



Excerpt From

*From the Center's Clearinghouse ...*\*

A Resource Aid:

## Responding to Crisis at a School

This document is a hard copy version of a resource that can be downloaded at no cost from the Center's website (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>).

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**Section IV**

*Organizing and Training  
a School-based Crisis Team*

- # Building a School-Based Crisis Team**
- # Crisis Team Training**
- # Two Initial Training Sessions**



## *Building a School-Based Crisis Team*

The process of organizing a school-based crisis team begins with the site's leadership. Once there is agreement on the value of establishing such a team, someone must be designated the responsibility of building the team. That person begins by identifying those who have formal roles they must play during a crisis, those with specific skills that are needed, and any others who may be especially motivated to be part of such a team.

The next step is to set a meeting time and invite the potential members.

To increase the likelihood that the meeting is focused and productive, it helps to do some pre-session structuring. This includes

- ✓ asking others to play a role during the meeting (e.g., meeting facilitator, time keeper, note taker --see accompanying sample form)
- ✓ providing them with copies of the site's existing crisis response plans and some general material to read on the subject of school-based crisis response (such as the overview presented in Section I of this resource aid).

During the meeting, it helps to use worksheets that focus the discussion on key topics and decisions about tasks assignments and timelines.

The meeting, of course, will review the site's existing crisis response plans and discuss a variety of related matters.

By the end of the meeting, agreements should have been made about team membership, roles, and decide on initial training dates and who will conduct the training.

*Example of Meeting Invitation*

## **Meeting to Organize the School's Crisis Response Team**

Date

To:

From:

As you know the school has decided to (re)organize a school-based crisis team. You have been identified as a key person to talk with about the team.

At the meeting, we will review the site's existing crisis response plans and discuss a variety of related matters. By the end of the meeting, we will clarify crisis team membership, roles, and initial training dates.

In preparation for our meeting, please review the attached material.

The meeting is scheduled for (date, day, time)

To help make the meeting run smoothly and productively, the following staff have agreed to guide the process.

Meeting facilitator will be \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting time keeper will be \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting scribe will be \_\_\_\_\_

Finally, since a crisis demands that we work quickly, teamwork under pressure will be good practice. This means starting and ending the meeting on time and setting time limits for each task.

*Session Topic:*

## **FOCUS ON PLANNING**

*What are our roles and functions as team members?*

- (1) Meeting facilitator reviews the key team roles and functions
- (2) Decide who will take each role. (Fill in Worksheet -- see accompanying example).

If there are enough people, designate a back up for each position. Discuss *chain of command*. Who will be in charge, who will be next, if these two are not available or busy who would be third. Enter all necessary contact information (e.g., home numbers, beepers).

- (3) Discuss the last crisis at the school.

If one doesn't come to mind, use the possibility of a car accident outside school involving a student and observed by most students and parents. Each team member should assume her/his role in talking through the specifics of what to do. Treat this as brainstorming with no discussion until the exercise is finished. Then take five minutes to highlight the good ideas and additional suggestions for action.

- (4) Plan on a way each team member will inform others at the school about the crisis team membership and roles. For examples who will talk to faculty, parent center coordinator, office staff, TA's, Playground staff, support staff?

- (5) Prepare for the next meeting which will *FOCUS ON ACTION*

Date for next meeting  
Meeting facilitator  
Meeting time keeper  
Meeting scribe

Someone should volunteer to copy and distribute the preparation material for the next meeting.

# *Worksheet*

## **Team Membership, Roles, and Functions**

<i>Roles/Functions</i>	<i>Name</i> (One person may serve more than one role/function)	<i>Chain of Command</i> (Who's in charge? Back-ups?)	<i>Contact Information</i>
Team Leader			
Administrative Liaison			
Staff Liaison			
Communications Liaison			
Media Liaison			
First Aid Coordinator(s) medical psychological			
Communications Coordinator			
Crowd Management Coordinator			
Evacuation/Transportation Coord.			

# *Crisis Team Training*

The team as a whole should receive general training with respect to crisis intervention and team building. In addition, each subteam or designated "specialist" needs specialized training.

The team leader should bring all members together once a month so that each can learn from the experiences and training of the others. The minutes of this meeting can be reproduced as a monthly report to the school, and this report can act as a reminder of the importance of dealing with the aftermath of crises, of who should be contacted at such times, and as an indication of the team's impact.

Besides mastering the school's crisis response plan and emergency steps, *general* training involves learning

- how to minimize student contagion in the aftermath of such a problem
- how to reassure the majority of students about the problem
- how to identify and provide psychological first aid to students who have especially strong reactions (including assisting with someone in acute shock or trauma)
- counseling skills appropriate to the event (including active listening skills, small-group techniques for both students and adults, conflict resolution, critical incident stress debriefing, support group facilitation)

Each subteam should receive *specialized* training with respect to the specific type of crisis with which the subteam is concerned (e.g., fire, earthquake, suicidal youth). Specialized training involves learning

- the types of reactions students, staff, and parents are likely to have to a particular type of crisis;
- how to respond to specific types of reactions.

Note: A special training opportunity for interested team members is to participate in a disaster drill held by local hospitals, police, fire departments, offices of emergency services, etc.

# *Two Initial Training Sessions*

The first sessions after the organizational meeting stress specific preparation for action and prevention..

## **Session 1: FOCUS ON ACTION**

*What steps should we plan for?*

## **Session 2: FOCUS ON PREVENTION**

*How can we enhance resources to prevent some crises and minimize others?*

### **(1) Focus on Action**

Prior to the session, team members are to review the material on Planning for Crisis in Section I of this resource aid, as well as the material on key considerations and the Crisis Checklists contained in Section II.

At the session(s):

- 1) The meeting facilitator talks through a crisis intervention flow chart. For each step, team members write in the name(s) of who on the team will be responsible for the function.
- 2) The meeting facilitator asks each member to talk through one section of the checklist. Briefly personalize this for the school (who, what, when, where). If this takes too long for one meeting, carry it over to a second FOCUS *ON ACTION* Meeting.
- 3) If there has been a crisis at the school or one has been averted or minimized, discuss it briefly. Assess what worked well and what didn't. Make any changes in the plans and decide how to inform others.

### **Preparation for the next meeting *FOCUS ON PREVENTION*.**

Date of the meeting:

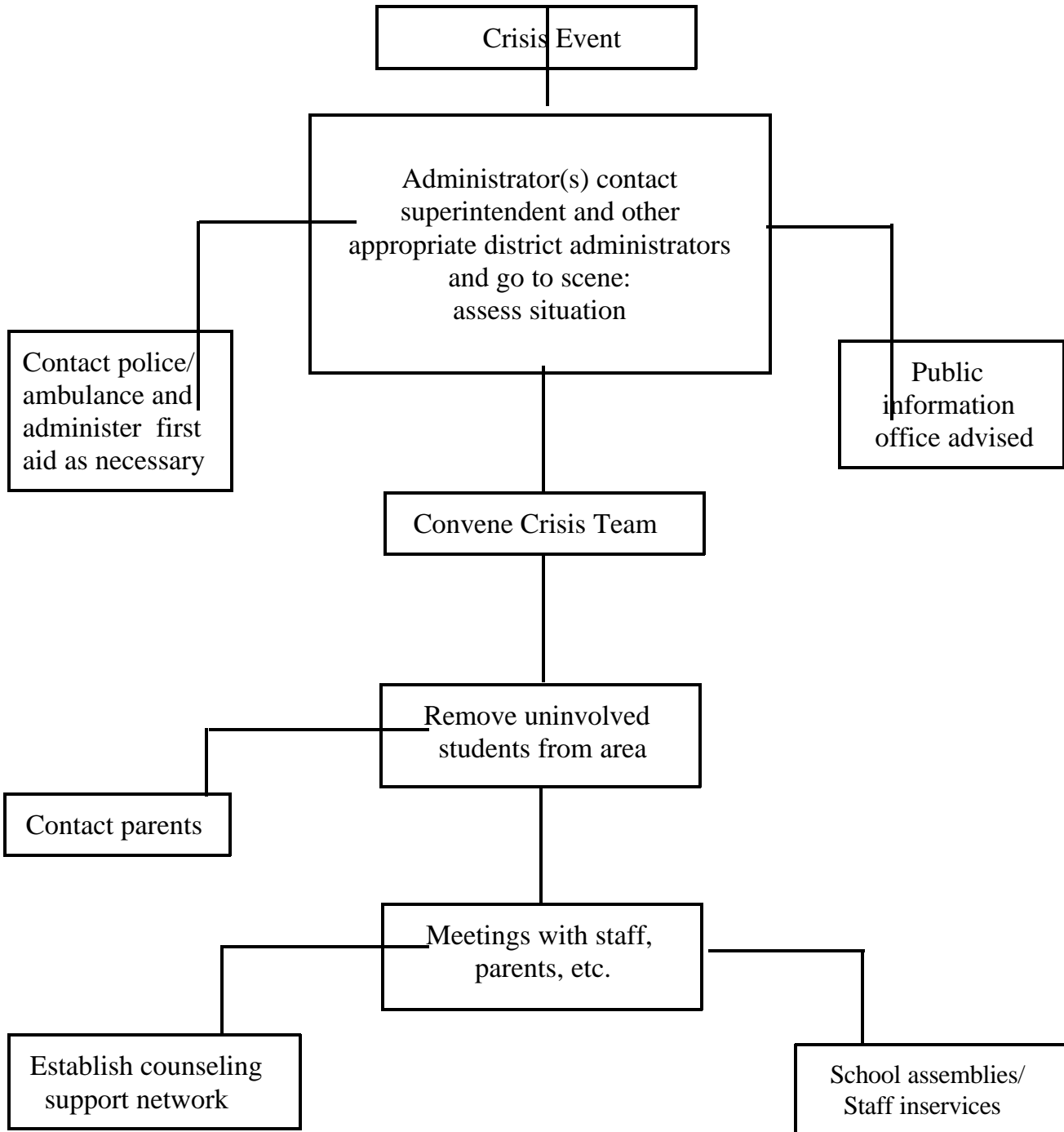
Meeting time keeper:

Meeting facilitator:

Meeting scribe:

## Crisis Intervention Flow Chart

### *Personal/Life Threatening Event*



## (2) Focus on Prevention

At this session(s), the discussion and training explores the following matters.

If a crisis situation has occurred at the school, part of the time is used for debriefing (*What happened? How was it handled? What went well? What didn't? Is a change in plans needed?*).

To begin to plan ways to minimize and perhaps avert crises, the team needs to understand how existing programs might be enhanced and new ones developed. The discussion begins with the questions:

*What are ways the school can avert or minimize crisis situations?*

*Can we do so by enhancing certain programs and developing preventive approaches?*

This leads to discussion of:

*What does the school have? Need?*

*What else might strengthen the safety net?*

In this context, team members can learn to map what's in place and analyze whether it needs to be improved (e.g., Is the school's emergency plan effective? Is there a safe school plan? a Parent Center? a District Crisis Team? Is there a conflict mediation program? a human relations program? Could linkage with some community resources result in better recreation and enrichment opportunities and reduce gang violence?)

With a view to enhancing resources for all facets of crisis response and prevention, team members need to connect with community resources. As a first step, they can begin by mapping resources that can assist during and in the aftermath of a crisis (see attached worksheet).

Future training sessions should try to achieve a balance between capacity building for crisis response and pursuing ideas for crisis prevention. In terms of timing, everyone tends to be most motivated to learn in the wake of a debriefing done after a crisis. For purposes of simulated practice, the team might use any disaster drills the school carries out (e.g., fire, earthquake). As new members join, it is a good opportunity for experienced members to orient and teach them and, in the process, to review and consolidate what they have learned to date.

