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In Crisis Situations You Must Have a Plan

Crisis can arise anywhere and at any time. This is what makes them so frightening to millions of people. There is a degree of unpredictability about crises that goes against the comfort all of us find in having things happen according to our plan or our schedule. This lack of predictability, often more than the event itself, is what distinguishes a crisis situation from what may otherwise simply be an unpleasant one. This, and the fact, that in many situations we define as crises, things take place that have no business happening in safe places like our schools.

As the heads of their schools, administrators must have plans for dealing with these crisis situations. They must be prepared to respond to the variety of stakeholders whose lives are affected by crises at school. A crisis at a school, even more so than a crisis at home, requires special attention and specialized communication efforts. What is meant by the term crisis situation? Does it refer only to tragic occurrences, such as that of Columbine High School in 1999?

A crisis may include criminal acts or serious threats of criminal acts such as shootings, knifings, bombings, bomb threats, arson, kidnapping, or rape. A crisis situation may instead involve natural disasters such as blizzards, tornadoes, hurricanes, or floods. Finally, the term crisis situation can be used to refer to employee problems like strikes, student disturbances, or other situations like power outages and water contamination that can lead to the rapid shutdown of the school or school system. Although all of these things are crises, they are not all created equal. They share one common element, however. The only way to successfully deal with these crisis situations is to have a plan in place before the situation arises.

The Importance of Planning

Every school district and every school within every school district must have a plan for responding to crisis situations. The key word is "every." If you had an opportunity to interview the administrators at any of the schools across this country that have experienced a crisis within the past decade, you would find a unanimous claim that the administrators never expected such

crises to happen at their school. None of us expect a crisis to occur in our school. Thankfully, this expectation is correct, as most readers of this text will probably not experience a major crisis while they are in charge of a school. But rather than playing the odds and assuming that such tragedies as those experienced at other schools will never happen at ours, all educators must be prepared to respond efficiently and effectively to crisis situations. The responsibility is the greatest with school administrators.

An essential consideration in designing a crisis management plan is that the plan be highly structured. Lack of structure could lead an otherwise manageable crisis situation to become chaotic. Whenever the public views our efforts as loose and chaotic, then we run a great risk of losing the credibility we have worked so hard to achieve. Worse yet, a loosely managed crisis could lead to harm to students, teachers, or staff. Although a structured plan cannot hope to address each and every conceivable specific crisis that can develop, the structure of the plan should be such that it accounts for nearly every type of problem. Some flexibility and adaptations will always be necessary, but a structured crisis management plan specifies the who, what, where, when, why, and how to the greatest extent possible. Exhibit 12-1 illustrates critical components of any crisis management plan. Addressing these components virtually assures that the crisis management plan will be a structured one.

All of these components are general enough to be applied to virtually all crisis situations that could arise in schools. However, the components are also specific enough to create a structured plan that will greatly assist the school staff in dealing with the situations in an effective and efficient manner. Let's examine each component separately to gain a better understanding of how each one is best understood and implemented.

Exhibit 12-1 Designing a Crisis Management Plan

A comprehensive plan should do the following:

1. Select individuals to serve on crisis response and aftercare teams.
2. Establish a headquarters for the crisis response and aftercare teams.
3. Select an individual to be the official spokesperson during a crisis.
4. Establish a procedure for activating community support services.
5. Establish a procedure for developing channels of communication.
6. Establish a procedure for controlling rumors.
7. Establish a procedure for assessing the crisis management system.
8. Establish a procedure for bringing closure to the crisis.

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- 1. Select individuals to serve on crisis response and aftercare teams.**

Although potentially all members of the school community are affected by a crisis situation, it is both impractical and illogical for each person to play a role in responding to the crisis. That, more than anything else, will likely lead to chaos. Instead, the school administrator should select members for the crisis response and aftercare teams based on his/her knowledge of each person's strengths. Although school counselors and social workers may make excellent members of the aftercare team, a team that requires counseling and human relations skills, there are likely additional members of the school community with some of those skills. Likewise, although the school secretary may be a logical person to assign to the crisis response team, as making telephone contacts and announcements are skills necessary for this team, there are doubtless other members of the school community who would be excellent choices to carry out these duties as well.

It is important that individuals selected for these teams are aware and approve of their selection. Above all else, crisis response and aftercare teams need individuals with a desire to serve on them and an understanding of their importance. Finally, and likely obvious to most, individuals selected for these teams ought to be people who are regularly in the school, or at least, have very quick access to the school. A half-time teacher, living some 30 miles from the campus, is not a good choice for this particular assignment.

- 2. Establish a headquarters for the crisis response and aftercare teams.**

Chaos is probable if the crisis response or aftercare teams have no place to go in a crisis situation. In situations like the Columbine incident, those who are on the response and aftercare teams need a place to do their work. There must be a specific room in the building where the team meets, formulates strategy, responds to the press, and makes decisions. This must be decided upon before the crisis takes place. It would be very damaging to a school's public image, not to mention their ability to assure safety during a crisis, if members of these teams were running around bumping into each other as they searched for a place to meet. Whether it is the school media center, the cafeteria, the teachers' lounge, or someplace else, the crisis response and aftercare teams must have an established place to meet. They are also wise to have a backup place in the event that access to their normal meeting place is blocked.

- 3. Select an individual to be the official spokesperson during a crisis.**

Although a high-ranking school administrator is typically chosen for this role, this does not necessarily have to be so. I have known many administrators who lacked the calmness and rationality to act as spokesperson during times of crisis. This did not make them bad administrators. It did, however, make them lousy spokespersons during a crisis

situation. The person selected for this role must understand much of what was explained in Chapter 8. They must be aware of their nonverbal communication idiosyncrasies, they must have a pleasant demeanor, and they must be able to respond calmly, rationally, and assuredly during emergency situations.

Some larger school districts have hired public relations personnel to deal with issues such as these. If your school does not have access to such personnel, then it is critical that a person be selected who has the appropriate qualities. As always, this person must agree to the assignment and must understand the significance of the role he or she is agreeing to.

4. Establish a procedure for activating community support services.

The more serious the crisis, the more important it will be that community support services are made available to your school family. In virtually all of the school tragedies experienced during the last decade, community support services have played a major role in assisting students with issues such as grief management, guilt, depression, fear, or even suicidal feelings. It is not only the students who benefit from these services, though. School staff members and parents often have tremendous difficulty coping with tragic events taking place in schools that they assumed were too safe for such things to happen.

As is the case with each of these components, lack of planning can really be as devastating as the crisis situation itself. Therefore, it is imperative that the plan specifies who will contact community support services, how they will be contacted, and when the contact will take place. Failure to address these concerns will increase the risk that community support services will be lost as an oversight.

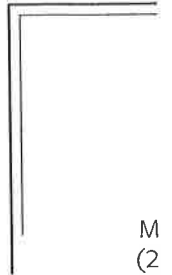
It is further important that the list of support services and their contact information is kept in a secure and reliable place. The individual in charge of this list must regularly update it to ensure that contact information is as accurate as it possibly can be.

5. Establish a procedure for developing channels of communication.

Who contacts the superintendent and the school board? Are they contacted immediately? Who contacts police and other emergency personnel? Are the press responded to as they arrive, or are press conferences held? If there are press conferences, where are they held? How are parents notified? Who notifies them? Who tells the staff? Are students informed of the crisis in a large assembly, or is it handled individually in classrooms?

These are just some of the questions that point to the significance of developing channels for communication. It is so easy during a crisis to overlook informing somebody who really ought not be overlooked. It is equally easy to incorrectly inform individuals or to release information out of sequence or to the wrong party. Establishing channels of communication ahead of time avoids these problems. In many schools, telephone

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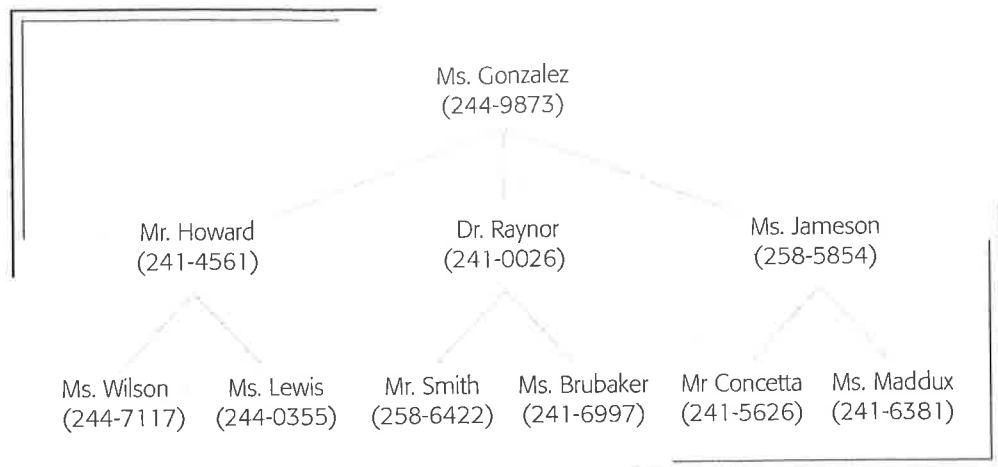
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Exhibit 12-2 Telephone Tree



Telephone trees have been established for this very purpose. Although they tend to be more prevalent in areas that may be affected by severe weather closing school unexpectedly, telephone trees are a very traditional, simple way to keep people informed. Exhibit 12-2 is an example.

Obviously, not all of the questions above are appropriate in all crisis situations. For example, if a gunman opens fire in a crowded cafeteria, all students are likely to know about it quickly. If a staff member is killed in an accident on the way to school, however, then the issue of informing students becomes a bit more delicate.

6. Establish a procedure for controlling rumors.

Whenever a crisis develops in a community as large and as diverse as a school, there is always a risk of rumors being developed and disseminated. As the facts of a crisis may be delicate enough to deal with, there is no need to be forced to deal with rumors as well. Therefore, there must be a plan for keeping rumors controlled.

Part of this plan should involve the assurance of honest communication. People often start rumors, not out of cruelty, but because of a lack of correct information. Therefore, keeping people appropriately informed will help squelch some rumors from circulating. The school administrator should take the lead in requiring all staff to put an end to rumors early on. Students who may be having difficulty dealing with the crisis situation may spread rumors as a defense mechanism or as a way of suppressing the truth that they do not understand how to deal with. Staff members need to be sensitive to these possible defense mechanisms and should seek out the assistance of counselors, social workers, or community service agencies when dealing with these students.

7. Establish a procedure for assessing the crisis management plan.

As is the case with virtually all that we do in education, there must be methods in place for assessing our crisis management plan. This includes an assessment of the personnel in key roles and the comprehensiveness of the plan itself. As a crisis management plan is designed, there is no real concrete way for determining the extent to which it has been appropriately created. This lack of a concrete method is why school leaders must seize the opportunity for evaluating the plan's effectiveness if misfortune strikes and a crisis does occur.

In assessing the system, it is important that administrators ask the difficult questions. Were people properly informed? Did our plan have the necessary structure? Were grieving school community members appropriately assisted? Were key personnel able to perform their duties as we had imagined they would? Did we use space appropriately? These are just a sample of the questions that ought to be a part of your assessment system. A good piece of advice is to develop assessment questions before the plan must be implemented. This is no different than the effective teacher who often develops assessment tools before he/she completes the teaching of an instructional unit.

8. Establish a procedure for bringing closure to the crisis.

Among the greatest lessons school administrators have learned from school tragedies that have taken place before is this one. Just as in all other personal tragedies human beings may endure, closure must ultimately be brought if healing is to successfully occur. Although this does not mean that the school administrator arbitrarily chooses a date at which he/she declares the crisis and its aftermath to have ended, it does mean that at some point the school must ceremoniously end the crisis. It is important to remember that different people with differing relationships to the crisis victims will heal at dramatically different rates. School administrators must be sensitive to this and should ensure that services are available for as long as members of the school community need them.

However, in respect to these individual needs, the school administrator must ensure that the crisis is brought to closure for the entire school community. This may mean that a memorial service is held and school is cancelled for a period of time. It may mean that a monument of some sort is erected in memory of victims. It may mean, in the case of a less tragic crisis, little more than a newsletter summing up how things have been handled. The school administrator must work with the crisis management team to develop a plan for bringing closure to the crisis in a way that respects individual needs, honors what people endured during and after the crisis, but reminds everybody involved that the purpose of schooling must endure.

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Responding to Crisis

What follows is the description of how a fictitious school could respond to a potential crisis. It uses the terminology “code red,” a common term in schools throughout the U.S. today:

A Code Red/Lockdown Alert is sounded if there is a suspected armed intruder or active shooter on campus or in the neighborhood. The Code Red response is a partnership with local law enforcement and was developed after the shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado. Code Red is defined as an alert status indicating imminent danger exists to all staff and students. During a Code Red, staff and students must remain within their classroom or within a secured area. If students are in the hallways, they must quickly move to the nearest classroom or to a secure area, remain quiet and follow staff instructions. When a school responds with emergency measures its sole priority is to keep all students and staff safe. Oftentimes, in cases of potentially serious school safety threats, students and staff remain in the building under a lockdown, even after the school day has ended. Although these measures are often frustrating for parents who want to remove their children from the school during a threat, all parents need to appreciate that the school has to protect itself from all potential incoming individuals—even if the incoming individuals are parents.

An Opportunity for Staff Development

The steps listed above will never be fully implemented or utilized if they are placed in a staff handbook and left on a shelf to gather dust. Because schools are such optimistic, energized environments, it is very easy to forget about the negativity of crisis situations. Doing so increases the risk that the school community will be unprepared if a crisis does affect the school.

Although it is illogical to live in fear of a potential crisis, particularly in an age when schools have taken great measures to improve the safety of all students, it is more illogical to hide our heads in the sand and insist that a crisis will never happen to us. Remember, the school communities that have experienced some of the worst American school tragedies strongly believed that such events could never happen in their schools.

Proactive school administrators use staff development opportunities to promote, practice, and perfect their crisis management plans. This is an outstanding use of these non-student days that helps ensure that the school community is prepared. In many school communities, these staff development days include assistance from local police and emergency personnel. These individuals, highly skilled and trained at crisis response, make excellent members of a school's crisis planning team. If you ask them, you will more than likely discover that they are happy to provide community service and assist you in designing meaningful staff development around the issues of school safety and crisis management.

In the School Town of Munster, located in Munster, Indiana, for example, Superintendent William J. Pfister held an administrative retreat devoted to crisis management. Munster, a nice, well-to-do, upper middle-class community, is not a place that one may expect a school crisis to occur. However, recognizing the need for all communities to be prepared, Superintendent Pfister invited key members of the Munster Police Department to the administrative retreat to assist administrators in understanding appropriate responses to potential crises. The police officers posed real-life scenarios to the administrators and assisted them in assessing their readiness to respond.

Opportunities such as this are excellent first steps. Building level administrators should then go to the next step, which includes designing a plan with the entire staff's involvement, rehearsing it, and then, most significantly, regularly revisiting it to keep it fresh in everybody's mind. Again, although it is not possible to be prepared for every possible crisis situation that may occur, it is probable that most schools could become more prepared than they currently are.

It is very important that school leaders take the potential for crises seriously while not becoming stifled in fear by the mere thought of a crisis developing. This goal, too, can be assisted through staff development. Although it is desirable to have a school community that is cognizant of the dangers and warning signs of potential crises, it is critical that the school community understand how rare crises, from the highly tragic ones to simple mechanical problems, really are. School leaders can design staff development opportunities that share statistical data and trend analyses about youth violence and domestic issues in order to increase awareness. It is through staff development such as this that factual information can be shared and discussed. Members of the school community can be made aware of two dichotomous facts: whereas overall youth violence increased at the end of the last millennium, school violence decreased. Consider these statistics: the National School Safety Center reported a decline in the number of killings on school campuses. They reported 11 deaths in 2009–2010, down from 33 in 1999–2000. There have also been reports of fewer fights on campuses despite the fact that youth involvement in violent behavior outside of school is reported by many to be on the rise.

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Legal issues regarding school safety, crisis response, and crisis prevention make for additionally wise staff development topics. Too often, issues of legal consequence are not shared with school staffs. This creates an environment of uncertainty, as individuals are not sure how to set limits or what behavior will be permissible by law. Many educators would be astonished to know what our courts have recently been deciding regarding issues of school safety. For example, a 1998 court case starkly illustrates a school's duty to maintain a safe environment for students. After a boy was attacked and stabbed in his classroom, his mother brought an action against the school, alleging that nothing had been done to implement safeguards at the school, despite previous acts of violence that had occurred on campus. The court agreed with the boy's mother and found that the school district was negligent for not adopting or implementing security policies, procedures, or safeguards (*Brum v. Town of Dartmouth and others*, 1998). This example drives home the point that beyond the obvious ethical imperative, schools face a legal imperative to improve school safety where it appears to be lacking. Although not all acts of violence constitute school crises, they are often indicative that the school may not be as prepared as it ought to be for responding to a crisis situation.

Communicating During a Crisis

Two of the most important considerations when schools are faced with a crisis are deciding who to inform and how to inform them. Not only must these points be addressed in a school's crisis management plan, but they also must be points that have close attention paid to them to ensure that damage above and beyond the crisis does not occur. Failing to consider carefully how and when to inform individuals during a crisis can be a difficult malady to survive.

Again, there are some crisis situations that are so severe that everybody in the school community becomes instantly aware. Still others may occur without the knowledge of too many people. A mechanical problem that requires heating or cooling to be shut down and a student suicide occurring at home are two examples. In situations like these, the school administrator is relied on to understand all the intricacies of effective communication. Exhibit 12-3 illustrates important considerations for informing the school staff during a crisis situation. Note the importance of informing staff members first and of assessing individual staff members' readiness for communicating with students regarding the crisis. This assessment is made much easier by meeting with staff face to face if at all possible.

When meeting face to face with all staff members is not a possibility, then the administrator must still avoid using the intercom at all costs. Students should never find out about a school crisis of any magnitude through such an impersonal means.

Exhibit 12-3 Informing Staff of Crisis Situations

- Faculty and staff must be informed first so they have time to prepare.
- Never use the intercom to relay critical information.
- Try meeting with all faculty—not just representatives.
- Control rumors.
- Remind faculty of their responsibilities.
- Note which staff members are not capable of working with students due to their own emotional condition.

Exhibit 12-4 deals with considerations for informing students of a crisis. Notice here the increased focus on the emotional well being of the students. Although different crisis situations will likely illicit different responses from students, there is always the likelihood that students will find the information more difficult to deal with than staff members will. For this reason, staff members are informed first, an assessment is made regarding which staff members are best equipped for communicating with students, and students are informed in as personal a way as possible.

Depending on the severity of the crisis, some students may need assistance from individuals with counseling expertise. School administrators need to recognize this and must have these individuals on alert should their services be needed. This is why determining how contacts with community service personnel are made is an integral part of the crisis management plan.

Exhibit 12-4 Informing Students of Crisis Situations

- Information should be transmitted in a private area.
- Students should receive information from somebody they trust and respect.
- Unnecessary details should be avoided.
- The person informing students should be prepared for a variety of reactions.
- The students should not be alone after being informed.
- Some students need expressions of sympathy.
- Silence is perfectly normal, but students should know that it's appropriate to express emotions if they need to.

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Media Relations in Crisis Situations

Chapter 7 focused on effective methods for dealing with the media. As mentioned there, some special skills are needed for working with the media during crisis situations. A clear-minded, rational communicator is needed if the school wishes to respond appropriately and provide the media with pertinent facts that will assist the community in understanding what has transpired. Although it is of paramount importance that the individual who communicates with the media during crisis situations embodies the above qualities, everything will be made easier if a foundation, based on the skills and techniques from Chapter 7, has first been established. In other words, as part of a crisis readiness system, the wise school leader establishes a mutually respectful relationship with the media from the very beginning.

If a crisis suddenly hits a school, as crises generally do, the media may be on the scene in a matter of minutes. This gives the school leader and the crisis management team precious little time to prepare. By keeping the suggestions from Exhibit 12-4 in mind, the individual from the school community who is charged with working with the media will find the task to be far less daunting.

Some of these suggestions, though certainly worth repeating, have been discussed at length earlier in this text. However, there are a few important suggestions from Exhibit 12-5 that warrant deeper explanation.

- **Provide facts about the school and the crisis.**

It is wise for the person charged with media relations to always have on hand a fact sheet about the school. Although nothing overly elaborate, this fact sheet ought to contain important demographic information such as population numbers, male/female ratio, and grade configurations. The fact sheet also may include some recent positive accomplishments enjoyed by the school. Not only do reporters often need this information, but they also need facts about the crisis being experienced. In initially speaking with reporters, it is unwise to speculate. Giving facts about the school and the crisis will ensure the most accurate media coverage.

- **Log all information released to the public.**

In a time of crisis, it is so easy to forget what you have said and whom you have said it to. Therefore, it is wise to always log all of the information released to the public in these situations. This will assist the school in checking on the accuracy of information once it appears in print or after it has been broadcast. It will also prevent the school personnel from being redundant.

- **Release names of victims only after the next of kin have been notified.**

In addition to the obvious public relations nightmare created by having a victim's next of kin find out about their loss through media

Exhibit 12-5 Dealing with the Media in Crisis Situations

- Develop working relationships with reporters.
- Focus on the question and the feedback from reporters.
- Provide facts about the school and the crisis.
- Log all information released to the public.
- Release names of victims only after the next of kin have been notified.
- Be aware of your nonverbal communication. Be sure not to send the wrong message.
- Be calm, even when pressed by reporters.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."
- Tell the truth. Honesty is essential.
- Be aware of photographers on campus. You have every right to control photographers on your property.
- Be brief.
- Don't allow yourself to be bullied or intimidated.
- Control the length of the interview by informing reporters at the beginning how long the interview will last.
- Repeat key messages as often as possible and stay focused on those messages.

outlets, such an error is a potential legal nightmare for the entire school system. Schools hold a tremendous amount of sensitive personal material about their students and staff. The sensitivity of information is magnified during a crisis situation. Whoever has the task of communicating with the media during crisis situations must remain cognizant of the importance of notifying a victim's next of kin first. There are no exceptions.

- **Be aware of photographers on campus. You have every right to control photographers on your property.**

Believing that the media has a right to be on school property because of the public nature of such property is a mistake. As chief executive officers of schools, the administration has the right to limit access to photographers on school property. More than the right, they have an obligation to do so. Most parents would cringe at the thought

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of photographers lurking around their child's school, snapping photographs, and publishing them in the newspaper without the parents' knowledge. This is even truer during a sensitive time like when a crisis has taken place. There is no need to be rude. However, the school administrators must make it clear to media photographers that they are to remain off of the campus until they have been given permission to do otherwise.

- **Repeat key messages as often as possible, and stay focused on those messages.**

It is important that those speaking with the media remember that they are not there only to answer questions. Although this may certainly be one of their main purposes, these individuals also have an obligation to inform the media of facts that may not be addressed by the reporters' questions. When this happens, it is crucial that these points be repeated often enough to guarantee that they will be included in the media's coverage.

For example, if your school has enjoyed unparalleled safety and has been free of virtually all disturbances prior to this crisis, you may want to share this information with reporters. A skilled communicator will know how to weave this fact into almost all of their responses to best ensure that the media representatives have heard the message loudly and clearly.

Dealing with the Aftermath of a Crisis

As mentioned, the way in which schools deal with the aftermath of a crisis situation is a most important aspect of how successful their crisis management plan really is. Even if a school administrator has assembled the best crisis management team, conducted meaningful and lasting staff development around his or her school's plan, and overseen its execution with precision, failure to effectively and sensitively deal with the aftermath of a crisis may be the administrator's lasting legacy. What is meant by the crisis aftermath? How does the school leader sensitively deal with the aftermath while still bringing the crisis to closure? Again, although the specific answers to these questions will vary with individual schools and individual crises, there are some common guidelines that can be generalized to most situations.

Crisis Aftermath

The crisis aftermath refers to that period of time in which individuals really begin dealing with the effects of the crisis. It refers to that time after the proverbial dust has settled and people can pause to reflect upon the situation

they have experienced. Obviously, the aftermath of every crisis is different, and each individual who experiences a crisis also experiences the aftermath in his or her own unique way. Also true is the fact that the time period thought of as the crisis aftermath can vary tremendously. Some crises continue causing individuals grief and despair years after they happened. And yet other crisis situations are successfully dealt with within a matter of days.

There is special training required to assist members of the school community with ways of coping in the aftermath of a crisis. School administrators are not expected to necessarily possess all of these skills. They are expected, however, to recognize the needs people have and to provide assistance in identifying individuals who can meet those needs. Exhibits 12-6 and 12-7 contain brief synopses of crisis situations. Exhibit 12-6 describes a more tragic crisis, whereas Exhibit 12-7 describes a crisis less likely to cause great distress. Although very different from one another, notice that as each crisis ends there is an aftermath that must be dealt with.

These two examples showcase the tremendous diversity in what are termed crisis situations. Both of them have an aftermath that must be dealt with carefully to avoid the creation of another crisis. At the same time, the skills and resources required to deal with the aftermaths could not be more diverse.

The crisis situation described in Exhibit 12-6 is tragic and will unquestionably lead to some grief and emotional turmoil. Even though Dr. Lewis has led the school through a successful resolution of the crisis on day one, the emotional issues that could linger as a result of a teacher's death will present real challenges. Although Dr. Lewis does not single-handedly

Exhibit 12-6 Tragic Crisis Scenario

Many people wondered why Mrs. Thompson wasn't in school. For as long as she worked at Monroe School she had never missed a day. And for her not to call in and notify anybody! Something strange must have happened.

When the police arrived at the school and informed the principal, Dr. Lewis, that Mrs. Thompson had been tragically killed in an automobile accident, Dr. Lewis was shocked. Aside from the instant grief and sadness were Dr. Lewis's concerns about how members of the school community would cope with this tragedy. Executing her school's plan very carefully, Dr. Lewis mobilized the staff to notify stakeholders, assist upset students, and respond to media inquiries. Somehow, they all got through the day. What would tomorrow bring, though?

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Exhibit 12-7 Inconvenient Crisis Scenario

As Jermaine Brown entered the boy's restroom, it was apparent that somebody had performed a prank. Jermaine stepped quickly into 2 inches of standing water. Disgusted, he ran into the hall where he almost bumped into a very upset Lisa Wilkins. "My shoes are ruined," screamed Lisa, as similar cries echoed from many other rooms within Harrison High.

It wasn't long before the school was being evacuated and all of the water had been shut off to Harrison High. The unusual freezing temperatures must have been the culprits of this unexpected pipe bursting disaster. Due to a well-executed plan, all of Harrison's students made it home in as safe and orderly a fashion as possible. The question looming over the heads of the administrators was this: "How would Harrison High School possibly be ready to open at 7:00 a.m. tomorrow morning?"

need the skills and resources to resolve these issues, it is imperative that the school community is provided with people who do have them. For this reason, the formation of an aftercare team remains a vital component of crisis planning. The aftercare team in this particular situation will have a monumental task ahead of itself as it successfully assists all members of the school community in dealing with the issue that will surely arise as a result of their recent tragedy.

The crisis described in Exhibit 12-7, on the other hand, will not require the same type of aftercare response. There will probably not be as many emotional issues surrounding the water damage and subsequent school evacuation as there were in Exhibit 12-6. However, the aftermath of this crisis will need to be handled well, too. Although counseling is likely not a significant need here, the members of the aftercare team still need to utilize sufficient skill to get the school up and running again. Additionally, there will likely be upset students and parents to deal with as a result of both the potential damage of personal property and the difficulty parents had in responding to an unexpected dismissal. Additionally, the aftercare team will need to do whatever possible to assure that future occurrences of this problem are avoided.

The aftermath of any crisis, in short, requires as much skill and planning as the crisis management itself. Although it is not possible to anticipate a crisis aftermath any more than it is possible to anticipate a particular crisis, school leaders must take the initiative to ensure that people are ready to make the necessary response.

Chapter Summary

- Crises can occur any place and at any time.
- Although we can never be truly prepared, it is imperative that every school has a plan for dealing with a crisis situation.
- An essential component of a crisis management plan is that it is highly structured.
- All involved individuals must know what their role is during a crisis situation.
- It is up to the administrator to see to it that the school's crisis management plan is an integral part of the school's ongoing staff development plans.
- In some instances, the aftermath of a crisis can require more care than the actual crisis itself.
- The school administrator must activate all available resources, from the school and the community, to assist students in the aftermath of a crisis.
- The school must have some means by which closure is brought to a crisis.

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

3...2...1...Action!

When she arrived at school and saw the emergency service vehicles all over the parking lot, principal Amy Larkin knew something was terribly wrong. "What's going on here?" she demanded as she bolted from her car. "What are you all doing here, and why haven't I been notified?"

After being told of the tragedy by the chief of police, Dr. Larkin stood in the doorway, a thousand thoughts and emotions streaming forward at once. What could have prompted Frank to take his own life? Why hadn't she noticed any signs before? He was the jolliest, most upbeat custodian she had ever worked with. What would happen to his poor family?

Suddenly she was jolted back into consciousness by one thought—the students! They would be arriving in about 18 minutes. How would she inform them? What if the police were still here? What would the parents think when they dropped the children off for school? Should she call the Superintendent?

With that thought, Superintendent Fleischmann arrived in his car. Behind him was a white van with a sign on the side that read *Channel 2 Action News*.

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Questions for Analysis

1. Does this school already have a crisis management plan?
2. What should Amy Larkin do first?
3. What are some key steps that need to be taken within the next 20 minutes?
4. After surviving this day, what are some problems Amy Larkin can anticipate tomorrow?
5. What future steps should be taken to ensure that Amy Larkin does not have a day that's as challenging as today promises to be?

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