

SCHOOL DISTRICT U-46
Elgin, Illinois

SOCIAL WORK

CRISIS TEAM MANUAL

Updated by
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I. THE PURPOSE OF A CRISIS TEAM INTERVENTION PROGRAM

Few events in the life of a school are more painful or potentially more disruptive than the suicide or homicide of a student. The accidental death or serious injury of a schoolmate or prominent adult can also have a major impact upon individual students and the school as a whole. Such traumatic events affect everyone to some degree. It is recognized that many students will be emotionally distressed over the event and may be unable to function as they normally do in the classroom. Events, which have an emotional impact, demand a supportive response from the family and community including the school.

School District U-46 Social Workers have developed a proactive plan that prepares the school to respond to a tragic event. While this plan was originally designed in 1988 to address the preponderance of cluster suicides observed across the United States, it has been modified to also address a variety of other traumatic experiences, which can impact a student group. Once established, a building crisis team can be utilized to address a variety of traumatic events.

Implementation of this plan can help minimize the development of an undesirable resolution about the traumatic event; and to do so in a way that will support the natural recovery process. The primary goals of the interventions planned are to minimize the development of attendance problems, academic performance problems, disruptive behavior, depression, excessive anxiety, self-destructive behavior and other undesirable reactions to the event; and to maximize the student's ability to return to an educational focus and readiness to learn.

Levels of intervention are presented on a continuum. In some cases students can cope with the situation with minimal intervention. In other situations a major mobilization of all school resources may be required. In any event, this plan provides a way to assess the needs of staff and students at all grade levels, and to assist in organizing building, district, family and community resources should they be needed.

II. CRISIS TEAM PARTICIPATION

A. At the onset of the crisis event crisis team members are expected to:

1. Set aside regular duties and responsibilities and make themselves available to participate with the crisis team as quickly as possible.
2. Be an active and collaborative participant.
3. Help the team to stay focused on the facts.
4. Make suggestions that are clear and useful.
5. Volunteer to carry out interventions that they feel confident they can perform, and also be willing to accept assignments by the crisis team leader.

B. During the crisis event crisis team members should reflect on the following:

1. In consideration of what I was assigned to do am I clear about what I am to do?
2. If their role was not defined during a crisis team meeting, they should ask themselves:
 - a. What are the goals of the crisis team?
 - b. Knowing my strengths and limitations where can I be the most helpful?
3. If their desired role conflicts with that of their colleague(s) then they should conference, discuss and be prepared to compromise as necessary.

III. CRISIS TEAM PROCEDURES

When there has been a tragic event such as a student death the principal should obtain relevant information and immediately convene a pre-established crisis team. The crisis team assesses the situation and develops a plan.

A. Assessment of anticipated impact on school

After reviewing the reported facts the crisis team examines the meaning of this information in order to determine the magnitude of the school intervention needed.

1. Student Impact

The following factors are to be considered in assessing the level of impact upon survivors. This list does not preclude other factors, nor are they equally weighted. Therefore, each situation or combination of factors will require a different level of intervention.

Greater impact:

- several students died
- several student witnesses
- several students injured
- well-known student(s)
- violent death
- sudden/unexpected
- some mystery attached to the event
- high identification with student(s)
- in school or during school event

Lesser impact:

- one student died
- no witnesses
- no students injured
- less known student(s)
- natural causes
- event anticipated
- clear, unambiguous cause
- low identification with student(s)
- out of school

2. Staff Impact

Some of the factors addressed in the student impact may be relevant to staff impact. For example, consider numbers of students involved, how well known students were to staff and whether the event happened in school or during a school-sponsored activity. Staff that were more directly involved are more likely to be in crisis themselves. In view of this, consider which staff may be in need of support and which staff may be able to offer support.

B. Assessment of building resources

It is recognized that each building will have a different level of staff performance in emotionally charged situations. Encourage a discussion about this and acknowledge concerns. The following are some questions to consider:

1. To what extent have the crisis team members been impacted by the event?
2. Would it be appropriate to involve others from the school on the team?
3. Considering student and staff impact, are there enough trained personnel to implement an agreed-upon intervention plan?
4. Is it appropriate to request the assistance of additional social workers to provide counseling services and to participate with the school building crisis team in performing other supportive tasks?

C. Development and implementation of an intervention plan

1. Staff

Refer to www.u-46.org/sehs/cbgi/checklist.pdf for suggested notification, direction and support of staff. Any combination of the following may be appropriate:

- a. No notification necessary.
- b. Written notification about the death/event.
- c. Written notification about the event including a request for the classroom teacher to make an announcement to students.
- d. Distribute of additional written materials. (www.u-46.org/sehs/cbgi/memo_to_staff.pdf)
- e. Emergency staff meeting with all staff before or after school for the personal dissemination of information.
- f. Small group discussion for information sharing, special directives and support.
- g. Individual staff concerns and needs addressed as necessary.

2. Students

Consider anticipated impact and resources within the building. Each situation should be individually considered, however, be aware that how the school handles the current situation may be seen as setting a precedent for the future. Select a plan of action from the following:

- a. No school response to the death/event.
- b. Notify faculty of the death/event – encouraging them to maintain their normal routine – and refer distressed students to a support area.
- c. Limit the announcement/intervention to a specific target group, e.g., the deceased’s peer group, team, club, etc.
- d. Notify faculty to announce and discuss the death/event to their class. For more information refer to: www.u-46.org/sehs/cbgi/classroom_guide.pdf
- e. Select a team member to attend the deceased student’s classes and assist the teacher in a classroom discussion.
- f. Select a team member to assist with a classroom discussion, upon any teacher’s request.
- g. Select trained staff to operate a support area for distressed students. The following are some general considerations for intervening with distressed students:
 - (1) Attendance is voluntary and presented as an invitation to interested students rather than an expectation; participation is also voluntary.
 - (2) Groups should be comprised of similarly affected individuals
 - (3) Emphasis should be on validation of thoughts and feelings, understanding the cause of the event, and on creating structures to boost adaptive coping and social support for those affected.

For more information about intervention procedures refer to:
www.u-46.org/sehs/cbgi/intervention_guidelines.pdf and to:
www.u-46.org/sehs/cbgi/intervention_guidelines_outline.pdf

3. Community

Plan the most appropriate responses.

- a. Assign a representative to the family of the deceased to:
 - (1) Express concerns and offer support or condolences.
 - (2) Obtain information such as hospital updates, funeral arrangements, etc.
 - (3) Inquire about siblings or close friends and any special concerns the family may have about them.
 - (4) Return student belongings and class work to the family.
 - (5) Present any commemorative projects or articles produced by classmates and other students.
 - (6) Coordinate any school-approved commemorative activities at school.
 - (7) Provide follow-up contact to identify any other concerns or address special requests.

- b. With parents of other affected students:
- (1) Designate a person to respond in person with parents who arrive at school and/or to respond to incoming phone calls from parents, with a script if necessary.
 - (2) Provide supportive assistance on a one-to-one or small-group basis with parents who have come to the school. (www.u-46.org/sehs/cbgi/parent_support.pdf)
 - (3) Personally call or send an automated call to parents of targeted student groups.
 - (4) Send a letter home to parents and, if indicated, enclose relevant resource materials. (www.u-46.org/sehs/cbgi/parent_handouts.pdf)
 - (5) Make referrals to community agencies for individuals, families or parent groups.

c. Media Contacts:

An official spokesperson and alternate should be designated to give a status report and answer questions from the media. Confusion is minimized when staff and students know they should deflect media inquiries to a designated person. Personal information about a student may not be released to the public without parent permission.

d. Police and Community Agencies:

If the event involves a crime on school grounds, e.g., a shooting incident, the police have complete jurisdiction over the school until it is completely secured. Additional restrictions may be implemented if it becomes a crime scene with the need to collect evidence. A designated school employee should liaison with the police so that the police can be as understanding and sensitive as possible to the needs of students who may benefit from counseling as well as the needs of students from whom they are seeking information if an investigation is indicated.

When anticipating large numbers of referrals to counseling agencies for after-school crisis or grief counseling, parent support groups, etc., the agencies should be notified as soon as possible so that those agencies can have their staff rearrange their schedules to accommodate as many new referrals as possible. A designated person can serve as a liaison between the school and community agencies involved.

D. Evaluation of the intervention plan

The crisis team should convene at the end of the day to share observations, get feedback, and evaluate:

1. The effectiveness of the building plan for the students, staff and community.
2. The continuation or modification of the plan for the next day.
3. The degree of support needed for crisis team members and other staff involved.

E. Plan for follow-up activities

1. Students

Consider continued support to effected individuals and small groups. Although the overt actions within the school have subsided, it is important to keep in mind that significant dates and participation in events associated with the deceased may be difficult for some students.

For more information refer to: www.u-46.org/sehs/cbgi/follow_up.pdf

2. Staff

It is acknowledged that the crisis intervention process is very stressful to the crisis team members. A “debriefing” or planned time for the sharing of thoughts and feelings has been shown to be beneficial in providing those involved with the necessary support and closure. This process should be positive and non-critical of fellow team members. It should not be a time to discuss when, where, how and/or why problems occurred. Issues pertaining to unsatisfactory staff performance should be addressed privately and at a later time.

JC- 4/1/08