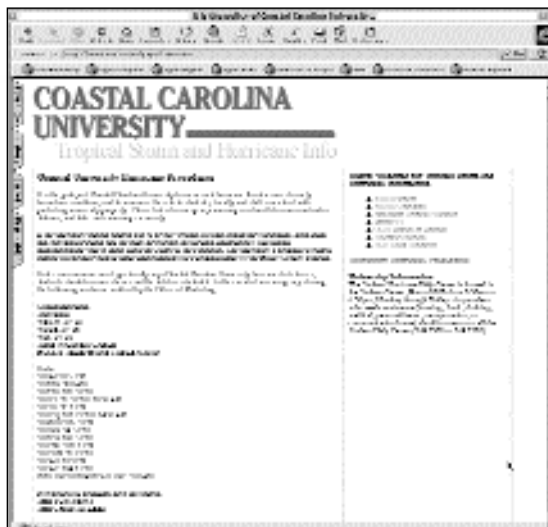
About the Tool

The Internet can be a powerful tool for sharing facts and information. From posting the daily fact sheet to putting up lists of contact and support numbers to giving survivors a place to post their thoughts and feelings, a web page can be a critical part of your school's information dissemination and support functions in a crisis. This tool provides some examples of web pages used in a crisis.

SAMPLE WEB PAGES—USED FOR HURRICANE FLOYD UPDATES



www.state.nc.us/hurricane/



www.coastal.edu/pages/storm.htm

Tool 20—Frequently Asked Questions

Samples and Templates



About the Tool

The purpose of a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document is to prepare answers to the most commonly asked questions and to ensure that all phone bank volunteers can provide accurate information to callers, which has been pre-approved by the association or district. This document should be updated multiple times a day, as more questions arise, and should be posted on the web site and made available for volunteers to distribute and fax on request. The fictitious example can be used as a basis for creating your own FAQ.

FAQ

LAST UPDATED 2/15/2000

Q. How can I locate a family member, colleague or student displaced in the storm?

A. Evacuee Information Info Numbers (by county)

Pitt County Shelter Locator

555-9037

Lenoir County Shelter Locator

555-4528

Edgecombe County Shelter Locator

555-7916

Q. How can I volunteer to help out the victims of the floods?

A. Volunteering: (888) 835-9966

Q. When will school resume and where will students whose schools have been damaged or destroyed by the storm attend class?

A. The school board will meet on February 10 to make decisions about alternative school sites. An announcement will be made through the media and on the storm hotline — 1-800-999-7777.

Q. How can parents and teachers receive information about how to help children deal with trauma?

A. The county mental health agencies have staff available to provide information and assistance on a 24-hour basis. Call 345-567-8901.

Q. How can parents and school staff receive help with childcare while they are busy attending to storm damage repair?

A. The Hearts and Healing childcare center is expanding their services to provide extra childcare for parents attending to storm damage abatement. The childcare center is also providing tips for parents on minimizing the emotional trauma of the storm on children. Call 567-789-0000 or visit their web site at www.healinghearts.org

Q. I am a ___ worker and am out of work in the wake of the storm. How can I file for unemployment?

A. Call unemployment and insurance claims, 1-888-834-6284;

Q. Where can I get information about federal disaster aid for home, business, and property damage?

A. Call FEMA Alabama Hotline 1-800-462-9029

Q. How can I donate money or provide assistance to flood victims?

A. Red Cross Helpline: 1-800-958-2351; For credit card contributions, call 1-800-HELP-NOW

Q. What items can be donated to help those whose homes and livelihoods have been destroyed in the flood?

A. Food and water was very important immediately following the disaster, but shifting from food to funds would be most helpful to victims right now. The victims and community are very grateful for the immense generosity shown by caring citizens from across the nation. To find out what items are most needed, please call the donations hotline. It is updated several times a day. 1-800-HELP-OUT.

Q. How can I take advantage of the advance payment program for small businesses who've suffered from the storm damage?

A. The advance payment program for small businesses is located in the Alabama Small Business Administration office. They can be reached at 1-800-987-5678.

Flood Facts and Statistics

- 48 people confirmed dead, 5 missing, 4 reported injured.
- The agriculture industry was extremely hard hit. Some 2.8 million chickens and turkeys, 880 cattle and more than 30,000 hogs have died in the floods.
- Tens of thousands of homes have been damaged by floodwaters in 39 of the state's 100 counties; almost 9,000 either severely impacted or destroyed.
- Five shelters are still open, housing more than 600 people. At peak, more than 48,000 people were staying in official shelters.
- More than 650 roads were closed during the peak of the devastation. Almost 300 remain closed in Eastern Alabama because of high water or damage. In addition, 11 bridges and culverts were destroyed and 750 locations with drainage pipelines were damaged or lost.
- More than 1.2 million Alabama customers lost electricity during the flood, more than 7,780 still do not have power. These are considered "unconnectable" because homes are still submerged or it is unsafe to restore power until the homes are inspected.
- There are more than 200 travel trailers occupied—87 at a group site in Lowdon County and 7 at private sites. Construction is underway for temporary housing in Lowdon, Ransom, Pendergrass, Wright and Stanton counties.

Tool 21—Student Response Form

Samples and Templates



About the Tool

Immediately following a disaster it is important to identify students and colleagues who may be in need of extra care and/or counseling. Some students may be better equipped to express their need for help than others. This response form is aimed at reaching out to all students—especially the more reserved children—to encourage them to seek out help or to provide help to fellow students in need. The form may be handed out to children in the first days back at school, filled out and then returned to the teacher. Extra forms should also be made available in numerous locations with depository boxes located in easily accessible, private areas.

TEMPLATE STUDENT RESPONSE FORM

Date: _____

Student Name: _____

Homeroom: _____

Please check one:

I would like to talk further

I would prefer not to talk further

I am also aware that should I later decide that I want to speak with a counselor, that the counselor's office would be the place to let this be known.

I suggest that someone speak with the following students. I notice that they might need some help.

Student signature (optional)

Tool 22—For Parents: Media Interviews of Children

Fact Sheet — Ready to Copy



About the Tool

Copy and distribute this fact sheet for parents to help them understand how media interviews may affect their child. Children can suffer unintended consequences as a result of being interviewed. Caregivers should help protect them.

FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS: MEDIA INTERVIEWS OF CHILDREN

In the chaos and confusion of an unfolding adversity like we face today, providing information and stemming misinformation continues to be an immense challenge. This is particularly true as media scramble to interview students, bystanders, and other sources near and far. We know many of you and your children have been asked to provide interviews to the media.

No one cares more about your children than you, and keeping them from harm is a top priority. Following is some important information about the many unexpected and unintended consequences of a child's being interviewed in the aftermath of crisis.

- It is important that the trauma experienced by your child—even if you or the child feel that it did not directly impact you—be processed soon after a traumatic event.
- Although unintended, media interviews can be damaging to children in their most fragile moments—immediately post-crisis. Mental health experts insist that in the aftermath of a tragedy, youth are not in a position to make decisions that protect themselves. In fact, mental health experts stress that media interviews can cause real psychological damage to the child. Often when the student sees or hears his or her interview on TV or radio, or hears about it from friends, he or she can be overwhelmed with guilt for not providing the “right” answers. The interview can create a judgment within the child that impedes the healing process. Psychologists caution that students should first process the trauma and aftershock with a counselor to prevent long-term damage.
- Law enforcement and investigators report that multi-source, unconfirmed, often live interviews from the scene of a crime or trauma invariably impede investigations. Too often police learn that answers to questioning and memories recalled cannot be distinguished from those heard and seen on TV and those obtained from their actual memories. In addition, if a student hears or sees an interview on TV and it evokes guilt or shame, they often unconsciously begin to change their story, further complicating the investigation. In addition, the experience of having their words and actions parsed and questioned can cause long-term damage and shame.
- Certain types of media coverage can contribute to copycat incidents. A 1994 Centers for Disease Control study provides strong evidence that certain kinds of news coverage perpetuates suicide attempts. Investigators also report that many of the recent perpetrators of mass violence had suicidal motivations (an aggression turned inward AND outward) and harbored fantasies about sending a message to the nation through the media. There is also evidence

that these perpetrators had studied similar crimes committed by others before them—information they gleaned by watching the news. Avoidance of coverage focusing on details of the crime (e.g., how the bomb was made)—and particularly the perpetrators’ motivations—can avert copycat acts. After all, too often a sufficient explanation or reason for horrible acts does not exist. Speculation and simplistic instant analysis can be a disservice to the victims and the community.

- News coverage and healing, constructive information are not mutually exclusive concepts. Sharing their story with a journalist and the community can be enormously satisfying and healing for your children. Community knowledge, emotions, and reactions are a product of the information we consume. News coverage and the truths uncovered help us learn and grow.
- If you or your child choose to participate in an interview, do some preparation work to make sure it fulfills your goals. Use the following points as a guide.
 - 1) Ask the reporter for the context of the story and how your comments will likely be used.
 - 2) Ask the reporter about others being interviewed for the story, so you can see how your comments might be framed.
 - 3) Clearly articulate your reasons for participating in the interview and set conditions to protect yourself. For instance, identify topics you are not comfortable talking about and those that you wish to stress and seek an agreement that these parameters will be respected.
 - 4) Consider the implications of your interview. What will be the short-term and long-term results? How will your family and colleagues react to your message?
 - 5) Write down the messages you would like to communicate and make sure that you repeat them often. Use bridging phrases to provide opportunities to articulate your main points—such as “It’s important to remember that...”, “The bottom line here is...”, “This issue hinges on...”.
 - 6) Make sure that your comments focus on your main points. Do not count on “off the record” comments being kept confidential. Think carefully how your words may be used IN and OUT of context. Don’t leave room for confusion or for your words to be taken out of context.

Tool 23—For the Media: Avoiding Copycat Threats

Samples and Templates



About the Tool

Children can suffer unintended consequences due to media coverage and being interviewed. Help inform the media about how to protect children from harm with this letter.

LETTER TO THE MEDIA ON COPYCAT THREATS

Dear Editor,

As you know this week, our community was rocked by tragedy. As journalists you have been on the front-lines reporting on all facets of this event. This tragedy represents an immense news story AND some of the most important moments in our lives.

The magnitude of the reporting challenge for journalists is profound, particularly when faced with the wrenching assignment of covering children and tragedy. Because educators and journalists care deeply about their roles as informers and community members, we present the following considerations for minimizing harm and maximizing constructive information in news coverage.

In addition to considering these suggestions, we encourage you to talk to a school psychologist. Virtually no one in the schools is more experienced and educated in this area and we would be happy to facilitate any interview or information requests you may have about this.

- **Avoid presenting simplistic explanations.** It's important to acknowledge that multiple factors will have contributed to an act of school violence.
- **Focus on gaining a fuller understanding** of the factors that contribute to violence and portray events in context. Too often issues in the news are presented in episodic frameworks—sitcoms that have a neat resolution at the conclusion of a 30-minute segment.
- **Avoid engaging in repetitive, ongoing, or excessive reporting of school violence in the news.** Alternative approaches for coverage of acts of school violence should be considered. In addition to possibly promoting copycat behavior, it distorts the reality of the situation and doesn't recognize how the situation has adjusted itself over time. Six months after Columbine, reporters were asking students poised to go back-to-school, a mental position that took a great deal of work, to take them "back to that fateful day."

-1-

- **Focus on solutions and strive for context.** Schools are one of the safest places for children—safer than the home, the mall, or the streets. Recognize that victims of tragedy can heal and grow stronger.
- **Avoid providing sensational coverage of school violence.** Sensationalism can be minimized by eliminating morbid details of the act, decreasing the prominence of the news report, and avoiding the use of dramatic photographs related to the event. Four days, four weeks, and even four months later, is the same photo really “news?”
- **Focus on reality of time passage.** Pictures of a community in strife and people in agony are dramatic and compelling, but a week later, consider focusing on growth or leaving them alone. That community has lived perhaps a decade’s worth of experience in a week. They are often not perpetually stuck in the tragedy.
- **Avoid reporting “how to” descriptions of acts of violence.** Reporting technical details about the act (e.g., how bombs were made, how weapons were purchased, etc.) is not recommended and may facilitate imitation of the event by other at-risk individuals.
- **Focus on programs that prevent violence.** Recognize a student or community leader who makes a difference.
- **Avoid presenting a violent act as a tool for accomplishing certain ends.** Violence should not be presented as an effective coping strategy because other violent individuals may view it as an attractive solution.
- **Focus on non-violent solutions to conflict.**
- **Avoid glorifying a person(s) who committed an act of violence.** News coverage is less likely to contribute to copycat acts of violence when reports do not give undue attention to perpetrator(s).
- **Focus on the reality that perpetrators of school violence typically have serious problems.** It is constructive to inform the public about the kinds of problems that lead to acts of violence.

Sincerely,

Tool 24—For the Media: Considerations on Covering Kids and Crisis

Fact Sheet — Ready to Copy



About the Tool

Copy and distribute this fact sheet for media to help them understand how media interviews may affect children.

FACT SHEET FOR THE MEDIA: CONSIDERATIONS ON COVERING KIDS AND CRISIS

The magnitude of the reporting challenge is profound, particularly when faced with the wrenching assignment of covering children and tragedy. Because educators and journalists care deeply about their roles as informers and community members, we present the following considerations for covering kids and crises.

Q. When reporters approach children and/or teenagers at the scene of a crisis, should consent from the student be sufficient to proceed with an interview?

Consider this... Even though they may seek YOU out, mental health experts insist that in the aftermath of a tragedy youth are not in a position to make decisions that protect themselves, and in fact, stress that media interviews can cause real psychological damage to the child. When the student sees or hears the interview on TV or radio, or hears about it from friends, they are often overwhelmed with guilt for not providing the “right” answers. Although unintended, the interview can create a judgment within the child that impedes the healing process. Psychologists caution that students should first process the trauma and aftershock with a counselor to prevent long-term damage.

Q. Does news coverage contribute to copycat incidents?

Consider this... Of course news coverage is not THE cause of copycat incidents, but a 1994 Centers for Disease Control study provides strong evidence that certain kinds of news coverage perpetuate suicide attempts. Investigators also report that many of the recent perpetrators of mass violence had suicidal motivations (an aggression turned inward AND outward) and harbored fantasies about sending a message to the nation through the media. There is also evidence that these perpetrators were careful students of similar crimes committed by others before them—information they gleaned through the media.

Q. Is pool coverage a realistic consideration for media reporting of major tragedies?

Consider this... Although some would call it highly unrealistic, many schools and youth advocates hope it becomes a consideration. Schools have been overwhelmed by the crush of media that ensues following school shootings, and unfortunately competition has not produced higher quality coverage, but instead tempted some reporters to act irresponsibly. For example, in Jonesboro, Arkansas, reporters posed as doctors and counselors in order to gain access to schools and hospitals, and in Littleton, Colorado, a major network newsmagazine offered a student a large sum of money to carry a hidden camera to school. Certainly, a school crisis IS news and most reporters cover such incidents with sensitivity and compassion. But could pool coverage be the answer to blunting the competitive frenzy to spare children and school communities?

Tool 25—For the Media: School Safety Statistics

Fact Sheet — Ready to Copy

FACT SHEET FOR THE MEDIA: SCHOOL SAFETY STATISTICS

The latest research demonstrates a decline in school violence over the past decade, with fewer students carrying guns or other weapons, and fewer fights than there were ten years ago. These statistics can help bring context to many of the school safety stories you are covering.

Although these new findings are encouraging, the National Education Association and its nearly 2.5 million members are committed to making every school as safe as possible. Communities need to continue to use comprehensive approaches to keeping schools, students, and school staff safe. Even one violent incident is too many.

- The number of youths who said they carried a weapon to school fell by 28 percent between 1991 and 1997. The proportion who carried a gun on or off campus dropped 25 percent. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, August 1999)
- The number of students who said they got in a schoolyard fight fell by 9 percent between 1991 and 1997. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, August 1999)
- Fewer young people are carrying guns or taking them into schools. Expulsions for carrying firearms onto school property dropped by nearly one third between the 1996-97 and 1997-98 school years. (U.S. Department of Education, August 1999)
- In a 1997 study by the National Center for Education Statistics, 80 percent of schools reported five or fewer crimes of any kind (serious or petty) in the 1996-97 school year. (National Center on Education Statistics, *Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools, 1996-97*).
- There were 40 school-shooting deaths during the 1997-98 school year, down from 55 in 1992-93. (National School Safety Center at Pepperdine University.)
- Only 10 percent of schools report any instance of serious crime. 43 percent reported no crime at all. (National Center for Education Statistics.)
- Every two days, 25 children die by violence in the United States. (Children's Defense Fund, 1998.)
- 99 percent of children's deaths occur away from school. Peak times are evenings, weekends, and vacations. (*Washington Post*, Justice Policy Institute.)

“There is no ‘trend’ toward shootings at schools. In fact, such attacks have been on the decline.... The good news is that schools are some of the safest places in America.”

VINCENT SCHIRALDI,
JUSTICE POLICY INSTITUTE,
WRITING IN THE WASHINGTON POST,
AUGUST 25, 1998

Tool 26—Crisis Drill Scenarios

Tool for Educators



About the Tool

Six crisis drill scenarios are part of this tool: abduction, death of a child, death of a teacher, epidemic or illness outbreak, legal disputes, and natural disasters. The framework also can and should be adapted to other scenarios.

IT IS THE SCHOOL DISTRICT AND ADMINISTRATORS' responsibility to develop crisis response plans in collaboration with the local association, local law enforcement, mental health agencies, and other appropriate entities, to update them regularly, and to plan crisis response drill and practice sessions. (See checklist with district level and school-based level crisis response plan guidance, page 1.6)

Like crisis plan development, the practice sessions must be a collaborative effort using input from the local association, law enforcement, ambulance and fire rescue teams, businesses, mental health organizations, parent groups, and other community organizations.

The following list of scenarios and corresponding questions provides a forum for local affiliate staff to conduct a full audit of the association's resources, strengths, liabilities, and connections under a variety of crisis situations. By recording answers in the blanks provided, the association will also have a record that could be referenced later.

This exercise will make the school and district wide practice and drill sessions more useful by providing very specific association resources, responses and roles. In addition, such advance thinking will help the district and association see around more corners to anticipate problems and seize opportunities. Based on the results of the association workshops, important revisions to the crisis response plans may be necessary.

TOOL FOR EDUCATORS: SIX CRISIS DRILL SCENARIOS

1. *Abduction*

Identify questions to ask to gauge the appropriate level of response. (e.g. Was event highly unusual for school community? Who was involved? Did the event occur on school property?)

Considering the answers given above, list the first five action steps the association would take.

List all appropriate contact names for help. (in order of importance and immediacy)

List all community allies and how they could provide assistance.

Audit the association's vulnerabilities and strengths.

List the associations' key messages to communicate to the students, district and community.

What are the media implications of this event and how can the association help?

How do the district-level and building-level crisis response plans provide for appropriate action to support and advocate for students and school staff?

TOOL FOR EDUCATORS: SIX CRISIS DRILL SCENARIOS

2. Death of a Child

Identify questions to ask to gauge the appropriate level of response. (e.g. Was event highly unusual for school community? Who was involved? Did the event occur on school property?)

Considering the answers given above, list the first five action steps the association would take.

List all appropriate contact names for help. (in order of importance and immediacy)

List all community allies and how they could provide assistance.

Audit the association's vulnerabilities and strengths.

List the associations' key messages to communicate to the students, district and community.

What are the media implications of this event and how can the association help?

How do the district-level and building-level crisis response plans provide for appropriate action to support and advocate for students and school staff?

TOOL FOR EDUCATORS: SIX CRISIS DRILL SCENARIOS

3. Death of a Teacher

Identify questions to ask to gauge the appropriate level of response. (e.g. Was event highly unusual for school community? Who was involved? Did the event occur on school property?)

Considering the answers given above, list the first five action steps the association would take.

List all appropriate contact names for help. (in order of importance and immediacy)

List all community allies and how they could provide assistance.

Audit the association's vulnerabilities and strengths.

List the associations' key messages to communicate to the students, district and community.

What are the media implications of this event and how can the association help?

How do the district-level and building-level crisis response plans provide for appropriate action to support and advocate for students and school staff?

TOOL FOR EDUCATORS: SIX CRISIS DRILL SCENARIOS

4. Epidemic or Illness Outbreak

Identify questions to ask to gauge the appropriate level of response. (e.g. Was event highly unusual for school community? Who was involved? Did the event occur on school property?)

Considering the answers given above, list the first five action steps the association would take.

List all appropriate contact names for help. (in order of importance and immediacy)

List all community allies and how they could provide assistance.

Audit the association's vulnerabilities and strengths.

List the associations' key messages to communicate to the students, district and community.

What are the media implications of this event and how can the association help?

How do the district-level and building-level crisis response plans provide for appropriate action to support and advocate for students and school staff?

TOOL FOR EDUCATORS: SIX CRISIS DRILL SCENARIOS

5. Legal Disputes

Identify questions to ask to gauge the appropriate level of response. (e.g. Was event highly unusual for school community? Who was involved? Did the event occur on school property?)

Considering the answers given above, list the first five action steps the association would take.

List all appropriate contact names for help. (in order of importance and immediacy)

List all community allies and how they could provide assistance.

Audit the association's vulnerabilities and strengths.

List the associations' key messages to communicate to the students, district and community.

What are the media implications of this event and how can the association help?

How do the district-level and building-level crisis response plans provide for appropriate action to support and advocate for students and school staff?

TOOL FOR EDUCATORS: SIX CRISIS DRILL SCENARIOS

6. Natural Disasters

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, violent storms, etc.

Identify questions to ask to gauge the appropriate level of response. (e.g. Was event highly unusual for school community? Who was involved? Did the event occur on school property?)

Considering the answers given above, list the first five action steps the association would take.

List all appropriate contact names for help. (in order of importance and immediacy)

List all community allies and how they could provide assistance.

Audit the association's vulnerabilities and strengths.

List the associations' key messages to communicate to the students, district and community.

What are the media implications of this event and how can the association help?

How do the district-level and building-level crisis response plans provide for appropriate action to support and advocate for students and school staff?

Tool 27—For Parents and Caregivers: Helping Child Victims of Natural Disaster

Fact Sheet — Ready to Copy



About the Tool

Copy and distribute this fact sheet for caregivers to help them support children in crisis. Knowing about common reactions and what to do to provide support can be empowering.

FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS: HOW TO HELP CHILD VICTIMS

Children are able to cope better with a traumatic event if parents, friends, family, teachers, and other adults support and help them with their experiences. Help should start as soon as possible after the event. It's important to remember that some children may never show distress because they don't feel upset, while others may not give evidence of being upset for several weeks or even months. Other children may not show a change in behavior, but may still need your help.

BEHAVIORS CHILDREN MAY EXHIBIT AFTER A DISASTER

- Children may be upset over the loss of a favorite toy, blanket, teddy bear, or other things that adults might consider insignificant, but that are important to the child.
- Children may change from being quiet, obedient, and caring to loud, noisy, and aggressive or may change from being outgoing to shy and afraid.
- Children may develop nighttime fears. They may be afraid to sleep alone at night with the light off or to sleep in their own room, or they may have nightmares or bad dreams.
- Children may be afraid the event will reoccur.
- Children may become easily upset, crying, and whining.
- Children may lose trust in adults. (After all, their adults were not able to control the disaster.)
- Children may revert to younger behavior, such as bed wetting and thumbsucking.
- Children may refuse to go to school or childcare and not want parents out of their sight.
- Children may feel guilty that they caused the disaster because of something they said or did.
- Children may become afraid of wind, rain, or sudden loud noises.
- Children may have symptoms of illness, such as headaches, vomiting, or fever.
- Children may worry about where they and their family will live.

THINGS PARENTS OR OTHER CARING ADULTS CAN DO

- Talk with children about how they are feeling and listen without judgment. Let them know they can have their own feelings, which might be different than others. It's OK.
- Let children take their time to figure things out and to have their feelings. Don't rush them or pretend that they don't think or feel as they do.

- Help children learn to use words that express their feelings, such as *happy, sad, angry, mad, and scared*. Just be sure the words fit their feelings, not yours.
- Assure fearful children that you will be there to take care of them. Stay together as a family as much as possible.
- Go back as soon as possible to former routines or develop new ones. Maintain a regular schedule for the children.
- Reassure children that the disaster was not their fault in any way.
- Let children have some control, such as choosing what outfit to wear or what meal to have for dinner.
- Help children know that others love them and care about them by visiting, talking on the phone, or writing to family members, friends, and neighbors.
- Encourage children to give or send pictures they have drawn or things they have written to family and friends.
- Reestablish contact with extended family members.
- Help children learn to trust adults again by keeping promises and including them in planning routines and outings.
- Help children regain faith in the future by helping them develop plans for activities that will take place later—next week, next month.
- Children cope better when they are healthy, so be sure children get needed health care as soon as possible.
- Make sure children are getting balanced meals, eating enough food, and getting enough rest. Natural disasters are energy sapping. Children may need increased rest and nutrition.
- Remember to take care of yourself so you can take care of your children.
- Spend extra time with children at bedtime. Read stories, rub their backs, listen to music, talk quietly about the day.
- If you will be away for a time, tell children where you are going and make sure you return or call at the time you say you will.
- Allow special privileges such as leaving the light on when children sleep for a period of time after the disaster.
- Limit children’s exposure to additional trauma, including news reports.
- Children should not be expected to be “brave” or “tough,” or not to cry.
- Don’t be afraid to “spoil” children in this period after a disaster.
- Don’t give children more information than they can handle about the disaster, don’t minimize the event either.
- Find ways to emphasize to children that you love them.
- Allow children to grieve losses.
- Develop positive anniversary activities to commemorate the event. These events may bring tears, but they are also a time to celebrate survival and the ability to get back to a normal life.

ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

- Encourage children to draw or paint pictures of how they feel about their experiences. Hang these at the child’s level to be seen easily.
- Write a story about the frightening event. You might start with: “Once upon a time, there was a terrible ___ and it scared us all. This is what happened: ___.” Be sure to end with, “And now we are safe.”
- Playing with playdough or clay helps children release tension and make symbolic creations.
- Music is fun and valuable for children. Creating music with instruments or rhythm toys helps relieve stress and tension.
- Provide children with clothes, shoes, hats, etc. so they can play “dress up” and can pretend to be adults in charge of recovering from the disaster.
- Make puppets with children and put on a puppet show for family and friends, or help children put on a skit about what they experienced.
- Read stories about disasters to and with children.

*Material adapted from Disaster Training International—Helping Adults Help Children, P.O. Box 30144, Seattle WA, 98103

Tool 28—For Parents and the Media: Coping with Natural Disaster

Fact Sheet — Ready to Copy



About the Tool

Copy and distribute to parents and the media to help caregivers provide assistance to victims of crisis. Knowing about common reactions and what to do to provide support can be empowering.

FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS AND THE MEDIA: COPING WITH NATURAL DISASTER

Natural disasters, such as floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, storms, and earthquakes, send shockwaves far and wide. The psychological consequences are felt individually and collectively. No one who witnesses a disaster is unaffected by it.

Although we can't control the weather and other natural phenomena, we can prepare to cope with it and its consequences. We can also help children recover. Many of the victims left in the wake of natural disasters are children. Adult professionals and family members are crucial supports for children, helping them heal and regain trust.

As teachers and support staff committed to advocacy for children, the NEA association family has the resources and communication networks available to deliver help to children and members struck by natural disaster.

COMMON REACTIONS TO NATURAL DISASTER

There are multiple factors that determine how to negotiate stress with children and the community. The amount of direct exposure, the loss of or serious injury to a friend or family member, and/or experiencing the destruction or damage to school, home or neighborhood all increase the severity of individual and collective reactions to trauma.

A child's perception of adults' reactions to the disaster is a major factor in youth coping. Children are very aware of adults' worries most of the time but they are particularly sensitive during the period of a disaster. Adult acknowledgment of concern and ability to cope with stress is important for children in dealing with the stressors of natural disasters. Being aware of the varied reactions can help caregivers develop appropriate healing responses and support.

The reaction to natural disasters can be similar to the stages of grief with individuals and communities experiencing them in various time frames and order. The trauma evokes painful consequences for the collective community and on young children and teens. Many of the reactions can be latent, appearing weeks and even several months following the disaster.

Reactions differ according to age groups. Following are some common reactions that can help school communities identify appropriate responses.

Community-Wide Reaction

Adults may exhibit denial differently than children. Some behaviors include feeling numb, blocking off pain and emotion, dreaming, feeling removed from experiences, or no feelings at all.

Children and adults experience a loss of the past, and a loss of the future. The destruction of livelihoods, homes and property relied on everyday, and family pictures, heirlooms, and scrapbooks that chronicle important benchmarks of the past represent a loss of the past and the future.

The feeling of loss of control can be overwhelming. By their nature, disasters are something over which we have no control—if we did, we would stop them from happening.

Disasters interrupt the natural order of things and create a severe loss of stability. The loss of stability can be very threatening, destroying faith and upsetting equilibrium for extended periods. The feeling is that if this disaster happened, then most anything else is likely.

Natural disasters multiply stressors in daily life. The financial pressures, intense work and concentration involved in beginning the rebuilding process, and often loss of livelihood can create immense stress in families. Any unsettled, dysfunctional, or sensitive issues will come bubbling to the surface, causing enormous strain on relationships. Children will often witness parents fighting and stress in their family life. Divorce and/or separation are common. It's important to recognize that families with the scarcest resources—emotional and financial—will suffer most.

Many emotional reactions of disaster survivors stem from problems of living caused by the disaster—home repair, replacement, or relocation, transportation, financial constraints. Disaster relief procedures have been called “the second disaster.” Navigating the bureaucratic red tape of relief can be exceptionally frustrating. Children are likely experiencing and sensing the extra stress and frayed nerves in their families. It's important to recognize that some of these extra stressors over time will provide the motivation and extra energy to act and break out of a mode of paralysis and feelings of being overwhelmed.

Separation anxiety is felt community-wide, but it can be especially acute in young children. It is best to try to keep the family together as much as possible. If parents are able, they should take children with them to run errands and attend meetings. After the disaster abates, parents and caregivers should pay particular attention to times of separation (bed time, school drop-offs, etc.) and provide extra reassurance. Let your child know where you are and possibly increase daytime phone calls.

The anxiety in children is often attributed to anxiety perceived in parents. Children who realize that their parents are powerless are fearful.

Adolescent Reactions

Adolescent reactions are marked by confusion with their own feelings. Trusted adults can provide guidance for teens in addressing their feelings and identifying constructive outlets.

Reaction

Rebellion in the home, refusal to do chores, substance abuse, questioning authority and “trying on” new behaviors for fit. (Some research suggests that a loss in the belief of adult's power results in the questioning of adult authority or juvenile misconduct.) Such behavior may include antisocial behavior like stealing, aggression, and acting

Response

Encourage youth to work out their concerns about the disaster. Adolescents may try to downplay their worries. It is generally a good idea to talk about these issues, keeping the lines of communication open and remaining honest about the financial, physical and emotional impact of the disaster on your family. Acknowledge the likely confusion that results from adolescent need for independence and the family's needs to pull together during and after a disaster.

Reaction

Excessive preoccupation with one thought or image. Fear related to their own well-being and survival.

Response

Significant adults in the lives of children can create distracting activities that attempt to shield children from emotionally troublesome images or thoughts and channel their energies into more productive outlets.

Reaction

Agitation, apathy, depression. Hypervigilance and avoidance of similar events, such as water, thunder, wind, the outdoors, etc. Loss of interest/concentration in school. Time distortion

Response

Monitor children's media viewing. Images of the disaster and the damage are extremely frightening to children, so consider limiting the amount of media coverage they see. A good way to do this without calling attention to your own concern is to regularly schedule an activity—story reading, drawing, movies, or letter writing, during the news hour.

Reaction

Withdrawal, listless behavior, isolating themselves from peers and family. An inability to make simple decisions. Anxiety about disruptions in peer relationships and school life. Appetite and sleep disturbance. Fear of the dark and being alone.

Response

Adolescents typically are going through an identity phase of development. Their sense of "who they are" at this point in their lives may be tied to possessions and friends. Having to transfer schools may be traumatic and telling friends they are living in a shelter equally difficult. Offer support and encouragement that things will get better and elicit their contribution to work on repairs or prevention of additional damage.

Young Children's Reactions

Young children are most dramatically affected by natural disasters. Generally the world as children know it is predictable and stable and served by dependable adults. Any disruption in stability causes stress. Following are some common reactions:

Reaction

Excessive clinging to parents and a fear of being alone. Regression in behavior (thumbsucking, bed-wetting, fear of sleeping alone, etc.) and in school performance. Violation of unconditional trust in adult ability to provide protection.

Response

Parent should be assured that they are not spoiling their child by responding to fright. If feelings are not recognized, then buried and later may surface...when the reason is not as evident. Significant adult availability and responsiveness is of great importance to move through the stressful time.

Reaction

Sleep disturbances and a refusal to go to bed. More severe reactions can include night terror and aimless running. Such behavior should be considered for referral to a professional.

Response

Children's fears often get worse around bed time, so you might want to stick around until the child falls asleep in order to make him or her feel protected.

Reaction

Reluctance to go back to school or child care. (This may emerge up to several months after the disaster.)
Sadness over the loss of prized possessions and pets.

Response

Separation is the flip side of attachment. Any indication that separation may occur causes stress. Children going into a new child care situation, to a new class, or to spend the night away from home (even to camp), can be stressed due to separation. It can be helpful for children to bring an attachment item along (blanket, bear) to child care, to ease the separation from parents.

Reaction

Overt competition with siblings for parents' attention. Obsession with one thought or fear. Misconduct and disobedience can reflect anxieties and losses that the child may not be talking about weeks and months after the disaster. Great sadness over the loss of property or pets.

Response

Spend more time with your child and try to identify with their concerns and fears. Some comfort may also be restored through recreating familiar surroundings, such as getting copies of photos from family and friends and allowing children to replace stuffed animals.

Physical complaints such as stomach aches, fevers, rash, asthma, headaches, dizziness, for which no immediate physical cause is apparent. More severe reactions such as hallucinations or fears of killing self or others should be referred to mental health professionals immediately.

Reaction

Shame and guilt—children do not believe in randomness and may even feel at fault after a disaster. Shame is one's public exposures of vulnerabilities. Guilt is private. There is a need to resolve these feelings, regain a sense of control, gain a new sense of independence and feel capable.

Response

Children need to be given permission for a range of emotions and to understand that there is no "right" or "wrong" way to feel. Each child needs an opportunity to discuss his or her situation and to talk about how the disaster has affected them.

Reaction

Irritability and/or excessive withdrawal. Speech difficulties. Changes in appetite and eating problems. Avoidance of stimulus or similar events, such as boating, swimming, baths, wind, thunder, the outdoors, etc. More severe reactions that can be cues for professional help can include uncontrollable crying, trembling with fright, and immobility.

Response

Engage children in conversation about the event and try to answer their questions with clear, simple, age-specific language. Encourage them to draw or express themselves through storytelling to gain a better understanding of a child's feelings about the disaster. Avoid euphemisms or false reassurances. Don't say disasters will never affect your family again; children will know this isn't true. Instead say, "I'll always try to keep you safe," or "Adults are working very hard to make things safer for next time."

Tool 29—The First Day Back at School Following a Crisis

Tool for Educators



About the Tool

The first day back at school following a crisis presents a rush of emotions and apprehension for teachers and school staff. It's important to recognize that these are normal, common reactions to an abnormal event. It may be comforting to know that experts say that experiencing the school routine again and feeling the embrace and support of the teachers, administrators, and students in your school family will be an important step in healing.

This tool provides a guide for teachers on one way to structure the first day back at school following a tragedy. See **Tool 30** for specific information on the first day back to school following a natural disaster.

FIRST DAY—FIRST PART/MORNING

Goal: Clear the Air and Stop Rumors

Start by outlining the plan for the day. You may also want to write the plan on the board. For example:

We will start by focusing on facts and stopping rumors. Next, we will focus on our emotions. And finally we will focus on where we can find useful information and assistance by identifying people and phone numbers for you and/or your parents to call if you need help. It is okay to feel afraid, confused, angry, and guilty. These are all normal responses to a crisis or tragic event. Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

Remember to **listen carefully** and be honest. Provide exact, factual information. Answer only what students ask you. Admit when you don't have specific answers. Use realistic terms with students when discussing aspects of an accident, injury, and loss. Avoid euphemisms.

Provide **facts** based on information provided by the school, including:

- Who was involved?
- What did they do and to whom?
- When did it happen?

Allow for a question-and-answer period.

Structure, safety, and routine are very important at this stage. **Detail for students the plans and safeguards in place** to ensure safety and structure, including the following.

- A class schedule for the week provides for activities and discussion topics for each school period.
- Presence of new adults in the building: police counselors, and others. Note the need to report suspicious incidents and people.
- Rules and regulations about student movement (such as in the halls, stairwells, and cafeteria).
- Rumor control: phone number for reporting rumors and other information.
- Long-term plan: focus on growth and healing.

Allow for a question-and-answer period.

FIRST DAY—SECOND PART/LATE MORNING, EARLY AFTERNOON

Goal: Process Emotions

During the second part of the day (late morning/early afternoon), focus on processing emotions. “Processing emotions” is less about psychotherapy and more about listening and providing feelings of safety. Through the process of identifying and articulating feelings as a group, students gain control and are comforted by knowing that others are experiencing similar feelings. If the emotion has a name, it is less mysterious and anxiety-producing.

Let’s talk about how we feel this afternoon. Given all that you’ve been through, I bet there is a whirlwind of feelings swirling in your hearts and minds.

- Address emotions and answer questions.
- Help students name their feelings. (You may want to write them on the board, or have students write them on the board.) They may need some priming to begin process of sharing. At a minimum, students are experiencing fear, anger, and guilt.
- Ask direct questions. Encourage shared feelings. *Are there others who feel this way?*
- Watch for moments or events shared in your classroom that would gently open the door for discussions about death.
- Honestly say that you too are having a hard time dealing with your own feelings.
- Comfort students by telling them not to be afraid to share how they feel and to cry if that is important.

One challenge you will face is balancing expressions of emotions with a return to routine. Certainly, the first few days will require mostly talking, sharing, and listening. Your goal may be to return to your normal routine by next week...with a little less sharing time and a little more teaching time each day.

Refer students for counseling if they have been particularly affected or if they are otherwise at risk due to a history of emotional issues or family problems. All students will grieve differently. Some students may develop post-traumatic stress disorder. Your district will have information on warning signs and appropriate resources.

Identify students who are absent. Students who choose not to come to school may be withdrawing and school staff might consider following up with them or their families.

Help students understand that their reactions may be normal. Expressions of grief may be delayed and may suddenly appear later as inappropriate behavior. Assure students that their feelings are all part of the healing process. Let students and parents know to that these reactions are normal. (See **6 and 7** list of common reactions to grief.)

At the end of each class period, provide a few minutes for students who have not spoken. Offer to talk with them one-on-one.

Share your discussions with other teachers—particularly those conversations with students who may be extremely distressed.

FIRST DAY—THIRD PART/LATE AFTERNOON

Goal: Provide Information and Resources

By the last period of the day, every teacher and staff member should be provided with the following information. A district decision should be made on how this information should be provided.

- Names of community, regional, and national organizations with information on crisis prevention.
- Information about mental health coverage in insurance plans and a list of providers.
- Community hotlines for violence and suicide prevention.
- Names of community groups that have youth outreach and peer oriented groups.

Resources should also be provided for parents. They may include the following.

- A letter that clearly explains the situation and provides phone numbers for questions.
- A list of steps you have taken to ensure the safety of students and staff.
- Information on how parents and family members can help students cope, including names of resources for family mental health.
- A fact sheet on post-traumatic stress disorder and other reactions some students may be exhibiting. (See **Tool 7**.)

Tool 30—Reentry into the School Routine Following a Natural Disaster

Tool for Educators

TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF ARE IMPORTANT supports in helping children manage the stress evoked by natural disaster. A child searches out that person who makes them feel safe and secure—trusted teachers. In fact stress occurs when that person is not available—in proximity or emotionally.

A psychology/sociology theory worthy of consideration in dealing with disaster stress is **attachment theory**. Throughout life, young children are more resilient if they have become attached to at least one significant adult. Being able to trust at least one adult pulls them through stressful times. Secure attachment provides a foundation for healthy development and healthy mental functioning.

- **Greet each child warmly** each day. That transition from parent to teacher is an important one. Often mornings are extremely stressful for families. Children may have been yelled at, hurried, and given breakfast in the car. A warm smile or hug as a child walks in the door can go a long way to help a child feel accepted and wanted.
- **Eliminate stressful situations** from your classroom and routines.
- **Be sensitive to the different cultures** and histories of nations that have experienced this kind of disaster or other trauma.
- Above all, **be honest without being too explicit**. Use age-specific terms in explanations and avoid euphemisms and simplistic bromides. Dispel myths about class issues—for example, point out that the disaster has caused loss for people on many different levels—emotionally and mentally as well as physically.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Many teachers respond to natural disasters with creative classroom activities to assist their students in ventilating and integrating their experiences. Some of these activities are appropriate for various age groups. They are meant to be vehicles for expression and discussion for your students, important steps in the healing process. These are examples of what can be done. They can be used to stimulate your own ideas and can be adapted to meet your own students' needs and your teaching style.



About the Tool

The first day back at school following a natural disaster presents a rush of emotions and apprehension for teachers and school staff. It's important to recognize that these are normal, common reactions to an abnormal event. It may be comforting to know that experts say that experiencing the school routine again and feeling the embrace and support of the teachers, administrators, and students in your school family will be an important step in healing and exercising coping skills to help support the long process of rebuilding.

Following is a guide for teachers on how to structure the first days, weeks, and months back at school following a natural disaster to provide maximum support for children. See **Tool 29** for additional general information on the first day back at school following a crisis.

Preschool Activities

- Make toys available that **encourage play reenactment** of children’s experiences and observations during the disaster to help children integrate these experiences into their lives. These might include fire trucks, dump trucks, rescue trucks, ambulances, or building blocks or playing with puppets or dolls as ways for the child to ventilate and act out his or her own feelings about what has occurred. Emotions and thoughts expressed in play provide an important window into understanding how a child is processing the trauma of the disaster. Based on what is expressed, teachers may want to refer the child to a counselor.
- Play games that involve physical touching among children within a structure. Children need **close physical contact** during times of stress to help them reestablish ego boundaries and a sense of security. Some examples might include Ring Around the Rosie, London Bridge, or Duck, Duck, Goose.
- Provide extra finger foods, in small portions, and fluids to supply the **emotional and physical nourishment** children need in times of stress. Oral satisfaction is especially necessary as children tend to revert to more regressive behavior in response to feeling that their survival or security is threatened.
- Have the children **create a mural** on long paper with topics such as “What happened in your house/school/neighborhood when the big storm/flood/earthquake hit?” This is recommended for small groups with discussion afterward facilitated by an adult.
- Let the children **dictate short stories** to an adult on a one-to-one basis on such topics as “What I do and don’t like about the rain.” This activity can help the child verbalize his/her fears, as well as perhaps get back in touch with previous positive associations with the disruptive phenomena.
- Have the children **draw pictures about the disaster** and then discuss the pictures in small groups. This activity allows them to vent their experiences and to discover that others share their fears.
- Create a **group collage**.

Primary School Activities

- Make toys available to the younger children that **encourage play reenactment** of their experiences and observations during the disaster to help them integrate these experiences into their lives. These might include fire trucks, dump trucks, rescue trucks, ambulances, or building blocks or playing with puppets or dolls as ways for the child to ventilate and act out his or her own feelings about what has occurred. Emotions and thoughts expressed in play provide an important window into understanding how a child is processing the trauma of the disaster. Based on what is expressed, teachers may want to refer the child to a counselor.
- Help or encourage children to **develop skits or puppet shows** about what happened in the disaster. Encourage them to include anything positive about the experience as well as those aspects that were frightening or disconcerting.
- Stimulate group discussion about disaster experiences by showing your own feelings, fears, or experiences during the disaster. It is very important to **legitimize their feelings** and to help them feel less isolated.
- Have the children **brainstorm their own classroom or family disaster plan**. What would they do? What would they take if they had to evacuate? How would they contact parents? How should the family be prepared? How could they help the family? Encourage them to discuss these things with their families.
- **Encourage class activities** in which children can organize or build projects (scrapbooks, replicas, etc.), thus giving them a sense of mastery and control over events.
- Have the children **color the pictures** in “The Awful Rain and How It Made Me Feel” (or similar material appropriate to the disaster). Encourage the children to talk about their own feelings during and after the disaster.

Junior High and High School Activities

- Facilitate **group discussion** of students' experiences of the disaster. This is particularly important among adolescents, who need the opportunity to vent as well as to normalize the extreme emotions that come up for them. A good way to stimulate such a discussion is for the teacher to share his/her own reactions to the disaster. They may need considerable reassurance that even extreme emotions and "crazy thoughts" are normal in a disaster. It is important to end such discussions on a positive note (e.g., What heroic acts were observed? How can we be of help at home or in the community? How could we be more prepared for a disaster?) Such discussion is appropriate for any course of study in that it can facilitate a return to more normal functioning.
- Break the class into small groups and have them **develop a disaster plan for their home, school, or community**. This can be helpful in repairing a sense of mastery and security, as well as having practical merit. The small groups might then share their plans in a discussion with the entire class. Encourage students to share their plans with their families. They may wish to conduct a "Family Disaster Preparedness" meeting and invite family members and disaster preparedness experts to participate.
- Conduct a class discussion and/or support a class **project on how the students might help the community rehabilitation effort**. It is important to help them develop concrete and realistic ways to be of assistance. This helps them to overcome the feelings of helplessness, frustration, and "survivors guilt" that are common in disaster situations.
- **Classroom activities that relate the disaster to course study** can be a good way to help students integrate their own experience or observations while providing specific learning experiences. In implementing the following suggestions, or similar ideas of your own, it is very important to allow time for students to discuss feelings stimulated by the projects or issues covered.

Art

Have the students portray their experiences of the disaster in various art media. This may be done individually or as a group effort, such as making a mural.

Civics/Government

Study government agencies responsible for aid to victims—how they work, how effective they are, the political implications within a community. Examine the community's systems and how the stress of the disaster has affected them. Invite a local governmental official to class to discuss disaster precautions, warning systems, etc. Have students contact the California Seismic Safety Commission of State Legislators regarding recent disaster-related bills passed or pending. How will this legislation affect your community and other areas of the state? Visit local emergency operating centers and learn about their functions.

English Composition

Have the students write about their personal experiences in the disaster. Discuss composition problems that arise in conveying heavy emotional tone without being overly dramatic.

Health

Discuss emotional reactions to disaster and the importance of taking care of one's own emotional and physical well-being. Discuss health implications of the disaster, such as water contamination, food that may have gone bad because of lack of refrigeration, and other health precautions and safety measures. Discuss the effects of adrenaline on the body during stress and danger. Invite a guest speaker from the field of public health and/or mental health.

History

Have students report on past natural disasters that have occurred in your community or geographic area and what lessons were learned that can be useful in preparing for future disasters.

Journalism

Have the students write stories that cover different aspects of the disaster, such as the impact on the community, lawsuits that result from the disaster, human interest stories from fellow students, or the geological impact. The stories might be compiled into a special student publication. Issues such as accurate reporting of catastrophic events vs. sensationalistic reporting might be discussed.

Literature

Have students report on natural disaster in other times and places—in Greek mythology, in American and British literature, in poetry.

Math

Have the class solve math problems related to the impact of the disaster, such as gallons of water lost or cubic feet of earth that moved in a mud slide.

Peer Counseling

Provide special information on common responses to disaster; encourage the students to help each other integrate their own experiences.

Psychology

Have the students apply what they learned in class to the emotions, behaviors, and stress reactions they felt or observed in the disaster. Cover post-traumatic stress syndrome. Have a guest speaker from the mental health profession who is involved in disaster work with victims. Have students discuss, from their own experience, what things have been most helpful in dealing with disaster-related stress. Have students develop a mental health education brochure discussing emotional/behavioral reactions to disaster and things that are helpful in coping with disaster-related stress. Have students conduct a survey among their parents or friends: What was the most dangerous situation in which you ever found yourself? How did you react psychologically?

Science

Cover scientific aspects of the disaster, such as the climate condition or geological impact. Design a project about stress, discussing the physiological responses to stress or the methods of dealing with it. Discuss how flocks of birds and herds of animals band together and work in a threatening or emergency situation. What can be learned from their instinctive actions?

Speech/Drama

Have the students portray the catastrophic emotions that come up in response to a disaster. Have them develop a skit or play on some aspects of the event. Conduct a debate, such as that women are more psychologically prepared to handle stress than men (or vice-versa).

Tool 31—Talking Points for Teachers

Tool for Educators

TALKING POINTS FOR ADDRESSING STUDENT QUESTIONS FOLLOWING A CRISIS

Using age-specific terms, explain to children the events that have transpired. You may also want to write it on the board.

Example: “We are sad to announce that something very unfortunate has happened to someone we care about. On (time, date, and name) was involved in a _____.” (Release as much information as possible without graphic details or nonfactual elaboration.)

Some of you may feel sadness over this loss. If you feel that you need to talk with someone about these feelings, counselors are available in ___ to help. Information about funeral arrangements will be given as soon as they become available.

- Tell students how and where they can obtain information and assistance (point out safe rooms and the names of counselors).
- Identify people and phone numbers students and parents can call if they need assistance—provide a list or have students write down names and numbers. (Consider using a student response form to reach out to less expressive students, who may be unable to ask for help. See **Tool 21**.)
- Tell students that it is okay to feel afraid, confused, angry, and guilty. These are all normal responses to a very abnormal crisis or tragedy.
- Ask if students have questions. Remember to listen carefully and be honest.
- Provide exact, factual information.
- Answer only what students ask you.
- Admit when you don’t have specific answers.
- Use realistic terms with students when discussing aspects of an accident, injury, and loss.
- Avoid euphemisms.

EMPHASIZE

- Each student is valued and will be supported in this time of strife.
- School is safe and central to the community.
- No one is to blame and varied reactions are OK.
- If suicide, communicate that the deceased is not a bad person and that he or she chose a permanent action to address temporary problems.
- All students and staff should cooperate with investigators or evacuation procedures.
- Encourage students to be aware of each other and to walk those in need to an adult for help.
- Communicate that there will be an organized way to say goodbye to the deceased such as a journal, memorial video, and/or art project.



About the Tool

Re-entry into school following a disaster creates apprehension for teachers and students. It’s important to recognize that these are normal, common reactions to an abnormal event. Leading class and answering difficult questions from students is understandably an intimidating notion. Please know that there are no “perfect” ways to handle the situation and teachers will not have many answers to students’ questions. This tool provides some guideposts for talking to your students.

AVOID

- Don't immediately clean out a student's locker or desk and/or remove their artwork from the school building. Wait a few days and gauge student and staff readiness.
- Don't make announcements over the public address system or in assemblies, communicate in small groups and classrooms. Talking points similar to this document can be produced for making announcements and should be provided to teachers or others responsible for making announcements
- Do not ignore warning signs of staff and students who appear to be suffering and lacking in coping skills.

Tool 32—Children’s Concept of Death

Tool for Educators

CONCEPT OF DEATH AT VARIOUS AGES

Ages 18 Months (or Younger) to 24 Months

Infants do not have concepts, but do have intense subjective images. They do not fully understand that an object can exist apart from their sensory perception of seeing, hearing, touching, or tasting. If a parent dies, the child may become distressed at the absence of a caretaker but will not comprehend death.

Ages Three Years to Five Years

Preschoolers think that dead people are not really dead, but continue to live under changed circumstances. There are several systems of thinking about causes of death at this age.

- **Animistic thinking** assumes that everything in the whole world is alive. Preschoolers believe inanimate objects can move, think, feel, and rest. Thus people are always alive. Death is merely a deep sleep. Children worry about the comfort and physical care of dead bodies. They are concerned that the dead person might be hungry, cold, or lonely.
- **Magical thinking** attributes a power to everyone. Everything is under the control of someone else’s will. Within the system, people can die because of another’s wish and can return to life just as readily. A prince can turn into a toad and a dead princess can wake up with a kiss.
- **Artificialistic thinking** is the belief that things exist for people’s convenience. If toys can be fixed upon request, then why not dead people?

Personal motives are ascribed to certain events. Bad dreams are a punishment for misbehavior; bad falls are caused by eating too much candy. Wrong thoughts or deeds can also bring death.

Death is temporary, reversible, and caused magically. Children at this age tend to respond in varied, often contradictory, and unpredictable ways. They may be angry at the dead person for abandoning them or anxious that others might also leave them. A preschooler may be convinced that some thought or action of their own caused the death. Adults must be sensitive to changes in behavior driven by guilt feelings.

Ages Six Years to Eight Years

Death is conceived as a person. If the child’s magic is strong enough, death can be fought and mastered. Death does not take young and healthy people. Only the old and sick are too weak to hold death off. The dead can still see, hear, eat, and breathe. This causes many fears about the fate of the corpse. Children at this age may worry about being trapped in coffins. They are fascinated by what happens to corpses after death and may be preoccupied with decompo-



About the Tool

Children conceive of death differently from adults. It helps adults who are supporting and consoling a grieving child to realize that children’s reaction to death depends on what they think causes death. As children mature with age their cognitive abilities increase and they become more logical and can understand how and why people die. This tool provides a summary of children’s concepts of death at various ages. Educators may want to review this information so they can better understand how children think about death.

sition and decay.

Ages Nine Years to 12 Years

Children now know that what lives also dies. They have let go of magical thinking and replace it with a higher order of logic. Death is understood as normal and irreversible. Dead people cannot be brought back to life. They are concrete and objective in their reasoning. They still may think death will not happen to them until they are very old. In fact, with luck, it is possible to escape death altogether.

Children at this developmental stage understand internal illness as a cause of death, as well as physical violence and accidents. Their anxieties are more likely to be related to the physical consequences of death than to separation. Physical causality is understood, so their fears may focus on bodily mutilation, being buried alive, and the physical process of death. Because they understand the irreversibility of death, they may receive comfort from a belief in life after death but still have difficulty visualizing a decaying body in a coffin and in heaven at the same time. The concept of a soul is usually too abstract for an 11-year old to understand.

Adolescence

Death is final and irreversible. It happens to everyone, including them. Adolescents are as capable of abstract reasoning as adults. They are concerned with theological beliefs or explanations of life after death. Death is remote and spiritual rather than concrete and physical. It is inevitable, but will not happen immediately. Adolescents live for the moment and they may deny the possibility that death could interrupt any of their current or life plans. Adolescents may take unwarranted risks when seeking thrills or impressing friends because they do not accept the reality of personal danger. They may focus on the glory of death and idolize a peer who dies.

STAGES OF GRIEF

The course of normal grief has both similarities to and differences from grief caused by crisis. People grieve in their own way. Those in mourning must move through the grief process, regardless of how painful, if loss is to be resolved with time. Unfortunately, unresolved grief can manifest itself many years later. Individuals with unresolved grief pay a high price in mental distress and illness.

Stages of Grief for Those Who are Dying

- **Stage 1—Denial:** it is hard to believe or accept the impending death.
- **Stage 2—Anger:** Why me? The anger is directed at everybody.
- **Stage 3—Bargaining:** Some people may try to bargain to put off death. There are so many unfinished things to do. Promises are made to God or whomever is perceived to have the power to prolong the inevitable.
- **Stage 4—Depression:** When the realization sets in that death is inevitable, depression results. The person is mourning for their own death and losses. They are also very sad for those left behind. Guilt may accompany depression.
- **Stage 5—Reflection:** The dying person accepts what is happening and may withdraw from loved ones,

review the past life with satisfaction, and become ready for death, with quiet resolution.

Stages of Grief for Loved Ones

There are ten stages of grief that people usually go through after a loss before they find their way back to the “mainstream of life.” These grief experiences are normal, but not everyone experiences them in the same order or necessarily goes through all stages.

- **Stage 1**—Shock
- **Stage 2**—Expression of emotion
- **Stage 3**—Depression and loneliness
- **Stage 4**—Physical symptoms of distress
- **Stage 5**—Panic
- **Stage 6**—Guilt
- **Stage 7**—Anger and resentment
- **Stage 8**—Resistance
- **Stage 9**—Hope
- **Stage 10**—Affirmation of reality

GRIEF “WORK”

Grief has often been described as “grief work.” It is not a passive process that will simply happen without effort or pain. To progress through the stages, a grieving person has to actively work through tasks.

- **Accept the reality of loss.** The shock of loss is great. There is a tendency to deny that the death occurred or deny the significance of the loss.
- **Experience the pain of grief.** The pain is both physical and emotional. It hurts. Avoidance and suppression of the pain prolongs the mourning process.
- **Adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing.** Changes in the daily living routine happen after a loss. Excessive dependency on others will foster helplessness.
- **Withdraw emotional energy and reinvest in another relationship.** Past attachment with the deceased is lessened without betraying the memory and new relationships are formed. The gap may be filled but it nevertheless remains something else. Life changes.

STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS

- Tell children about the death with clear, honest, age-appropriate information
- Encourage children to express and share their feelings. Empathize with anger and reassure that it is part of grief.
- Help fellow classmates who may be anxious about how to act and what to say to a student returning to school after suffering a loss in their family. Help them. Explain that it is appropriate to tell them that you are sorry for their loss and will be there for them if they would like to talk. Explain that it is probably not helpful to say things like, “you’ll forget about it soon” or “cheer up.”
- Correct any misconceptions.
- Provide comfort.
- Permit children to participate in memorials, funerals, or other ceremonies associated with the death. Prepare them for the experience by explaining what may happen and how they might approach grieving parents or friends to offer comfort.

- Maintain consistency and predictability of the school routine.
- Communicate with parents about the child's behavior relating to expressions of grief.
- Encourage projects such as collecting writings, drawings, and pictures into a scrapbook of memories.
- Help children create and send sympathy cards.
- Provide individual and group crisis counseling.

Good Books and Resources on Grief and Coping with Loss

- *Straight Talk About Death for Teenagers: How to Cope With Losing Someone You Love*, Earl A. Grollman
- *Talking About Death : A Dialogue Between Parent and Child*, Earl A. Grollman, Susan Avishai (Illustrator)
- *Death is Hard to Live With: Teenagers Talk about How They Cope with Loss*, Janet Bode, Stan Mack
- *Helping Teens Work Through Grief*, Mary Kelly Perschy
- *Bereaved Children and Teens : A Support Guide for Parents and Professionals*, Earl A. Grollman (Editor)
- *50 Facts about Grieving Children*, Erin Linn
- *Badger's Parting Gifts*, Susan Varley
- *When Dinosaurs Die: A guide to understanding death*, Laurie K. Brown

The Dougy Center for Grieving Children has a series of four books that members may find useful. These books can be ordered by calling 503-775-5683. The Dougy center also produces activity books and videos on grief for teachers, parents and children:

- *Helping Children Cope with Death*: provides a comprehensive overview of issues facing grieving children, and ways to help them, including information on a child's understanding of death, relevant developmental issues, how to explain death to children, how to know when to get professional help, etc.
- *Helping the Grieving Student: A Guide for Teachers* is written specifically to address issues that arise in the classroom after a death impacts a student, a classroom or the school. Provides teachers of elementary through high school aged students with an understanding of how to help children and teens affected by death, including what to say and do and what not to say and do following a death.
- *Helping Teens Cope with Death* helps explain common grief reaction of teenagers, specific challenges grieving teens face, advice for parents on supporting their adolescent, and knowing when to seek professional help, etc.
- *When Death Impacts Your School: A Guide for School Administrators* provides information about how schools can facilitate student healing by talking directly about concerns, allowing for grieving and planning for memorials. Provides special guidance for planning a school intervention plan after a death and addressing special issues around suicide and violence.

Tool 33—School Safety and Crisis Response Resources

Tool for Educators

REFERENCE MATERIALS AND WEB SITES

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry:
www.aacap.org/clinical/Ptsdsum.htm

The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress:
www.aets.org/tnesp.htm

American Counseling Association (three handouts):
www.counseling.org/consumer_media/

American Red Cross: www.redcross.org

The Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence: <http://www.hamfish.org>

David Baldwin's Trauma Information: www.trauma-pages.com

Essential Information on Trauma and Dissociation:
www.mcs.net/~kathyw/trauma/html

Federal Emergency Management Agency (includes information for kids):
www.fema.org

Federal Emergency Management Agency (crisis emergency response team information): www.fema.gov/emi/cert/index.htm

Gift from Within (references on trauma): www.sourcemain.com/gift/

The Incident Command System (a proven tool for the management of emergency operations):
www.ifpo.com/articlebank/incident_command_system.htm

The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies: www.istss.org

Infoseek search engine PTSD link:
http://infoseek.go.com/WebDir/Health/Mental_health

Internet Mental Health Resources:
www.med.nyu.edu/Psych/src.psych.html

National Association of School Psychologists:
www.naspweb.org/center.htm

National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder:
<http://dartmouth.edu/dmsptsd>

National School Public Relations Association: <http://www.nspra.org>



About the Tool

This tool lists resources including the latest research on school safety and a list of people who've "been there" who have expressed a strong desire to help others who find themselves in the midst of a crisis.

“We are all terribly strong people. We are the fixers and the caretakers. But the middle of a crisis — whatever the cause — is a terribly lonely place, and though no one can ever know what you feel or understand what you’re going through, we can listen and perhaps help lighten your burden for a time. It’s so important that we all know that help is available within our ‘family.’”

MYRA REICHART
PENNSYLVANIA EDUCATION
ASSOCIATION

National Victim’s Assistance Organization: www.try-nova.org

North Carolina State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences: <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/humandev/disint.html>

Project Linus (state-by-state listing for getting blankets for those who are traumatized): www.projectlinus.org

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder bibliography:
www.rovers.net/~schowcof/ptsd.html

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Resources Web Page:
www.long-beach.va.gov/ptsd/stress/html

Trauma Resource Area: www.sidran.org/casa/html

YOUR COUNTERPARTS—PEOPLE WHO’VE “BEEN THERE” AND WANT TO HELP

Jon DeStefano, Jefferson County Board of Education President:
303-987-3994 (work); 303-674-1848 (home)

Jane Goff, Jefferson County Education Association President:
303-232-6405

Jim Hodges, Jefferson County Education Association UniServ Director:
303-232-6405

Jane Hammond, Jefferson County Public Schools Superintendent:
303-982-6808

Dexter Meyer, Jefferson County Education Association UniServ and Communications Director: 303-232-6405

Rick Kaufman, Jefferson County Public Schools Director of Communications and Public Engagement: 303-982-6808,
rkaufman@jeffco.k12.co.us

Marilyn Saltzmann, Jefferson County Public School District Manager of Communication Services: 303-982-6808, msaltzma@jeffco.k12.co.us

Christian Anderson, Information Technology Services, Jefferson County Public Schools: 303-982-6958

Debbie Benefield, President Jefferson County Council-Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Jefferson County, Colorado: 303-425-1360 (home)-helped archive and display memorial items and rallied parents behind students and staff when returning to school.

Mona Wittmus, Director of the Jefferson Fund in Littleton, Colorado (the repository for many Columbine High School donations):
303-982-2210

Jeanne Beyer, Colorado Education Association, Internal
Communications Director: 303-837-1500

Deborah Fallin, Colorado Education Association, External
Communications Director: 303-837-1500

Valerie Preston, California Teachers Association:
916-723-2822, vpreston@cta.org

Myra Reichart, Pennsylvania Education Association UniServ and
Communications Director: (work) 1-800-962-7732; (home) 814-734-
5195, mreichart@mail.psea.org

Karen Archia, North Carolina Association of Educators
Communications, 919-832-3000

Cynthia Menzel, Kansas NEA Communications Director, 785-232-8271

“During the Columbine crisis I found that I didn’t have the time or energy to respond to the hundreds of well-meaning messages of support and offers of help. What I needed then was a resource list of people who had “been there.” It’s a waste of time and energy to reinvent the wheel in a crisis. So don’t. Help is a call away.”

DEXTER MEYER
JEFFERSON COUNTY
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

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