

Practical Information on Crisis Planning: A Guide for Schools and Communities

Taking action now can save lives, prevent injury, and minimize property damage in the moments of a crisis. If you do not have a crisis plan in place, it is time to develop one. If you have one, review, practice, and update your plan. This brochure is designed to assist schools and communities in either situation. Although every school's needs and circumstances are different, these checklists provide general guidance that can be adapted as appropriate to each district's or school's circumstances.

Mitigation and Prevention

The goal of mitigation is to decrease the need for response as opposed to simply increasing response capability.

- Connect with community emergency responders to identify local hazards.
- Review the last safety audit to examine school buildings and grounds.
- Determine who is responsible for overseeing violence prevention strategies in your school.
- Encourage staff to provide input and feedback during the crisis planning process.
- Review incident data.
- Determine major problems in your school with regard to student crime and violence.
- Assess how the school addresses these problems.
- Conduct an assessment to determine how these problems—as well as others—may impact your vulnerability to certain crises.

Preparedness

Good planning will facilitate a rapid, coordinated, effective response when a crisis occurs.

- Determine what crisis plans exist in the district, school, and community.
- Identify all stakeholders involved in crisis planning.
- Develop procedures for communicating with staff, students, families, and the media.
- Establish procedures to account for students during a crisis.
- Gather information about the school facility, such as maps and the location of utility shutoffs.
- Identify the necessary equipment that needs to be assembled to assist staff in a crisis.

Response

A crisis is the time to follow the crisis plan and make use of your preparations.

- Determine if a crisis is occurring.
- Identify the type of crisis that is occurring and determine the appropriate response.
- Activate the incident management system.
- Ascertain whether an evacuation, reverse evacuation, lockdown, or shelter-in-place needs to be implemented.
- Maintain communication among all relevant staff at officially designated locations.
- Establish what information needs to be communicated to staff, students, families, and the community.
- Monitor how emergency first aid is being administered to the injured.
- Decide if more equipment and supplies are needed.

Recovery

During recovery, return to learning and restore the infrastructure as quickly as possible.

- Strive to return to learning as quickly as possible.
- Restore the physical plant, as well as the school community.
- Monitor how staff are assessing students for the emotional impact of the crisis.
- Identify what follow up interventions are available to students, staff, and first responders.
- Conduct debriefings with staff and first responders.
- Assess curricular activities that address the crisis.
- Allocate appropriate time for recovery.
- Plan how anniversaries of events will be commemorated.
- Capture "lessons learned" and incorporate them into revisions and trainings.

HELPING CHILDREN RESPOND TO DISASTERS

Many feelings and reactions are common and shared by people of all ages after a disaster. However, special attention is required in addressing the needs of children. During times of confusion, young children are particularly vulnerable to the disruption of their previously orderly world. Because they generally lack the verbal and conceptual skills necessary to cope effectively with sudden stress themselves, they look to family members and other adults for comfort. Children look to adults (parents and other caregivers) for information about what is happening as well as for protection and reassurance. It is important for adults to provide clear information in a manner which fits each child's level of understanding. A ten year old will be able to absorb more details about a disaster than a three year old - but, they both need information. By providing information and reassurance (even if we ourselves don't feel entirely reassured), we can help children feel less fearful and more in control of their lives.

What Can Child Care Providers Do?

Child care providers and staff play a pivotal role in the lives of their families. In fact, child care or school may be the only stable place in children's lives immediately after a disaster. By providing a consistent environment in the midst of chaos and turmoil, child care programs play a key role in helping children return to normal. Here are some additional thoughts and suggestions for child care providers:

- Keep to normal routines as much as possible. This may not be as easy as it sounds because it is also important to be flexible when dealing with different children's responses to the trauma.
- Listen to the children. They need to know that it is okay to feel sad, scared or angry and that someone will listen to their feelings.
- Provide opportunities for children to express what is happening and how they are feeling. Dramatic play and drawing are two excellent avenues for expression. Through play the child is able to talk about traumatic events, act out feelings and come to resolution in a manner that is appropriate for the child's age and ability.
- Be prepared for some post-traumatic symptoms and behavior. And, remember that children may act differently in child care than they do at home. Some of the expected areas of difficulty are:
 - **Separation:** Children may experience new difficulty in separating from their parents. Some may revert to clinging behavior or need extra time to say good-bye. Child care providers can assist with this process by developing a plan with parents that is supportive and developmentally appropriate to get through temporary difficulties.
 - **Sleeping:** Naptime may also become more problematic. Because of scary dreams or nightmares, children may resist going to sleep. Again reassurance is the best medicine. An adult presence, soothing music and backrubs may help children relax and feel more at ease about falling asleep. Allowing a child to temporarily sleep in a parent's room may help some children.
 - **Toilet Training:** Expect some developmental regressions. Some children who have been dry during the night and at naptime may wet the bed again. Take this in stride and reassure the child that this is okay and s/he will gain control again.
 - **Situational Anxiety:** Reminders of the traumatic event may cause some children to exhibit temporary anxiety. Hearing the wail of a siren, for example, may evoke fears or sadness. When this happens, reassurance is again the first order of business. This can also be an opportunity to encourage a child to talk about his/her feelings.
 - **Aggression:** Some children may become more aggressive and demanding as the weeks after a disastrous event unfold. Try to provide ways for them to vent their angry feelings without hurting themselves or others. Gentle limit-setting is useful because it lets children know that an adult is still in charge.

- Support the child's parents. Try to give parents the opportunity to talk about their concerns.
- Get support if you need it. Much has been said about supporting and reassuring both children and parents. As a child care provider, you do this on a regular basis. However, when a disaster befalls your community, you may find yourself called upon to support a number of children and families at the same time.
- Talk to and learn from other child care programs. Hold a meeting at your house or center or request that the disaster be a topic on the agenda of your child care association or support organization's next meeting

Activities For Home And Child Care Programs

Providing children with activities which help them deal with their fears allows them to feel more in control. Here are some specific suggestions:

- Provide toys that encourage dramatic play so that children can act out how they experienced the disaster. This will help them express feelings about what has occurred and make these feelings part of their lives. Appropriate toys might include: blocks, fire trucks, cars, ambulances, action figures (fire fighters, police officers, men, women, children), puppets, dolls, and dress-up clothes.
- Remember the power of art. Ask the children to draw pictures of what they saw, heard and felt about the disaster. Encourage children to tell you stories about their creations. Painting and drawing are important ways to identify and work out feelings.
- Write stories about the disaster or allow children to dictate short stories to you. Allow children to make up stories about what a super hero could do to "save the day" during a catastrophe. Set aside time for the children to share their stories with each other.
- Remember to emphasize physical activity. This is especially important during times of stress because it helps the child re-establish a sense of self and a sense of security.
- Make certain that extra food and drinks are readily available. If possible, these should be provided upon the children's request. This a positive way to provide both physical and emotional nurturing that most children need at stressful times.
- Provide plenty of holding and physical contact and encourage extra cuddling and hugging. Giving each other back rubs can be soothing. One way to let children comfort themselves would be to use hand lotion liberally so that they can massage their own hands.
- Read stories. Use the library as a resource.
- Encourage children to come up with a plan (perhaps with the parents' suggestions) to help and/or thank others. Some ideas: Make cookies and take them to the local fire house. Conduct a penny drive for the Red Cross. Collect and send food and clothes to an area struck by a disaster. Write or send artwork to children in communities affected by a disaster. Even the smallest child can extend a helping hand and be empowered by helping others.

Disasters bring turmoil and fear. But, they also can bring a reaffirmation of our ability to survive and remind us of our interdependence and need for others. Children can learn positive lessons from a calamity with the gentle guidance and support from the adults who love and care for them. Unfortunately, disasters are a part of life – fortunately, so is recovery.

Pennsylvania is one of the most flood-prone states in the nation. From rural areas to suburban communities, floods - especially flash floods - are a constant concern.

BEFORE

- Find out if you live in a flood-prone area from your local emergency management office
- Learn flood warning signs and you community alert signals
- Request information on preparing for floods and flash floods
- If you live in a frequently flooded area, stockpile emergency building materials (plywood, plastic sheeting, nails, hammer, saw, etc.)
- Plan and practice an evacuation route

Have disaster supplies on hand

- Flashlights and extra batteries
- Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Emergency food and water
- Non-electric can opener
- Essential medicines
- Cash and credit cards
- Sturdy shoes

Develop an emergency communications plan

- In case family members are separated from one another during floods or flash floods, have a plan for getting back together
- Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." Make sure everyone knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person
- Teach all family members how and when to turn off gas, electricity and water
- Teach children how and when to dial 9-1-1, and which radio station to listen to for emergency information

DURING A FLOOD

If indoors:

- Turn on battery-operated radio to get the latest emergency information
- Get your preassembled emergency supplies
- If told to leave, do so immediately

If outdoors:

- Climb to high ground and stay there
- Avoid walking through any floodwaters. If it is moving swiftly, even water 6 inches deep can sweep you off your feet

If in a car:

- If you come to a flooded area, turn around and go another way
- If your car stalls, abandon it immediately and climb to higher ground. Many deaths have resulted from attempts to move stalled vehicles

DURING AN EVACUATION

- If advised to evacuate, do so immediately
- Listen to a radio for evacuation instructions
- Follow recommended evacuation routes -- shortcuts may be blocked
- Leave early enough to avoid being stranded by flooded roads

AFTER

Flood dangers do not end when the water begins to recede. Listen to a radio or television and don't return home until authorities indicate it is safe to do so.

Remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance -- infants, elderly people, and people with disabilities.

Stay out of buildings if flood waters remain around the building.

Throw away food -- including canned goods -- that has come in contact with flood waters.

Pump out flooded basements gradually (about one-third of the water per day) to avoid structural damage.

Service damaged septic tanks, cesspools, pits, and leaching systems as soon as possible. Damaged sewage systems are health hazards.

Some thunderstorms can be seen approaching, while others hit without warning. It is important to learn and recognize the danger signs and to plan ahead.

It is equally important to provide your residence or business with a "Weather Alert Radio" receiver that permits you to receive warning messages from the National Weather Service and local emergency management agencies.

BEFORE

Learn the thunderstorm danger signs.

- Dark, towering, or threatening clouds.
 - Distant lightning and thunder.

Have disaster supplies on hand

- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries
 - First aid kit and manual
 - Emergency food and water
 - Nonelectric can opener
 - Essential medicines
 - Cash and credit cards
 - Sturdy shoes

Check for hazards in the yard.

Dead or rotting trees and branches can fall during a severe thunderstorm and cause injury and damage.

- Make sure that all family members know how to respond after a thunderstorm.
 - Teach family members how and when to turn off gas, electricity and water.
- Teach children how and when to call 9-1-1, police, fire department, and which radio station to tune for emergency information.

Severe Thunderstorm Watches and Warnings

- A *severe thunderstorm* watch is issued by the National Weather Service when the weather conditions are such that a severe thunderstorm (damaging winds 58 miles per hour or more, or hail three-fourths of an inch in diameter or greater) is likely to develop. This is the time to locate a safe place in the home and tell family members to watch the sky and listen to the radio or television for more information.
- A *severe thunderstorm* warning is issued when a severe thunderstorm has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. At this point, the danger is very serious and everyone should go to a safe place, turn on a battery-operated radio or television, and wait for the "all clear" by the authorities.
 - Learn how to respond to a tornado and flash flood.
- Tornadoes are spawned by thunderstorms and flash flooding can occur with thunderstorms. When a "severe thunderstorm warning" is issued, review what actions to take under a "tornado warning" or a "flash flood warning."

Develop an emergency communication plan.

- In case family members are separated from one another during a thunderstorm (a real possibility during the day when adults are at work and children are at school), have a plan for getting back together.
- Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact". After a disaster, it's often easier to call long distance. Make sure everyone knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.
- Contact your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter for more information on thunderstorms and lightning.

DURING

If indoors:

- Secure outdoor objects such as lawn furniture that could blow away or cause damage or injury. Take light objects inside.
 - Shutter windows securely and brace outside doors.
 - Listen to a battery operated radio or television for the latest storm information.
- Do not handle any electrical equipment or telephones because lightning could follow the wire. Television sets are particularly dangerous at this time.
 - Avoid bathtubs, water faucets, and sinks because metal pipes can transmit electricity.

If outdoors:

- Attempt to get into a building or car.
- If no structure is available, get to an open space and squat low to the ground as quickly as possible. (If in the woods, find an area protected by low clump of trees--never stand underneath a single large tree in the open.) Be aware of the potential for flooding in low-lying areas.
 - crouch with hands on knees.
 - Avoid tall structures such as towers, tall trees, fences, telephone lines, or power lines.
- Stay away from natural lightning rods such as golf clubs, tractors, fishing rods, bicycles, or camping equipment.
 - Stay from rivers, lakes, or other bodies of water.
- If you are isolated in a level field or prairie and you feel your hair stand on end (which indicates that lightning is about to strike), bend forward, putting your hands on your knees. A position with feet together and crouching while removing all metal objects is recommended. Do not lie flat on the ground.

Important: You are in danger from lightning **if you can hear thunder**. Knowing how far away a storm is does **not** mean that you're in danger only when the storm is overhead.

AFTER

Check for injuries.

A person who has been struck by lightning does not carry an electrical charge that can shock other people. If the victim is burned, provide first aid and call emergency medical assistance immediately. Look for burns where lightning entered and exited the body. If the strike causes the victim's heart and breathing to stop, give cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) until medical professionals arrive and take over. Remember to help your neighbors who may require special assistance--infants, elderly people, and people with disabilities.

Report downed utility wires.

Drive only if necessary. Debris and washed-out roads may make driving dangerous.

MITIGATION

Mitigation includes any activities that prevent an emergency, reduce the chance of an emergency happening, or lessen the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies. Investing in preventive mitigation steps now, such as installing lightning rods to carry the electrical charge of lightning bolts safely to the ground or purchasing flood insurance, will help reduce the impact of severe thunderstorms in the future. For more information on mitigation, contact your local emergency management office.

When a tornado is coming, you have only a short amount of time to make life-or-death decisions. Advance planning and quick response are the keys to surviving a tornado.

TORNADO FACTS

- A tornado is a violently rotating column of air extending from a thunderstorm to the ground
- Tornadoes are capable of destroying homes and vehicles, and can cause fatalities
- Tornadoes may appear nearly transparent until dust and debris are picked up or a cloud forms in the funnel. The average tornado moves SW to NE, but have been known to move any direction
- The average forward speed is 30 mph, but may vary from stationary to 70 mph with winds in excess of 250 mph
- Tornadoes can accompany tropical storms and hurricanes as they move onto land
- Waterspouts are tornadoes that form over water

WHERE AND WHEN

- Tornadoes can occur at anytime of the year
- In the southern states, peak tornado occurrence is March through May, while peak months in northern states is late spring/early summer
- Tornadoes are most likely to occur between 3 and 9 pm, but can happen at any time

HOW TO PREPARE

- Develop a plan for you and your family at home, work, school, and when outdoors
- Identify a safe place to take shelter
- Have a NOAA Weather Radio with an alarm tone and battery backup to receive watches/warning
- Listen to radio and television for weather information
- Check the weather forecast before leaving for extended periods outdoors. Watch for signs of approaching storms.

Develop an emergency communications plan

- In case family members are separated from one another during floods or flash floods, have a plan for getting back together
- Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as the "family contact." Make sure everyone knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person
- Teach all family members how and when to turn off gas, electricity and water
- Teach children how and when to dial 9-1-1, and which radio station to listen to for emergency information

Have disaster supplies on hand

- Flashlights and extra batteries
- Portable, battery-operated radio and extra batteries
- First aid kit and manual
- Emergency food and water
- Non-electric can opener
- Essential medicines
- Cash and credit cards
- Sturdy shoes

Tornado Watches and Warnings

The National Weather Service (NWS) issues a *tornado watch* when tornadoes are possible in your area. Remain alert for approaching storms. This is the time to remind family members where the safest places within your home are located, and listen to the radio or television for further developments.

A *tornado warning* is issued, by NWS, when a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. If a tornado warning is issued for your area and the sky becomes threatening, move to your pre-designated place of safety. Turn on a battery-operated radio and wait for further instructions.

TORNADO DANGER SIGNS

Occasionally, tornadoes develop so rapidly that advance warning is not possible.

Look out for:

- Dark, often greenish sky
- Large hail
- Wall cloud
- Loud roar, similar to a freight train

SAFETY RULES DURING A TORNADO

- Do not get under an overpass or bridge. You are safer in a low, flat location.
- In a home or building, move to a basement, safe room, or a small interior room/hallway in the lowest floor
- Stay away from windows. Go to the center of the room. Stay away from corners because they attract debris. Do not open windows.
- If caught outside, lie flat in a nearby ditch or depression and cover your head with your hands. Be aware of potential for flooding.
- Be aware of flying debris

AFTER THE TORNADO

- Help injured or trapped persons. Give first aid when appropriate. Don't try to move the seriously injured unless they are in immediate danger of further injury. Call for help.
- Stay out of damaged buildings. Return home when authorities say it is safe
- Turn on radio or television to get the latest emergency information. Use the phone only for emergency calls.
- Clean up spilled flammable liquids immediately. Leave the building if you smell gas or chemical fumes.
- Take pictures of the damage – both the house and contents – for insurance purposes.

Inspect Utilities in a Damaged Home

- Check for gas leaks
- Look for electrical damage
- Check for sewage and water line damage

Mitigation

Mitigation includes any activities that prevent an emergency, reduce the chance of an emergency happening, or lessen the effects of unavoidable emergencies. Investing in preventative mitigation steps now, such as building a safe room, checking local building codes and ordinances about wind resistant designs and strengthening unreinforced masonry, will help reduce the impact of tornadoes in the future.