

## CRISIS MANAGEMENT

### DESCRIPTION

Crisis management includes having protocols and procedures in place to manage, intervene, and follow-up with crises directly related to a student (e.g., suicidal ideation, psychosis, abuse/neglect) as well as those that affect the entire school (e.g., school violence, fire).

### RATIONALE

School mental health providers are often called upon to intervene in a wide array of crises to stabilize a situation and protect student safety. Clear protocols and adequate supervision are necessary to ensure that school mental health staff are effective in intervening in a crisis situation and operate in a professional manner.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

*The following recommendations offer schools, stakeholders, and school mental health providers guidelines on establishing crisis protocols and training on both individual and school-wide crisis.*

#### Protocols

1. Participate in a crisis team for student or school-wide crises, either coordinated through the school or a community agency. Tasks for the Crisis Team can include:
  - developing a policies and procedures manual for crisis situations
  - providing supervision, support, and consultation during a crisis
  - handling crisis situations directly
  - handling debriefing sessions after the crisis has terminated
  - develop and/or update resources (e.g., safety kit that includes suicide contacts, hotline numbers, and outlines of safety plans)
2. Post all clearly outlined policies and safety procedures in an accessible space for all school mental health staff.
3. Inform students of exceptions to [confidentiality](#) during intake or entry into services
4. Utilize validated suicide assessments, violence, and abuse risk assessments to identify level of risk.
5. Become familiar with local policies and legislation regarding crisis management.
6. Establish supervision and documentation guidelines for clinicians who have students in crisis.

#### Training

Ensure that school mental health staff participates in relevant and regular training in crisis management. Training topics may include:

1. Crisis Prevention
  - A crisis event can occur at anytime. A crisis isn't necessarily a life changing event; an uncontrollable student in the classroom may be considered a "crisis" situation. With proper training, resources, and skills, crisis events can be handled effectively and efficiently.
  - A sudden change in the student's surrounding environment may cause mental and emotional distress in a student. A student who lacks support, resources, and/or positive coping skills may resort to substance abuse, suicide, violence, or other extreme forms of behavior.

2. Mobilizing Support

- Help the student to express emotions and deal with their emotional reactions.
- Encourage students to deal with the facts of the event; give accurate information and explanations about what happened and what to expect. Do not give unrealistic or false information.
- Some students may benefit from talking about their experience while others are not able to express their frustrations and thoughts verbally. Keep in mind that because the child is not talking about the event does not mean he/she does not need to express himself/herself and receive guidance and support.
- Ensure that the student has proper support from peers, family, and staff.
- Be sure that students and families are connected to necessary support and resources.
- Talk to the mental health agencies in the community and any other support staff that may be able to provide assistance.

3. Managing the Situation

A student in crisis can cause emotional reactions from other students. In order to prevent an unmanageable situation,

- Remain calm, direct, authoritative, nurturing, and problem-solving oriented.
- Address the distressed student(s).
- Identify why the student is upset. If this is not possible, find someone who is able to do so.
- State what can and will be done.
- Convey a sense of hope and positive expectation (e.g., crises change things, but there are ways to deal with the impact).

4. Following Up

- Check on progress of the student.
- Reinforce desired behaviors of the student.
- Provide outlets for the student who may be hesitant to verbalize their feelings (e.g., involving the student in clubs, sports, mentoring programs, writing and drawing activities).
- Determine whether the student needs additional support.
- Create a feedback loop between yourself, caregivers and other school mental health providers to reassess the student's symptoms.

**Individual Crisis**

1. Suicidal and Psychotic Behavior

- Establish a policy and protocols for intervening with students who display psychotic symptoms or suicidal behavior. Policies and protocols should address:
  - a) Notifying parents
  - b) Assessing risk in the student
  - c) Referral of student to appropriate health agency
  - d) Transport of student
  - e) Safety planning
  - f) Consultation
  - g) Notifying the school
- Create a clear document distinguishing the role and function of the school mental health provider and the school staff in responding to a suicidal or psychotic student.
- Provide adequate training to school mental health staff in order to assess risk level in students presenting with symptoms of psychosis or suicidal ideation.

## MHPET Dimension 1: OPERATIONS/Indicator 4

- Train school mental health staff in reintegrating students back into school following hospitalization.

### 2. Child Abuse and Neglect

**All 50 states and D.C. have their own laws regulations, and a mandated system response for child physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional harm and neglect.**

- Report all suspected cases of parental abuse or neglect to the Child Protective Services agency, according to the state statute. Utilize discretion whether to inform parents of the report, depending on circumstances of the case. In some cases, risk to the student may increase following the disclosure of a report, depending on type of risk, family culture, and unique circumstances of the case. Consult with a supervisor in cases where the decision is unclear.
- Establish a policy consistent with the state's legal mandates and the school's procedures regarding the handling of suspected abuse or neglect. An example of such a policy may include the following:
  - a) The school mental health provider with cause for suspicion should file a report immediately to Protective Services by phone. It is the responsibility of the social service agency to investigate reported incidents.
  - b) Within 24 hours, the reporting person should contact Protective Services and request an update on the status of the report. This must be documented in the student's record.
  - c) The reporting person must file a written report within a stated time frame, as required by state law. A copy of this report should be placed in the student's record.
  - d) School mental health providers will be responsible for documenting all contact with Protective Services, family members, and others related to the report.
  - e) When a school mental health provider is uncertain on whether to report, consultation and supervision is recommended.
  - f) School mental health providers will collaborate with other involved agencies in the development of a follow-up plan, within the limits of state regulations/law.

### **School-wide Crisis**

#### 1. Focus on restoring equilibrium

- Be calm, direct, informative, authoritative, nurturing, and problem-solving oriented.
- Counter denial, by encouraging students to deal with facts of the event; give accurate information and explanations of what happened and what to expect -- never give unrealistic or false assurances.
- Talk with students about their emotional reactions and encourage them to deal with such reactions as another facet of countering denial and other defenses that interfere with restoring equilibrium.
- Convey a sense hope and positive expectation -- that while crises change things, there are ways to deal with the impact.

#### 2. Support student's sense of agency

- Plan with the student for realistic, and appropriate actions they will pursue when they leave you.
- Build on coping strategies the student has displayed.
- If feasible, involve the student in assisting with efforts to restore equilibrium.

#### 3. Connect the student with immediate social support

- Peers, other staff, and family can provide immediate support, guidance, and other forms of immediate assistance.

## MHPET Dimension 1: OPERATIONS/Indicator 4

### 4. Take care of the caretakers

- Be certain that support systems are in place for staff in general.
- Be certain that support (debriefing) systems are in place for all crisis response personnel.

### 5. Provide for aftermath interventions

- Be certain that individuals needing follow-up assistance receive it.

## REFERENCES

Center for School Mental Health Assistance (2002). *Crisis Intervention: a guide for school based clinicians*. Retrieved from [http://csmh.umaryland.edu/resources.html/resource\\_packets/download\\_files/crisis\\_intervention\\_2002.pdf](http://csmh.umaryland.edu/resources.html/resource_packets/download_files/crisis_intervention_2002.pdf)

National Assembly on School-Based Health Care (2008). NASBHC Operations Tool Kit: Administration: policies and procedures [CD-ROM], A1.01 child abuse and neglect.

The University of Maryland's Center for School Mental Health (2008). *School Mental Health Quality Assessment Questionnaire (SMHQAQ) Quality Indicator Power points, Indicator 10*. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/Resources/Clin/QAIRsrc/QAQP>.

## RESOURCES

[http://csmh.umaryland.edu/resources.html/resource\\_packets/download\\_files/crisis\\_intervention\\_2002.pdf](http://csmh.umaryland.edu/resources.html/resource_packets/download_files/crisis_intervention_2002.pdf)

Center for School Mental Health (CSMH)'s resource packet on crisis intervention related to school mental health

[http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/state](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/state)

Information on state specific reporting for abuse and neglect

<http://www.safetyzone.org/index.html>

The Safety Zone is a clearinghouse for information and material related to school safety.

<http://www.nasponline.org/resources/prevention/resources.aspx>

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)'s prevention resources on bullying, children's mental health, school safety, violence, and school crises

[http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/state](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/state)

The State Statutes searchable online database of state statutes on child welfare