

About Conducting Crisis Exercises and Drills*

In the U.S.A, many schools are mandated to hold drills/exercises to prepare for emergency events (e.g., natural events such as fires, tornadoes, earthquakes; campus shootings). While research on the impact of such exercises and drills is sparse, the various costs of much of the activity, as currently performed, probably outweigh the benefits (e.g., Ramirez, Kubicek, Peek-Asa, & Wong, 2009; Zhe & Nickerson, 2007).

Schools need to make changes that can enhance effectiveness. Ramirez and colleagues found that, in the school district they studied:

Drills were not typically recognized as a training vehicle but rather as a compulsory exercise with little meaning. Observations indicated that students, particularly in the middle and high schools, often did not evacuate in an orderly fashion (e.g., in lines) and that staff generally did not correct this behavior. Staff reported that students saw drills as free time to talk with friends. In contrast, students said that they were not encouraged to take the drills seriously, and that teachers rarely required them to fully participate in the drills.

It is critical that schools address concerns that have been raised about factors undermining effectiveness. Examples include:

- the lack of surprise when required drills are scheduled and announced (unexpected drills and well-designed simulations are viewed as making the event more realistic)
- negative attitudes toward drills (e.g., the view that the drills are a nuisance and ineffective)
- negative psychological reactions (e.g., enhanced anxiety and fears)
- expanding enough clear exit paths to prevent overcrowding and less pushing and countering people's first instinct is to run during an emergency
- poor communication and coordination

And, with respect to school shootings, there has been considerable controversy over whether to change lockdown drills – from teaching students to quietly hide in their classrooms to teaching them a variety of ways to respond and escape (e.g., “running in zig-zag patterns, throwing objects, and screaming to make it difficult for a gunman to focus and aim”).

In moving forward, clearly, revisions should be made to current drill policies so that such concerns are addressed.

Preparing for an emergency should be a collaboration between school and community. A variety of resources are available that discuss ways to plan and implement exercises/drills. For example

> *Conducting Crisis Exercises & Drills: Guidelines for Schools*

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/conducting-crisis-exercises-and-drills>

> *Improving School Safety with Enhanced Drills*

https://www.navigateprepared.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/SafetyDrills_WhitePaper.pdf

> *9 Tips for More Effective School Lockdowns*

<https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/safety/9-tips-for-more-effective-school-lockdowns>

> *4 Ways to Make Your Emergency Drills Worthwhile*

<http://teaching.monster.com/benefits/articles/9622-4-ways-to-make-your-emergency-drills-worthwhile>

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Drills are One Part of a School's General Concern for Crisis Response and Prevention

Planning related to drills need to be part of overall activity addressing crisis response and prevention. Besides natural disasters such as earthquakes, fires, and pandemic diseases, students experience violence and death related to suicide, gang activity, snipers, hostage-taking, and rape. Some students and staff react with severe emotional responses – fear, grief, post traumatic stress syndrome. And, when a significant portion of a school's population is affected, major facets of a school's functioning are jeopardized. When too little effort is made to intervene, the aftermath can interfere with school and home performance, and long-term psychosocial and educational problems may ensue.

Crisis intervention is for responding to, minimizing the impact of, and preventing school and personal crises. After a crisis, the first concern is to ensure physical safety and medical first aid; this is followed immediately by attention to psychological considerations. Then, the emphasis is on the school's need to regain stability and a sense of normalcy so that students and staff can resume learning and teaching. This includes attending to follow-up care as needed. Comprehensive crisis intervention planning and implementation provides ways for school personnel, students, and families to return to normalcy as quickly as feasible, address residual (longer-term) psychosocial problems, and explore preventive measures for the future.

Examples of crisis intervention include activity designed to minimize the personal and institutional impact of crises and establish

- a safe and productive school environment (e.g., that deters violence and reduces injury)
- emergency/crisis responses at a site
- collaboration with local schools (e.g., an elementary to high school feeder pattern) and the community at-large for crisis planning and response and to develop and implement strategies to enhance safety and reduce violence, bullying, child abuse, suicide
- follow-up care when needed
- a violence prevention and resiliency curriculum designed to teach students anger management, problem-solving skills, social skills, and conflict resolution.

The following is the Center's prototype framework for planning crisis assistance and prevention.

Prototype Framework for Crises Assistance and Prevention				
		Major School-wide crisis*	<i>Scope of Event</i> Small Group Crisis**	Individual Crisis***
<i>Phases for which to plan</i>	During the Emergency			
	Immediate Aftermath			
	Prevention in the Future			
	Days/Weeks Following			

*Major school-wide crisis (e.g., major earthquake, fire in building, gun violence on campus)
 **Small group crisis (e.g., in events where most students are unaffected such as a classmate's death, the focus is on providing for *specific* classes, groups, and individuals who are upset)
 ***Individual crisis (e.g., student confides threat to hurt self or others such as suicide, assault)

Some References Used in Preparing this Information Resource

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Some Additional Resources

For some specific examples of ways to enhance Crises Assistance and Prevention, see the *Self-study Survey* – online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/crissurvey.pdf>

For free and easily accessed related online resources, see the special section on our website:

> *Responding to a Crisis* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/crisisresp.htm>

Also see our Center's Resource Aid on

> *Responding to a Crisis at a School* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/crisis/crisis.pdf>

And the Center's Quick Finds on

> *Crisis Prevention and Response* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2107_01.htm

> *Prevention* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/prevention.html>