

III. Crisis Preparedness

What is this? Schools need to be prepared for crisis. Crisis preparedness plans need to recognize socially and emotionally as well as physically dangerous moments. This means that schools need to anticipate crises and develop realistic and thoughtful plans to minimize potential trauma as well as the consequences of trauma.

Why is it important? Clear and practiced crisis preparedness plans promotes safety. In fact, it can save lives and dramatically reduce trauma when dangerous events occur. Virtually all schools have developed and practiced physical crisis preparedness (e.g. fires, a bomb scare). Most schools do not have plans for social emotional crisis preparedness. We suggest that developing norms and opportunities to practice “upstander” behavior in the face of socially and emotionally dangerous moments (e.g. bullying) is the most important and potent form of social-emotional crisis preparedness.

Common barriers:

- ✓ School define “crisis” as only relating to physically dangerous moments (e.g. fires and bomb scares).
- ✓ School leaders believe that bully-victim behavior is normal: “boys being boys” and/or “girls being girls”.

Key learning that staff needs to understand and be able to do:

Learning objectives

- To understand the detailed series of steps/systems schools need develop and practice for effective physical crisis preparedness planning.
- To understand the following seven steps schools need develop and practice for effective social (bully-victim-upstander) crisis preparedness planning.
 1. Preparation: Shared understandings and a vision of what we want school to be
 2. Securing the “Buy In” to the notion that virtually everyone in the school community endorses upstander as opposed to passive bystander behavior
 3. Assessment: Learning and planning: Understanding to what extent bully-victim is a problem in school
 4. School wide/systemic interventions: Communicating rules and norms that support upstander behavior
 5. Classroom based and instructional intervention: Learning about and practicing upstander behavior
 6. Infusing and reinforcing upstander behavior in school: Using language arts, social studies, community service, athletics and other aspects of schools life to learn more about the bully-victim-witness cycle
 7. Strengthening school-community partnerships: Joining with community leaders to recognize and reinforce upstander behavior

[*Note:* Crisis preparedness needs to be linked to crisis prevention. Although there are many ways that these five processes can be conceptualized, the instructional and systemic processes described above are crisis prevention as well as health promotion processes.]

Tasks that need to be considered to actualize this process:

Reflecting and raising awareness about:

- ✓ What does it mean to you to be safe at school?
- ✓ How terrorist alerts, anxieties provoked by war affected your students and staff?
- ✓ How bully-victim-passive bystander behavior has affected your students and staff?

Critically evaluating resources and making recommendations about:

- ✓ Current crisis preparedness planning, including:
 - What (if any) physical barriers (such as locked doors or gates at the gym) exist that undermine physical safety in your school on the one hand and how they can be eliminated?
 - What (if any) social-emotional barriers (such as accepting passive bystander behavior) exist that undermine safety in your school on the one hand and how they can be eliminated?
 - To what extent roles and responsibilities are clearly delineated (e.g. crisis team chair; crisis team assistant chair; coordinator of counseling service; media coordinator; staff notification coordinator; crowd management coordinator and so on)?
 - How many people in your school know about the existence of the plan?
 - What does your school crisis plan delineate? What are the most important details?
 - Does your school have a team approach to safety and an ongoing process for crisis preparedness?
 - How many people really know what to do?

Skill building:

- ✓ To develop a school wide consensus that bully-victim-passive bystander behavior is unacceptable and to (1) develop a shared vision about the importance of upstander behavior and (2) provide ongoing opportunities to practice and reinforce upstander behavior.

Indicators that a school is successfully focusing on this goal and related methods: There are four indicators of successful work in this area: (1) School climate findings that signal that students are feeling safer over time; (2) faculty will report that they understand crisis preparedness plans; (3) when crisis do occur, the plans are carried; and, (4) staff and students actively learn from how these plans are carried out.

How to measure it – Recommendations: School climate surveys; reported incidents.

Additional Resources: We have listed some resources in the text above. Here are additional resources that may be helpful. Please let us know what other resources you have found helpful and would like us to share with other educators (jonathancohen@csee.net)

Web sites:

- Center for Mental Health in Schools, UCLA: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>
- Center for Social and Emotional Education: www.csee.net

- Character Education and Civic Engagement Technical Assistance Center (www.CETAC.org);
- The Green Dot violence prevention initiative: www.greendotkentucky.com/
This Kentucky initiative is focused on the notion that “A GREEN DOT is any behavior, choice, word, or attitude that counters or displaces a red-dot of violence – by promoting safety for everyone and communicating utter intolerance for sexual violence, interpersonal violence, stalking and child abuse.”

Books and papers:

Adelman, H., & Taylor, L. (2005). *The school leader's guide to student learning supports: New directions for addressing barriers to learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Cohen, J. (1999). The first “R”: Reflective capacities. *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 57, 1, 70-75.

Cohen, J. (2006). Social, emotional, ethical and academic education: Creating a climate for learning, participation in democracy and well-being. *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 76, No. 2, Summer, pg 201-237.

Devine, J. & Cohen, J. (2007). *Making your school safe: Strategies to Protect Children and Promote Learning*. New York: Teachers College Press

Hunter, L., Hoagwood, K., Evans, S., Weist, M., Smith, C., Paternite, C., Horner, R., Osher, D., Jensen, P., & the School Mental Health Alliance (2005). *Working Together to Promote Academic Performance, Social and Emotional Learning, and Mental Health for All Children*. New York: Center for the Advancement of Children's Mental Health at Columbia University

Osher, D, Dwyer, K. & Jackson, S. (2003). *Safe, Supportive, and Successful Schools: Step by Step*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West

Weist, M.D., Evans, S.W. & Lever, N.A. (Eds.). (2003). *Handbook of school mental health: Advancing practice and research*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers
NY: Teachers College Press.