

Recovery From Large-Scale Crises: Guidelines for Crisis Teams and Administrators

The United States has recently experienced numerous large-scale crises that resulted in high death tolls and extensive property damage. Critical incidents such as suicide contagion, natural disasters, or mass casualty events have the potential to cause traumatic reactions and significantly affect children's sense of safety and security. School administrators and crisis team members tasked with meeting the needs of students and staff following such large-scale events must consider how they might support the school community both within the immediate aftermath of a crisis, as well as over the long term. The challenges encountered and the needs exhibited will vary and change with time and crisis teams must be prepared to address these as they face them. This resource was developed by a number of highly experienced school-based crisis responders with the intent of assisting administrators and crisis teams in crisis response and recovery efforts following a large-scale disaster or crisis.

IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH: THE FIRST DAYS AND WEEKS

The response immediately following a crisis or disaster is critical because it has the potential to greatly decrease the likelihood of further trauma; therefore, administrators and crisis teams must be prepared to engage in effective crisis response and intervention as soon as the danger has passed.

What to Expect: Challenges and Needs

1. *Identifying and assessing traumatized individuals.* It is critical to understand the relationship between crisis event variables and increased risk of developing trauma reactions as not everyone will react the same way. Processes and procedures for assessing the impact on children and youth must be in place; this ensures appropriate decisions are made regarding interventions and supports.
2. *Finding space to provide crisis intervention services.* Finding space to deliver supports can be a challenge. Thus, space that allows for the provision of both group and individual multitiered supports is critical and must be planned for.
3. *Timing the return to school.* If the incident resulted in an interruption to students attending school, making the decision as to when to have them return can be a bit tricky. Staff supports must be provided before students can return to schools. Consideration also needs to be given to modifying the daily schedule, at least in the short-term. An alternate location may also need to be considered, depending on the extent of the damage to the school building.
4. *Helping adults manage their own reactions.* Often, the adults who are expected to provide support to affected children are experiencing difficulties themselves. These adults will need support in learning to manage their own reactions and stress.
5. *Responding to spontaneous memorials and other remembrances.* Selecting and managing memorial activities can pose a challenge. Having an established school policy that addresses memorials can be helpful in mediating these challenges.

Recommendations to Address Challenges

1. *Conduct psychological triage to assess level of impact.* Psychological triage involves determining who is at risk for psychological trauma following a crisis. It is vital to estimate the number of individuals who will need mental health support and to determine what services may need to be provided. Research indicates that proximity—