

San Diego County Office of Education Safe Schools Unit After Crisis Tips

Developed by the San Diego County Office of Education, Safe Schools Unit
Liz Lebrón, Senior Director, (858) 292-3666

Administrators: The following can aid in establishing such an atmosphere on your campus.

1. High visibility.

- Administrators should be highly visible throughout the day
- Have teachers be visible during lunch and breaks
- Make sure security is on heightened alert

2. Be aware of race/ethnic relations on campus.

- At times like this, certain ethnic groups may become scapegoats.

Help your staff/school be aware of the need to protect our school community members who could be targeted with harassment (specifically people from the Middle East and Members of the Islam religion).

3. Heightened security/awareness of all staff.

- Reiterate to staff the importance of a secure campus
- Touch base with after-school program personnel

4. Check in with teachers and staff on a routine basis.

- Keep an open-door policy
- Have debriefing meetings for a minimum of 1 week (at the beginning of each school day)
- Include all school staff at meetings
- Provide resources to staff (i.e. counseling services, list of coping strategies, etc.)



Questions to ask at a meeting:

- What are teachers dealing with?
- What are some of the emerging issues?
- Are there students that may need mental health services?

5. Provide safe rooms for staff and students.

Safe rooms can provide an outlet for teachers and students and they are an excellent way of helping people cope with the aftermath of such a tragedy.

- Ask your school counselor to hold support group meetings at the end of the school day for teachers.
- A vacant classroom can be set up for students and staff who may want to talk to a counselor about the events.
- Rooms should offer a private, quiet atmosphere and should be staffed by a counselor or other crisis response personnel.

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- 6. Hold an assembly on diversity, blame, hate if needed, otherwise teachers should have discussions in class.**
 - Sponsoring diversity/cultural activities on campus can help students and teachers bond over such a tragedy instead of letting it divide them.
- 7. Give students a role in school safety/campus relations.**
 - Provide opportunities for students to take leadership roles in school safety
 - Ask students to actively participate in forums or meetings on how they can help make their school a safe place.

It is important for students to see themselves as part of the solution and be able to be pro-active and help.

- 8. Encourage students to report instigators.**
 - Establish a hotline number
 - Create an “anonymous tip” box
 - Set up an email account where students can send confidential messages to regarding any threats on campus
- 9. Strictly enforce school rules and policies relating to racial name calling or other acts of aggression. Students need to understand that even during this difficult time it is not acceptable to harass/bully others.**
- 10. Keep in mind that some teachers may not feel comfortable or able to conduct a classroom meeting of this nature. Encourage teachers to be forthcoming about what they do and do not feel comfortable doing.**
- 11. Send a letter to parents, informing them of what the school is doing.**
 - Attach a copy of the “Parent Tips” included in this packet
 - Explain the security measures being taken on campus
 - Reiterate that students are safe at school
- 12. Make sure all staff responds to parents’ questions/concerns in a consistent manner.**
 - Provide staff with a script in order that all information be consistent
- 13. Make resources available to the entire school community. The Search Institute has compiled a list of web sites that can be of help in dealing with this crisis. Please make these resources available to your staff, parents, and students (see *resources* on page 3).**

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14. Make sure you examine your own self-care and well being.

Examine your own self-care techniques or strategies. As an administrator and caregiver to staff, students, and parents, please allow time to incorporate some type of self-care in your daily tasks to ensure your own well being.

Resources:

• **Connect for Kids- <http://www.connectforkids.org>**

This site provides excellent information on how to talk to kids about trauma as well as how to cope effectively.

• **Talking With Kids- <http://www.talkingwithkids.org/television/twk-news.html>**

This site provides tips for adults on what to say and when to speak with young people about traumatic events.

• **The Parent Center- http://www.parentcenter.com/general/34754.html?CP_bid=**

Parents can find resources and guidance on what they can do in response to the events.

• **National Institute on Media and the Family-**

<http://www.mediaandthefamily.org/family/talkingwithchildren.shtml>

Teachers and parents will find specific tips for talking to young people of all ages at this web site.

• **Taking Action- <http://www.citycares.org/national/>**

This site provides both young people and adults with positive ways to react to the events.

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Teachers:

Teachers play a critical role in making sure that students feel safe in schools and class. Tragic events can make anyone, youth or adults, feel unsafe. The following is a process that will lead teachers through a discussion with students. Each step begins with a note to the teacher to provide information on why this step is being conducted. There are sections in boxes to assist with discussion. Boxed sections may contain tips, strategies, warnings or prompts to help get through tougher sections. If a teacher does not feel they are able to discuss this with students, please let your administrator know.

Introduction

Ask students to raise hands if they have heard about the event. Let the students know that you will be taking approximately 20-45 minutes to discuss the tragedy. Some students may not want to discuss the event or may feel that we are actually causing more problems by discussing it. Assure students that they may opt out of the discussion. Section 2, of this process encourages students to examine why this is important to the healing process.

1. Reassure students that they are safe.

Teacher Note: Some students may come to school with feelings of fear for their own safety, feelings of abandonment as family members may be called for military service, or safety concerns for family members. Before we can move forward we need to assure children that their safety is our highest concern. High Schools/Middle Schools may use any of the following periods to begin discussing school safety with their students. This should be done early in the school day. Elementary schools should begin the school day with the discussion.

- Home room
- Advisories
- First period
- Extended Learning Periods
- Beginning of school day

Make sure questions are age-appropriate.

Teacher Tips:

- **Share the school's safety plan with students**
- **Ask students to share why they feel safe at school**
- **Have students brainstorm programs that are in place that make kids feel safe**
- **Have a School Resource Officer (SRO) or other uniformed police officer visit the classroom**
- **Lead a discussion on what types of natural emotions may occur during or after a crisis**

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2. Explain the process.

Teacher Note: The process has been adapted from many sources including Critical Incident Stress Management. This process allows for feelings and emotions to come out and for students to move toward critical thinking for self-care and assisting others.

- Discuss the incident
- Describe the process to be used
- “We will begin by identifying some ground rules”
- “We will discuss what we thought of this event”
- “We will discuss how this event has made us feel on an emotional level”
- “We can talk about any current issues we are struggling with”
- “Lastly, we will identify strategies to help others and ourselves”

Teacher suggestion: Ask students why this discussion is important. List answers on chart paper.

• Teacher Prompts:

- We all react to stress in different ways
- We must be able to support each other
- Some students might need to discuss how they feel
- We can learn from this event

3. Ground rules.

Teacher Note: Teachers may write down ground rules they feel are needed to facilitate a discussion. Have students add to the list. List all responses on chart paper and make sure rules are clearly visible in the classroom. Explain the importance of not using racially charged statements or epithets.

Some educators may not be aware of derogatory names used against people of Middle Eastern descent. Please call local Islamic Centers or the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination League for assistance and resources.

Teacher Questions: How will you handle any name-calling or other violations of the ground rules?
What is the school policy?

Sample Ground Rules:

- No put downs/racial comments
- Respect other people's opinions
- One person speaks at a time
- Confidentiality
- Listen attentively

Ask students if other rules need to be added

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4. Teachers should inform students of the following:

Teacher Note: This section allows students to see similarities and differences in the way each of us handle stress. The focus should be on our responses to stress and to understand someone who may be feeling stress may react differently than us. This section is also used to discuss inappropriate behaviors of stress such as stereotyping or lashing out.

- Everyone responds differently to these types of incidents. Some basic signs of stress may include:
 - Students unable to focus
 - Behavioral changes
 - Anger
 - Withdrawal/depression
 - Use of humor
 - Appetite changes
 - Change in sleeping patterns
 - Inappropriate behaviors

Teacher Discussion Topics

Teacher Note: Steps need to be taken to ensure the safety of ALL students and to stop any harassment or acts of violence. The following examples will help with discussing inappropriate behaviors by students.

If someone attacks you, it is natural to respond by defending yourself.

Inappropriate reaction: to attack, confront, or injure someone who may look like or remind you of the attacker(s)/group.

You may want to talk about:

Scapegoating – an action to misdirect your anger on a person or persons who have nothing to do with the event/offense. This can include name calling, harassing, or physically injuring someone.

Stereotyping -a generalization about an entire group of people without regard for individual differences can have a negative impact. This includes even positive stereotypes, such as Asians are good at math and science.

Examples of history - Japanese-Americans were forced into internment camps after Pearl Harbor, the Sleepy Lagoon Riots, and the attacks on Middle Easterners after the Oklahoma City Bombing.

Remind students that different groups of people have been unjustifiably targeted throughout history.

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5. Facilitation questions.

Teacher Note: The process includes working through the following questions. The goal is to take students through emotions that they are feeling or hiding and move them to critical thinking. Ask each question separately and have students work in small groups and report out, or conduct an informal discussion depending on age level and sophistication.

Remember to allow students to opt out or pass on any question. You may use flip chart paper to write the student's responses. The last two points are critical to the process by allowing students to identify what they can do to help themselves and others. This section supports the student handout.

1. "What did you think when you heard about this event?"
2. "How did it make you feel?"
3. "What's happening now?"
 - Sleep changes
 - Appetite
 - Anger
 - Feelings of being unsafe
4. "What can you do to help yourself feel better?"
5. "What can you do to help others feel better?"

6. Student Handout.

Please give out the Student Handout (two pages) and discuss the packet with your students. If time allows, please have students fill-in their responses to the suggested strategies.

Teacher Reminder: Youth look to adults to guide them when they do not know how they should react. Your students will look to you and your behavior in trying times. Please monitor your attitude and what you say about people of different ethnic/racial backgrounds. Remind students that Muslim families, here in the United States and around the world, are peaceful and law-abiding. Any country will have a small number of individuals or groups of people that may want to harm innocent people. This is a time for us as a Nation to unite rather than stereotype or point fingers at one another.

7. Teacher self-care and well being.

As a teacher, you become a caregiver in times of crisis. Make sure to set some time aside for your own self-care and well being. Examine your strategies and/or activities to keep yourself well.

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STUDENT HANDOUT

[This can be given to students and should be discussed with them]

Students:

Dealing with a traumatic event can be extremely stressful but there are ways to cope successfully. Use the following as a guide to help you get through this difficult time.

1. What can you do to help yourself feel better? Here are some suggestions that may help:

- Journal writing
- Drawing
- Listening to music
- Prayer
- Quiet time close to nature
- Access resources in your community
- Talk to a friend or an adult you can trust
- Physical activity (i.e. sports, dance, walking)
- Express feelings of sadness, pain, confusion, anger, stress.
- Think of other ways to help you cope. Remember, not everyone copes in the same way, you need to identify what works best for you.

ACTIVITY ONE: Write down other ideas you may have to help yourself:

A.

B.

C.

2. Identify adults you can talk to.

Here are some ideas:

- Teachers/Counselors
- Coaches
- Faith community
- Parents/relatives
- Mentors

ACTIVITY TWO: Identify and write down other adults you can talk to:

A.

B.

C.

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STUDENT HANDOUT - CONTINUED

3. Identify friends you can talk to.

ACTIVITY THREE: Identify friends who are positive and helpful people that you can trust to be a good, confidential listener:

A.

B.

C.

4. Be aware of your emotions and feelings as well as what your friends may be feeling. Some common reactions to stress related events may include but are not limited to the following:

- Loss/increase of appetite
- Change in sleeping pattern
- Withdrawal/depression
- Mood/behavioral changes

ACTIVITY FOUR: Identify and write down other reactions people have to stress:

A.

B.

C.

5. Remember you are part of the solution. What can you do to help others?

Here are some suggestions:

- Sponsor a community drive
- Donate blood at your local clinic/hospital
- Raise funds for a good cause
- Encourage positive behavior- set the example
- Reach out and be supportive of your peers

ACTIVITY FIVE: Identify and list other ways to be part of the solution:

A.

B.

C.

Do not be afraid to ask for help. If you think you are experiencing some stress-related symptoms or simply feel the need to express yourself, get some help.

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Parents:

1. Your attitude sets the atmosphere to deal with the crisis. Be calm and reassuring. You and/or your child may:

- Be fearful to attend school
- Feel school and community are unsafe
- Have a different or less trustful view of the world
- Experience symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (i.e. Nightmares, confusion, flashbacks, unprovoked anger, outbursts, sleeplessness, irritability)
- Have an anxiety of separation

Assure your child that they are safe. It is important that you keep communication open with your children. They may, at times, not want to discuss anything, so allow them that time, however, be consistent in gently checking in with them daily.

2. Be aware.

- These events may trigger inappropriate reactions including: fear, jokes, negative comments, hyperactivity, threats, and acts of violence against different ethnic and religious groups
- Be a good role model by not participating or accepting negative behavior such as ethnic jokes or threats
- Help your child understand the importance of respecting diversity

3. At home provide a safe, supportive environment for your children.

- Pay particular attention to your child's emotional needs at this time
- Allow and encourage your children to express how they feel
- Be a good listener (allow the child to do most of the talking)
- Be attentive
- Acknowledge feelings
- Remind them that with time they will begin to feel better
- Provide supportive feedback and reassurance
- Reinforce that they are safe
- Give them frequent hugs

4. How to help your child deal with the extensive media coverage.

Set limits to your child's time viewing the media coverage

• For Elementary Age Children:

- Do not allow children to be exposed to violence and drama
- Provide positive alternatives for your child:
 - Watching a favorite video
 - Educational software
 - Reading

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- Arts and craft projects
- Writing
- Activities you can do outdoors
- Discuss solutions with your child
- **For Middle School and High School Age Youth:**
 - Watch media coverage with them

Ask questions such as:

1. "What are your thoughts and feelings about what you have seen?"
2. "Why do you think this occurred?"
3. "Have you noticed any changes in your patterns of sleeping, eating, feelings of safety or anger?" (These are all normal reactions to crisis)
4. "Did you discuss this crisis in class? What were the comments and proposed solutions that impressed you?"

It is important to be honest with your children about your feelings, however, keep your composure while speaking to them. Talk with them about how feelings can be confusing during a time of crisis and that their feelings may change from day-to-day.

If your child talks about witnessing or being a victim of harassment, bullying, or being picked on as a result of this event, ask the following questions:

- "Why do you think this bullying/harassment is happening?"
- "Have you been bullied/harassed/picked on?"
- "How did you feel when that happened?"
- "How did you handle this?"
- "What are ways to handle or cope* with bullying**?"
- "How can you help others who are bullied and harassed?"

One of the greatest concerns that children may have about reporting bullying to you or a school staff person, is confidentiality. If you need further help, ask your child's school counselor to arrange a confidential mediation between the two students (bully and victim) with their respective parents present. This has been the most effective strategy in preventing further bullying and decreasing the amount of bullying at school.

*See "Coping Skills for Youth" below.

**Refer to "Bullying Information" on our Safe Schools Resource Links Website:
www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/student/ss/resources.html

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Coping Skills for Youth:

- Journal writing
- Drawing
- Listening to music
- Prayer
- Quiet time close to nature
- Access resources in your community
- Talk to a friend/mentor/parent/clergy
- Sports, dance, walking – physical activity
- Express feelings of sadness, pain, confusion, anger, stress
- Add your own (i.e., playing a musical instrument)

Parent Note: As the primary caregiver of your child/children, it is important to take care of yourself physically and mentally. Set time aside for yourself for an activity that relaxes you or provides you the ability to “breathe.”

We hope this information will assist you and your children to establish a meaningful level of dialogue – expressing and addressing concerns and fears relating to the recent crisis.

If you need additional assistance dealing with this issue, please contact local school or community health professionals.

Community Health Professional Agencies

Agency	Phone Number
County Mental Health Crisis Line	1-800-479-3339
Psychotherapists Referral Services	(619) 296-9011
San Diego Psychological Services	(619) 291-3451
Association of Social Workers	(619) 232-9622
North County Psychological Services	(760) 752-6152
Countywide Crisis Hotline	(800) 479-3339
Youth to Youth (staffed by teens)	(888) 999-8336
Info & Referral Line (for family mental health)	(888) 843-5800
Family Advocacy & Support Services	(858) 566-5740
Frontline Crisis Services – Central County	(619) 692-8750
Access & Crisis – East County	(800) 479-3339
County Fire Recovery Hotline – East Cty.	(858) 495-5494
Frontline Crisis Services – Logan Heights	(619) 595-4400

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**For further assistance, please contact the
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