

# Preparing for Critical Incidents

## Procedures

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No one can predict every problem or crisis. No one can anticipate every possible risk or turn of events. Many variables are simply beyond our control. And no matter how well we prepare, anyone who's consciously determined to cause trouble will find some way to do so. However, we can at least take deliberate steps to:

- ❖ prevent critical incidents by reducing or eliminating certain variables that would otherwise foster them,
- ❖ make reasonable efforts to control incidents that come up despite those best efforts, and
- ❖ be better prepared to respond constructively to whatever is beyond our control.

These topics offer practical steps to take regarding several central topics and resources. Many of them overlap. If you know that certain issues here pose a more serious concern for a given school or district, focus on those items. We encourage you to read the entire list, find those items that come up most frequently among your key concerns, and address as many of those as you can. At the least, pay close attention to the sections on "CRT," "General" and "Training."

### ACCESS TO CAMPUS

- ❖ School grounds should be fenced and have only one or two entrances.
- ❖ Develop a site security plan to prevent unauthorized entry onto campus.
- ❖ Keep gates to parking lots locked during most of the day, if possible.
- ❖ Establish a procedure for students to enter the parking lot during school.
- ❖ Identify all persons entering the campus.
- ❖ Assign photo I.D. cards and/or badges for all personnel, students, visitors, and volunteers. I.D. should include the person's name, destination, with the date and time. I.D. is to be worn at all times on campus.
- ❖ Post signs stating that all visitors are required to check in at the main office and that all packages, purses, etc. are subject to search. Clearly indicate the location of the main office.
- ❖ Establish a sign in/out procedure for all employees, visitors, and volunteers.
- ❖ Establish and enforce a "greet-and-escort" program for visitors, involving parent or senior citizen volunteers.
- ❖ Escort and/or supervise any non-district maintenance workers.
- ❖ Insist that unauthorized persons leave campus immediately. Be ready to contact police.
- ❖ Assume that any intruder has a weapon. Be cautious; be aware of escape routes.
- ❖ Rooms not currently in use, such as storage rooms, broom closets, etc., and other areas accessible to the public should remain locked.
- ❖ Prepare a form identifying the master keys and contact person. (See sample forms)
- ❖ Strictly control and document access to keys. Ensure that authorized persons know exact procedures.

### **BOMBS AND BOMB THREATS**

- ❖ Make certain that every teacher's roll book has evacuation procedures, emergency code information, the bull's-eye (bomb threat) decal, and up-to-date student information.
- ❖ Instruct all volunteers and school personnel to check their work areas daily, to be aware of suspicious items, and to report immediately any student threats/jokes about bombs to the appropriate administrator.
- ❖ Provide annual training from police on handling bomb threats, and updates on and descriptions of any new types of devices.
- ❖ Provide all office staff with copies of the Bomb Threat Checklist. (See sample forms.)
- ❖ Know whom to call to request a bomb dog.
- ❖ Train all personnel and students on CODE WHITE and CODE BLUE procedures.

### **CHILD ABUSE ISSUES AND INCIDENTS**

- ❖ Emphasize to staff that all victims' personal information is confidential.
- ❖ Publicize the school's access to a current website and/or database of sexual offenders/sexual predators.
- ❖ Post signs with the abuse hotline phone number.
- ❖ Provide child abuse awareness training and materials for staff, students and possibly parents; provide an overview in PTA/PTO meetings. Address:
  - ❖ laws and district policies and procedures regarding suspected child abuse, neglect or abandonment
  - ❖ signs and symptoms of abuse
  - ❖ warning signs and appropriate responses to abuse
- ❖ Have guidance/counseling staff offer individual and group counseling for victims. Be prepared to refer victims and families to professional therapists for in-depth and long-term work, particularly for any who may not want school-based services.
- ❖ Inform staff and families that school officials may be present at an interview if a child complaining of abuse requests their presence, or if law enforcement considers it otherwise indicated.

### **CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEER MEDIATION**

- ❖ Implement Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation as proactive, preventive strategies for students and adults.
- ❖ Provide educational programs such as Aggressors, Victims, and Bystanders for appropriate grade level instruction.
- ❖ Train all personnel, especially the CRT, in positive conflict resolution strategies: nonverbal communication, escalation and de-escalation, anger management, mediation, etc.

## **Pre-Plan Action**

- ❖ This requires law enforcement action. Consult with police.
- ❖ Make parents or guardians and students aware of drug/weapon policy during registration.
- ❖ Post the school's/district's "search and seizure" policy prominently throughout campus.
- ❖ School staff and teachers should report to the police immediately any threats.
- ❖ Be aware of and report any person with evident potential for violence.
- ❖ Familiarize staff with EMERGENCY CODES procedures.
- ❖ Promote "Crime Stoppers" or a similar crime prevention program on campus.
- ❖ Refer to sample letters/memos/media statements.
- ❖ Refer to your school or district's policy regarding possession of firearms by a school employee/contractor/visitor.

## **Immediate Action**

- ❖ Assess the situation.
- ❖ Call 911 to contact police.
- ❖ **This situation may easily escalate. Wait for the police if the person is overtly violent or threatening.**
- ❖ **If safe to do so**, have the CRT respond and stand by.
- ❖ **If safe to do so**, an adult on the scene may:
  - Give loud order to clear the area.
  - Keep person with the weapon in sight and order all others to safety.
  - Call the subject by name, make every attempt to keep him/her calm, and encourage him/her to place the gun on the ground and step away from it.
- ❖ If the weapon is placed on the ground, an administrator may at his or her discretion pick up the gun, however **it is advised that this be done only if absolutely necessary for safety reasons. If necessary:**
  - One adult secures the weapon while another secures the suspect.
  - Carefully place it into a box on a towel or cloth. **Do not put the weapon in a pocket or attempt to unload it.** Carry the recovered weapon so that it cannot be seen by students. Keep it secured in the office until police arrive.
- ❖ Give as much information as possible to the responding police officer: type of weapon, location of person with gun, name if known, description of person, etc.
- ❖ Notify parents or guardians.
- ❖ Locate, identify, and document any witnesses; provide police with all information.
- ❖ Turn investigation over to police.

## ***Follow-Up Action***

- ❖ Send a letter home to all parents or guardians to dispel rumors and calm fears.
- ❖ Cooperate with police during the investigation and filing of criminal charges.
- ❖ Conduct a short staff debriefing, if necessary.
- ❖ Administration may, in conjunction with the information officer and police, prepare scripted information for faculty and students or special assembly or staff meeting to dispel rumors, and for staff answering phones. Scripted information can be placed on auto-answering device.
- ❖ Document the incident. File the appropriate report form(s) regarding response to the incident as well as any necessary staff training documentation. File according to school/district regulations.
- ❖ Depending on the situation be prepared to establish special areas for media/press, student evacuation point, parents, command post, etc.
- ❖ Critique the incident.