

## **A CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL TO EVALUATE AND IMPLEMENT THE MENTAL HEALTH COMPONENT OF YOUR SCHOOL CRISIS AND EMERGENCY PLAN**

The US Department of Education has published a model emergency-response and crisis-management plan for schools, which is now available at [www.ed.gov/emergencyplan](http://www.ed.gov/emergencyplan). Mental health issues are an important part of this plan. Based on lessons learned from schools directly affected by the tragedy and loss of September 11, 2001, the School Crisis and Intervention Unit of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network has developed this checklist for your use to assess the mental health component of your school's Crisis and Emergency Preparedness Plan. We encourage you to use this checklist as a guide to determine how well your school is prepared to respond to the immediate and long-term psychological effects on students, their families, and staff after a crisis or disaster.

### **MITIGATION & PREVENTION**

#### *Identify and Assess the Risks*

- £ Identify the most common kinds of crises and disasters that may impact your school
- £ Identify hazards or sites that may pose a threat to your school in the event of a disaster or terrorist act (e.g., factories, commercial transportation routes, conventional and nuclear power plants)

### **PREPARATION**

#### *Expect the Unexpected*

- £ Develop a comprehensive crisis and emergency-response plan incorporating both immediate and long-term mental health responses to the negative consequences of potential hazards
- £ Establish relationships with local mental health professionals and agencies as well as the community-based organizations specializing in disaster and trauma
- £ Define the roles of your school staff, qualified community mental health providers, and other community partners for different types of crises and phases of response and recovery (e.g., disaster-relief organizations, faith-based organizations, victim-assistance/victim-advocacy organizations, emergency medical services, first responders, and public health)
- £ Conduct regular annual or bi-annual crisis team practice drills for crisis response during different times of the day (e.g., lunchtime, recess, different periods)
- £ Identify students and/or staff who may have special needs or may be psychologically vulnerable during crises (e.g., wheelchair bound, visually or hearing-impaired students or staff, students with pre-existing developmental, psychological, and emotional difficulties, students who have experienced other trauma or major loss)
- £ Develop crisis and emergency-response protocols, practices, and materials that are culturally and linguistically appropriate to reflect the diversity of your school family
- £ Create redundant or back-up systems for evacuation, family reunion, and communication with your staff and parents during the crisis and recovery periods
- £ Provide your new staff members and substitute staff with adequate background information and training regarding crisis response
- £ Review annually your school crisis and emergency-response plans, protocols, and practices with community partners, including your school's response and lessons learned from past crises
- £ Conduct staff development on selected topics (e.g., impact of violence and traumatic events on children, adults, and the school climate; early warning signs and risk behaviors associated with traumatic stress; psychological first aid; evidence-based interventions; immediate and long-term recovery; suicide prevention and threat assessment; and vicarious trauma/effects of cumulative stress)

## **RESPONSE**

### *Are You Ready?*

- £ Assess the level of student and staff exposure to violence and identify those most at risk for emotional distress or problems requiring support and assistance
- £ Activate resources for the immediate, concrete needs of the students, families, and staff
- £ Identify the auditory, visual, and/or other sensory cues that serve as traumatic reminders of the event and monitor the range of trauma-related behaviors among students and staff
- £ Implement a program of support and provide psychological educational materials to students, staff and parents to help with reactivity to reminders
- £ Develop media messages during a crisis to disseminate trauma-related information and ways that parents can support the recovery of their children
- £ Provide regular information updates and maintain open communication with teachers, other staff, and parents. Work with teachers to provide developmentally appropriate information to students. Monitor rumors and maintain timely, accurate information
- £ Develop a system to identify and follow psychologically vulnerable students and staff during the recovery period

## **RECOVERY**

### *Addressing Long-Term Needs*

- £ Identify students and staff who may need long-term mental health support or intervention and develop the school and community resources to provide these services
- £ Monitor the effects of cumulative stress on caregivers such as office staff, teachers, aides, and crisis team members
- £ Provide information on how to cope with cumulative stress and modify work roles/ responsibilities or add volunteer or support staff as needed
- £ Make educational materials available to parents and staff on topics such as common symptoms and constructive ways to cope with stress
- £ Develop short-term modifications of school curriculum as students and staff are recovering
- £ Establish working relationship with Employee Assistance Programs
- £ Consider offering school-based mental health services provided by community, university, or public/non-profit mental health agencies after large-scale events and identify funding to support those services (e.g., Project SERV)
- £ Follow up with student referrals made to community agencies
- £ Note secondary adversities, such as subsequent losses and traumas, (e.g., parental loss of employment, separation, divorce, death, suicide or suicide attempt, loss of residence)
- £ Plan a response for the anniversary period several months in advance, including a needs assessment to identify students at continued risk



The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and its nationwide network of partners is dedicated to raising the standard of care and improving access to services for traumatized children, their families, and communities throughout the United States. The NCTSN is supported by a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

**[www.NCTSNet.org](http://www.NCTSNet.org)**