

Sonoma County

School Crisis Response & Recovery RESOURCE Guide

The Study Guide, Background and References
for Best Practices

**Cynthia C. Moore, LCSW
&
Melinda K. Susan, MA, NCSP**

The School Crisis Response & Recovery Resource Guide and
The School Crisis Response & Recovery Go-To Guide
are available at <http://www.scoc.org/pub/htdocs/safe-schools-resources.html>

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Sonoma County School Crisis Response and Recovery Manual

Introduction

This plan has been designed to assist schools in responding to the psychological impact of school crises. The School Crisis Response and Recovery Manual is a component of the Sonoma County Schools' Model Emergency Operations Plan. In the case of a large-scale disaster, schools will manage a crisis following the Model Emergency Operations Plan management guidelines. The crisis intervention team would be one of the many teams carrying out the roles and responsibilities described in the Model Emergency Operations Plan (available from School Guard, www.SchoolGuard.org).

Thankfully, schools do not frequently face crises requiring the full mobilization of an emergency operations center. However, schools often need to respond to the mental health crises such as the death or serious injury of students or staff. A crisis is any traumatic event that seriously disrupts our coping and problem-solving abilities. It is typically sudden, unexpected, dramatic and forceful and may even threaten our survival. A crisis can present a drastic and tragic change in our environment. This change is generally overwhelming and uncontrollable as well as unwanted and frightening. It may create a sense of helplessness, hopelessness and vulnerability combined with a loss of safety.

The School Crisis Response and Recovery Manual outlines an appropriate response to such situations, guiding the school and the crisis intervention team in moving through them. The goal is to address the trauma experienced by the school community in such a way as to prevent or reduce long-term negative impacts.

This manual includes information that will assist schools in creating and/or strengthening a site crisis intervention team. Also included is a description of the Sonoma County Crisis Intervention System of Support that provides schools with information on how to access Crisis Intervention Team support outside of their district (see page 17).

Following Page 88 of this document is a "Quick Reference Guide" that contains all documents that are needed to immediately respond to a crisis.

Crisis response requires four levels of action:

Phase 1 – Prevention and Mitigation: Averting or lessening the impact of a crisis

Phase 2 – Preparedness: Planning, drills, training, etc.

Phase 3 – Response: Emergency management, triage, assessment, etc.

Phase 4 – Recovery: Restoring the learning and teaching environment

Chapter One

Prevention and Mitigation

Major Steps in Preventing and Mitigating a Crisis

What kinds of crises can be prevented or mitigated?

- Playground or sports injuries
- High-risk behaviors involving alcohol, drugs, weapons and cars
- Student violence
- Harmful reactions to student or staff deaths
- Harmful reactions to local or national events that threaten students' well-being

What is the difference between preventing and mitigating a crisis?

Preventing means averting a crisis or lessening the probability of a crisis.

Mitigating means lessening the risk or harm of a crisis.

What prevention efforts are schools already making?

Comprehensive Safe School Plans ensure a safe and orderly school environment. These are mandated by Education Code 32280-32288 and must be reviewed annually. This plan is the responsibility of the school site council and is to be developed through a collaborative process that includes school staff, parents, students, and community participants. Crisis prevention and mitigation efforts should be coordinated with the Safe School Plan.

What are the major steps in preventing or mitigating a crisis at school?

- Encouraging input from school staff, students, parents and community members regarding risks and resources
- Reviewing policies and data about safety and risks
- Implementing effective strategies and programs
- Evaluating efforts on an annual basis and designing improvements

What are some resources for conducting an annual assessment of the dangers, risk behaviors and environmental factors that impact a campus?

- The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) is a student self-report survey, conducted every two years at grades 5, 7, 9, and 11. In addition to assessing drug and alcohol use and violence at school, the CHKS also collects student and staff responses regarding caring adult relationships, high expectations and meaningful participation at school.
- Focus groups and community meetings can be used to review this data with students, staff, families and community members (such as law enforcement, health care professionals and/or community-based organizations).

Why is it important to review district policies and procedures?

- District policy and procedural guidelines shape what happens at the school level.
- Policy and procedures related to school-wide discipline, environmental vulnerabilities (facilities, safety, access to campus, security), social vulnerabilities (school climate, bullying, substance use, gang activity), and the SEMS/NIMS command structure should be reviewed annually to align with personnel and facility changes.
- **What steps should be taken to insure that the policies and procedures are implemented effectively?**
- The staff in charge of prevention curricula and intervention services should be part of the crisis planning and prevention team.
- Staff should be educated about crises and be trained in their roles and responsibilities.
- Students and staff should practice emergency drills.
- Relationships should also be established with community responders (law enforcement, fire and community-based organizations) that would be called upon in a crisis event.
- These steps should be documented in writing.

What types of strategies and programs relate to crisis prevention?

- Schools should investigate curricula and programs aimed at preventing or addressing risk behaviors such as bullying, depression, alcohol and substance abuse, violence, physical and sexual abuse, suicide and self-injury.
- The research on effective strategies for dealing with substance abuse and violence is summarized in *Getting Results*, < <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/pn/fd/gettingresults.asp>>, published by the California Department of Education (CDE).
- The CDE publishes a list of research-based curricula that have shown evidence of effectiveness, <<http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/lr/wr/scibased0705.asp>>.

What do school staff members need to know to help in prevention?

- It is most important for staff to know their students and to develop caring relationships with them. Many crises have been averted because students have confided in trusted adults at school.
- Staff should trust their professional judgment when they sense that a student may need help.
- All staff should be trained to identify and report their observations of warning signs for substance abuse, violent behavior, depression and suicide.
- Counselors or administrators should know how to access school and other professional intervention and treatment resources for students at-risk.

Threat Assessment

What is threat assessment?

Threat assessment is the process of evaluating the risk of violence posed by someone who has expressed the intent to inflict harm on another. Threat assessment evaluates the context and circumstances of the threat in order to uncover any evidence that the threat may be carried out. A priority of threat assessment is the development of interventions and follow-up activities that are developed to manage and reduce the risk of violence.

Who conducts a threat assessment?

Threat assessment is conducted by a multi-disciplinary team including:

- School administrator
- Mental health professional (school psychologist, school counselor, social worker)
- School Resource Officer
- Other professional (school nurse, teacher)

Components of threat assessment

- **Identification**
 - Identify threats made by student.
 - Interview student using the “Threat-Maker Interview Protocol.” (See Quick Reference Guide, page 18)
 - Complete “Threat Assessment Incident Report.” (See Quick Reference Guide, page 19)
- **Evaluation**
 - Evaluate the seriousness of the threat and danger that it poses to others. Discriminate between threats in acknowledgment that not all are the same. *Making a threat is not the same as posing a threat. Is the student on the path toward an attack? (Secret Service/DOE guide).
 - Complete “Threat Assessment Initial Review.”
- **Intervention**
 - Use counseling and other interventions to reduce risk of violence.
 - Complete “Threat Assessment Intervention Plan.” (See Quick Reference Guide, page 25)
- **Follow-up**
 - Review outcomes of intervention strategies and assess the need for additional or ongoing interventions.

What is a threat?

A threat is an expression of intent to harm someone. Threats can be verbal, gestured or written. They may also be direct or indirect. Weapon possession is presumed to be a threat unless circumstances clearly indicate otherwise.

- **Direct** - “I’m going to stab you with a hunting knife after school.”
- **Indirect** - “I have the means to do some major destruction here.”

- **Third Party** - “He is going to get what is coming to him. Wait and see.”
- **Conditional** - “You better change my grade or I will kill you.”
- **Veiled** - “My brothers in Red Lake knew how to set things right.”

How to proceed with a threat assessment inquiry (Kanan, 2002)

- Use a neutral tone that is professional and non-confrontational.
- Ensure physical safety and security.
- Assemble the team and determine the facts
- Gather information from a variety of sources (student, staff, targeted individual, parent interviews).
- Evaluate information gathered and determine level of risk.
- Develop an action and supervision plan.
- Document information.
- Consult with district level administrators as needed.

Purpose of student interview

- Lets student know that behavior has been noticed and has raised concerns.
- Lets student tell story.
- Allows staff to assess and redirect behavior and to plan supportive interventions.

Key questions to guide inquiry (Secret Service/DOE Guide)

- What are the student’s motives and goals?
- Have there been any communications suggesting ideas or intent to attack?
- Has the student shown inappropriate interest in school attacks or attackers, weapons, incidents of mass violence?
- Has the student engaged in attack related behaviors?
- Does the student have the capacity to carry out the act?
- Is the student experiencing hopelessness, desperation or despair?
- Does the student have a trusting relationship with at least one responsible adult?
- Does the student see violence as an acceptable or desirable way to solve problems?
- Is the student’s conversation and “story” consistent with his/her actions?
- Are other people concerned about the student’s potential for violence?
- What circumstances might cause the likelihood of violence?

Determine the seriousness of the threat

- **Transient threat**
 - Most threats do not genuinely express an intent to harm.
 - They may be an expression of feelings of anger or frustration that are temporary in nature.
 - Usually they can be resolved at the office or on scene.

- After some resolution, the threat does not exist anymore.
- They usually end with an apology or clarification.
- **Actions following a transient threat**
 - Safety precautions may not be necessary.
 - See that the threat is resolved through apologies, explanations, making amends.
 - Provide counseling and education.
 - Take disciplinary actions if necessary.
- **Very serious or substantive threat**
 - A substantive threat is much more serious and includes the following components:
 - The intent to injure is beyond immediate situation.
 - There is at least some risk that threat will be carried out.
 - The threat requires protective action.
 - Police intervention or consultation may be required to address legal violations.
 - The safety of the campus must be maintained if the student is suspended.
- **Actions following a substantive threat**
 - If danger is imminent notify police immediately.
 - Take precautions to protect potential victims.
 - Warn intended victim and victim's parents.
 - Notify parents of student who has made threat.
 - Conduct mental health evaluation.
 - Determine safety if student is suspended.
 - Alternate placement may be considered.

Duty to Warn:

Following a serious or substantive threat, the potential victim(s) and their parents must be warned. Physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists and other mental health professionals have a duty to warn. When a patient presents a serious danger of violence to another, a therapist must use reasonable care to protect the intended victim against such danger (Tarasoff v. Regents of University of California (1976) 17 Cal.3d 425).

- School districts have a duty to warn if threats are specific and substantive.
- School psychologists/counselors and others have a duty to breach patient confidentiality and warn if threat is specific and substantive.
- School districts may release confidential pupil records (general and special education records) to protect the safety of others.

Action plans and Interventions (Goal to reduce risk of violence)

- Describe concerning behavior.
- Develop goals to address behavior.

- Develop a plan for teaching and for supporting new behavior.
- Document and describe success.
- Create a plan for implementation.
- Set up a timeline to review plan (Monitor!).