
*From the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA**

Recent Earthquake in Venezuela Highlights the Importance of Reviewing School Crisis Plans Before the New School Year

As schools prepare for the start of a new academic year, the recent earthquake in Venezuela serves as an important reminder that crises can occur at any time and often without warning. Schools and districts are encouraged to review and update their crisis preparedness, emergency response, and recovery plans before students and staff return.

Crisis, emergency, disaster, catastrophe, tragedy, and trauma are words that have become all too familiar in education. Almost every school has faced a major crisis, and every school should be prepared for that possibility. In addition to natural disasters such as earthquakes, wildfires, floods, and severe storms, schools may confront tragedies involving violence, suicide, accidents, gang activity, hostage situations, or the loss of students and staff.

Such events can have profound effects on students, families, and school personnel. Reactions may include fear, grief, anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress. For some young people, these experiences can lead to significant emotional distress and increase the risk of self-harm or harm to others. Effective planning and preparation are essential not only for ensuring physical safety, but also for addressing the immediate and longer-term mental health and psychosocial needs of the entire school community.

To assist schools and districts in strengthening their preparedness and response efforts, the Center offers the following resources:

From the Center's Resource Aid Packet: Responding to Crises at a School

<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/crisis/crisis.pdf>

Key resources include:

- **Crisis Response Checklist**
- **Major Facets of Crisis Response**
- **Responding to a Crisis: A Few General Principles**
- **Psychological First Aid**
- **The School's Role in Addressing Psychological Reactions to Loss**
- **Planning and Action for the Mental Health Needs of Students and School Staff After a Major Disaster**

Now is an opportune time for school leaders, crisis teams, and student support staff to review these materials, assess current readiness, identify gaps, and ensure that plans are in place to respond effectively when a crisis occurs. Schools need to play a role as a critical stabilizing institution in community crises, and effectively doing so depends on pre-established, operationalized collaborations with community systems. Without this, responses remain fragmented and reactive. (See ***School Response to Community Crises*** -- <https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/commcrisis.pdf>.)

Preparation before an emergency is always more effective than just reacting after the fact.