



By The Book

RISK MANAGEMENT INFORMATION FOR
PRIVATE AND CHARTER SCHOOLS FROM THE HARTFORD

This is the second of a two-part newsletter addressing the issue of violence in schools.

Planning Can Help Keep Your School Safe from Violence

The potential for violence in our private and charter schools is more prevalent today than ever before. As a private or charter school administrator, you can take measures to lower the risk in your school. Developing a school security plan before violence occurs is an important step in preparedness. An effective plan incorporates several parts: implementing security controls; training staff to recognize and address warning signs; and developing violence prevention and response plans.

Implementing Security Controls

By employing the following security controls, you can limit access to your school building(s) by potentially violent individuals.

- *Control access.* Ensure there is only one unlocked entrance door to the building, usually the main entrance. Keep other doors locked, and post signs in the parking lot, on the grounds and in the building to direct visitors to the school's main office. Remember, though, that door locks must allow evacuation of the building in an emergency. Consider installing "panic" hardware that allows teachers and students to quickly open doors from inside the building in an emergency.
- *Require visitor sign-in and escort.* Require visitors to sign a log when entering and exiting the building. Provide visitors with some means of identification (for example, a badge, tag, etc.). Escort visitors to and from their destinations, and do not allow visitors to roam the building unescorted. Review the log at the end of each day.
- *Challenge strangers.* Staff members — and students — should challenge strangers they notice on the premises. This can be done politely, by asking if the staff member or student can be of assistance, and directing all visitors to the school's main office. Staff and students should report all strangers who will not offer a plausible reason for being in the school to the administration manager or security personnel.
- *Install an alarm system.* Be sure the school has a good central station security alarm in addition to fire and sprinkler alarms. The security alarm should have full perimeter protection, as well as interior motion detection. Consider silent "panic" alarms

for offices or remote areas. A qualified alarm company, local law enforcement, or the 911 emergency system may monitor alarms.

- *Use metal detectors.* Some schools have installed metal detectors or x-ray units through which students must pass every day. Others use hand-held metal detectors at random. Each school administration must decide if this precaution is necessary based on its individual circumstances and philosophy.
- *Employ on-site security staff.* A privately contracted security staff can keep watch during school hours or part time. The local police department can provide different levels of security from periodic patrols of the school grounds during the day and night, to part-time officers on the premises, or full-time officers assigned to the school. Police or security personnel in schools must be properly trained to handle this unique assignment. Consider requiring training in school psychology, conflict resolution, state and federal law concerning schools and child abuse or neglect, and recognition of the warning signs for violence.

Training to Recognize and Respond to Warning Signs

Training staff to recognize and deal with early and imminent warning signs is a critical component of school safety planning. As part of their training, staff should learn to recognize the early warning signs and to employ effective intervention strategies *before* behaviors turn into violent incidents. Adopting approaches based on proven strategies is highly recommended. At a minimum, an effective written school security plan:

- Describes the early warning signs of potentially violent behavior and procedures for identifying children who exhibit these signs.

- Describes effective prevention practices the school community has undertaken to respond to all children and to enhance the effectiveness of interventions.
- Describes intervention strategies the school community can use to help troubled children. These strategies include early interventions for students who are at risk of behavioral problems and more intensive, individualized interventions and resources for students who have severe behavioral problems or mental health needs.
- Includes strategies for immediate responses to imminent warning signs and violent behavior, as well as a contingency plan to be used in the aftermath of a tragedy. The plan must be consistent with federal, state and local laws and have the support of parents and the board of directors. It must include provisions for good community communications, training, and monitoring and assessment of the violence prevention efforts.

Establishing a Prevention and Response Team

A comprehensive plan also incorporates the development of a core prevention and response team whose names are included in the written security plan. Team members should include:

- Building administrator
- General and special education teachers
- Parents
- Pupil support services representative such as the school psychologist, social worker, or counselor.

This team may also include alumni, community leaders, law enforcement personnel, attorneys and judges, clergy and media representatives.

Creating a Crisis Response Plan

It is important to respond appropriately during *and* after a crisis to ensure the safety of the school community. The following checklist outlines key components of a school's crisis response plan:

During a Crisis:

Some situations such as the presence of weapons, bomb threats or explosions, fights, natural disasters, accidents, and suicides, call for immediate, planned action. To address them, the crisis response segment of the plan should include contingency provisions such as:

- Evacuation and other procedures* to protect students and staff from harm. It is critical that schools identify safe areas where students and staff can go in a crisis. It is also important that schools conduct evacuation drills to ensure that they can clear the premises in an orderly manner.
- An effective, foolproof communication system* that designates roles and responsibilities to specific people to prevent confusion.
- A process for securing immediate external support* from law enforcement officials and other appropriate community agencies.

After a Crisis:

It's helpful for the crisis team to understand how people react to stress and how different individuals might respond to injury, death and loss. School communities that have experienced tragedy have included provisions in their response plans to:



- Help parents understand children's reaction to violence.* In the aftermath of tragedy, children may experience unrealistic fears of the future, have difficulty sleeping, become physically ill, and be easily distracted. Teachers and administrators should work to help parents understand and address their children's reaction to the incident.
- Help teachers and other staff deal with their reactions to the crisis.* Debriefing and grief counseling are just as important for adults as they are for students.
- Help students and faculty adjust after the crisis.* Provide both short-term and long-term mental health counseling following a crisis.
- Help victims and their families re-enter the school environment.* Often, classmates and/or students of those injured in violent incidents need guidance on how to handle their return to school. The school staff needs to be prepared to work with students, parents, and each other to design a plan that makes it easier for victims and their classmates to adjust.
- Help students and teachers address the return of a previously removed student to the school community.* Whether the student is returning from a juvenile detention facility or a mental health facility, it is necessary to coordinate with the staff from that facility to make the transition as smooth as possible.

Conclusion

There are effective ways to lower the risk of violence in your school. Developing and implementing security protocols, training staff to recognize and deal with early and imminent warning signs and developing prevention and response plans can help your school become better prepared and make it a safer place for children and teachers.

This newsletter provides only general information. It is not a complete resource for preventing or addressing violence in schools. For more detailed information, consult *Early Warning, Timely Response, A Guide to Safe Schools*, produced by the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice of the American Institutes for Research.*

***Reference:** *Early Warning, Timely Response, A Guide to Safe Schools*. Produced by the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice of the American Institutes for Research in collaboration with the National Association of School Psychologists, under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs (grant #H237T60005).

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