SAFE&CONNECTED SCHOOLS

Navigating Crisis Together:

Mental & Behavioral Health Recovery Planning for School Communities

Acknowledgments

Our school communities continue to grapple with significant trauma and consistent, intensive stressors. The COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustices in many forms, a dramatic spike in violence locally, a national gun violence crisis, school focused legislation attacking LGBTQIA+ students and staff across the country, contentious political rhetoric and increased hate speech and hate crimes, and the real-time impacts of climate crisis make this a deeply challenging time to be an educator and a student. We have also witnessed the power of community when educators, parents, and students show up for each other in meaningful ways, being incredibly creative in how to navigate this difficult time. Together, we can nurture connected, equitable, compassionate schools that are more equipped to respond to traumatic events.[*] And, it will always be a work in progress.

This document represents the collaborative work of educators and community partners to provide school districts and schools a guide for building your own mental and behavioral health recovery plan to support staff, students, and families following critical incidents and traumatic events. This guide is the result of a long term process, spanning many years, with Centennial, Corbett, David Douglas, Gresham-Barlow, Parkrose, Portland Public, Reynolds and Riverdale school districts, the Multnomah Education Service District (MESD) and Multnomah County. This edition has been edited and adapted by MESD, with input and feedback from all of our school and community partners. This plan in whole or part is available for use by other agencies, with proper attribution.

We offer deep gratitude to the school districts and partners for their contributions to this plan, and for everything you do daily for our students.

Note: This document uses the terms "critical incident," "crisis," and "traumatic event" interchangeably. Additionally, the term "marginalized" is used intersectionality and refers to people systemically harmed by systems and denied equitable access to what they need to thrive, including but not limited to: disabled people, people of color, lgbtqia+ individuals, religious and ethnic minorities, refugees and immigrants, people living in poverty.

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1. Introduction: Safe & Connected Schools and Mental/Behavioral Health Crisis Response

Navigating Crisis Together: Mental and Behavioral Health Recovery Planning for School Communities is part of Multnomah Education Service District's (MESD) multi-layered approach to regional supports for component districts in Multnomah County, and was created in collaboration with school and community partners, with significant contributions and leadership from the MOU Group from 2012 to present. We offer our thanks and appreciation to Lorena Campbell and MOU members for their expertise and commitment to this project. The current iteration of Navigating Crisis Together is a project of MESD's Safe & Connected Schools program, under the direction of Marcia Perez.

What is the Safe & Connected Schools Program?

Safe & Connected Schools is a new program of MESD that partners with schools to promote equitable, trauma-informed environments where staff, students and families are supported in feeling safe, connected and effective. Safe & Connected Schools works with school partners to enhance existing, aligned school wide efforts such as school climate, social and emotional learning, multi-tiered systems of support, and restorative practices with equity-centered and trauma-informed capacity building. A safe and connected school resists re-traumatization, and prioritizes healing as integral to learning - all critical aspects of positive mental and behavioral health and crisis response.

Safe & Connected Schools efforts are committed to and informed by 5 Guiding Principles. These principles greatly inform this document, and can be called upon to guide planning and decision making.

Safe & Connected Schools Guiding Principles

- Connection Through Authentic Relationship
- Physical and Psychological Safety
- Transparency and Accountability
- Equity, Inclusion, and Justice
- Co-Created, Transformative Responses to Systemic and Individual Harm, Ensuring That Power is Shared with Those Most Impacted

Our schools face new and daunting challenges, with high levels of trauma impacting many communities. Simply, it's a difficult time to be an educator, and a difficult time to be a student. And, the potential for schools to be places of healing and connection, where all students get to learn and thrive, is powerful and possible. Thank you for being an educator, thank you for caring deeply about your school community, and thank you for partnering with us in this work. We truly are stronger together.

2. Building a Mental and Behavioral Health Recovery Plan for Your School Community

At the foundation of every good recovery plan is a school community already committed to equity-centered, trauma-informed education practices and environments, where school staff share an understanding of the potential physical, social, emotional, educational and community impacts of trauma. Equally important is an evolving understanding of how diverse communities across race, culture, gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation (to name a few) access healing and well-being. Though all of our school communities are in various stages of building equity-centered, trauma-informed environments where all students and staff get to thrive, we encourage districts to proactively establish their commitments clearly and with purpose, as a critical aspect of traumatic incident recovery. Investing in equity-centered, trauma-informed environments is an investment in crisis response.

> **Environments and relationships rooted in equity and justice, and demonstrated in actions as well as words are a necessary component of supporting mental and behavioral health before, during, and after a traumatic event - particularly for students, parents and staff impacted by marginalization and oppression.**

This guide can be beneficial to any school, regardless of past efforts related to equitable and trauma-informed education, though the strength of any plan will be amplified in environments already working on safety and connection for all students.

> **It also must be definitively stated that a school cannot be trauma-informed if it is not also actively working towards equitable outcomes for diverse students.**

This is increasingly important during times of duress, when staff and students who experience marginalization are often impacted the most. The way that the COVID-19 pandemic

disproportionately impacted people of color in the United States[1], as well as people with disabilities[2] and lower income Americans[3], is a troubling reminder that equity and justice must be foundational to all of our crisis response efforts; otherwise schools are likely to cause more harm.

Equitable outcomes during a crisis recovery effort are more likely to be achieved when schools identify what their specific populations want and need before, during, and after an incident; therefore, a one-size-fits all approach should be avoided.

> **School communities that are connected through authentic relationships where the physical and psychological safety of all members are prioritized and promoted are school communities better equipped to navigate crises together, and even heal in communal ways.**

No one person or group should be left to recover on their own following a traumatic incident impacting a whole school community, and schools and their partners should be equipped to build collective well-being and healing processes that rely on and amplify community.

Notes on How to Use This Document to Plan Your Response

The guide offers guidance specific to promoting mental and behavioral health along this timeline:

Immediate Aftermath (After Environment "Secured") → **Short Term Response** → **Long Term Response**
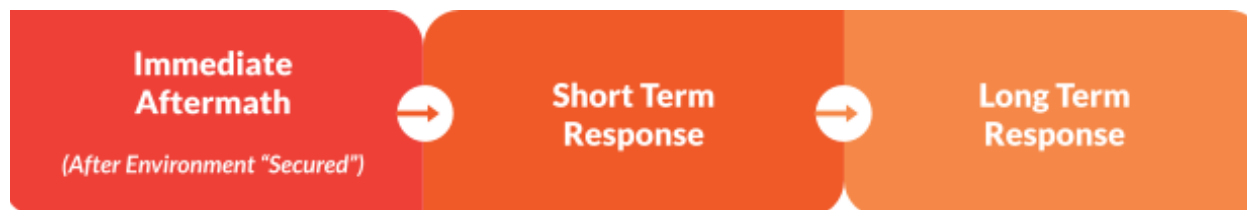
- This guide is intended to aid in planning school and/or district wide mental and behavioral support responses *after* a traumatic incident, once immediate safety has been secured or restored.

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[1] Cleveland Manchanda EC, Molina MF, Rodriguez RM. Racial Equity in Crisis Standards of Care—Reassuring Data or Reason for Concern? *JAMA Netw Open.* 2021;4(3):e214527. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.4527

[2] https://ncd.gov/progressreport/2021/2021-progress-report

[3] Zachary Parolin, Emma K. Lee, The Role of Poverty and Racial Discrimination in Exacerbating the Health Consequences of COVID-19, The Lancet Regional Health - Americas, Volume 7, 2022, 100178, ISSN 2667-193X, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lana.2021.100178.
(https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667193X21001745)

- It does *not* cover critical incident logistics management, and is not intended to inform how schools manage an immediate crisis as it unfolds (for example, you wouldn't consult this guide in the process of securing a building, etc).

- Throughout the document, you will notice call out boxes outlining how one or more of the Safe & Connected Schools Guiding Principles apply to decision making and other considerations.

- Considerations for staff, students, parents, and community partners are also woven throughout the guide, as all members of each school community are critical to mental and behavioral health recovery.

- "Navigating Crisis Together" isn't the plan itself, but rather supports the development of your own school and district specific plan and to provide the basis for training and staff development.

- For more support in developing your own plan in tandem with this document, please refer to "[Navigating Crisis Together: Mental & Behavioral Health Recovery Planning for School Communities - TOOLS for Navigating Crisis Together](#)"

Assembling Your Mental and Behavioral Health Response Planning Team

- Members of your Mental and Behavioral Health Response Planning Team should be chosen thoughtfully, with a diverse makeup that reflects your school community as much as possible. Depending on the district, this team may be school-based or district-wide.

- Team assignment should take priority over other job assignments so that the team can convene quickly when necessary.

- A team leader(s) should be identified, who has the decision-making authority to coordinate assignments and to communicate with the school administrator, in a collaborative manner.

- The team leader may also be the liaison to the community, depending on circumstances specific to your school. If not the team leader, someone should be identified to community members as the point person for ongoing inquiry, feedback, and accountability.

- This team may be your Flight Team, may be parallel to your Flight Team, or may be something else entirely. Each school will have its own needs, interests, and capacities.

- Individual faculty assignments for the team are recommended so that after the crisis occurs, faculty are reminded of their assigned roles and can determine if they are able to perform these tasks, based on their proximity to the event and their own ability to navigate the impact of the situation.

- Assigned faculty may need to pass the task on to someone else, and should be able to state what they need with trust that they will be heard. Ideally, schools will consistently revisit staff roles for mental and behavioral response plan implementation, so that everyone is aware of and able to meet the expectations.

- Identify external community behavioral health resources and build relationships, prioritizing communities facing inequities before the crisis.

- *Members of your Mental and Behavioral Health Response Planning Team should be involved in developing and/or updating your school's specific plan. [The TOOLS for Navigating Crisis Together](#) can also support this process.*

3. Traumatic Events Impacting School Communities

Context Setting for Crisis Response Planning

No critical incident is the same, and no impacted community is the same. Responses that support mental and behavioral well-being must be offered within the context of relationships characterized by safety, equity, and empowerment, in alignment with the Safe & Connected Schools Guiding Principles. These relationships are ideally built preventatively, before critical incidents occur, between staff and students, families, and other school partners who comprise that community. This again speaks to the importance of investing in equity centered, trauma-informed approaches proactively, as a whole school climate effort.

While this plan focuses on "critical incidents" the contributors would like to emphasize that no event occurs in isolation. Trauma is cumulative in its impact, with sociopolitical realities and generational experiences shaping how it is felt in the body, spirit, and mind. When there is a new critical incident, there is history that precedes it and a larger context within which that new incident is understood. That history and context may be shared, or not, by large groups within each school community and will result in significant differences in how that event is interpreted or experienced as traumatic or not traumatic.

Commitments and Beliefs for Crisis Response Planning

WE BELIEVE that students, families, staff and community members will respond to critical incidents and traumatic events differently based on, culture, race and ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status, gender and sexual orientation, past experiences, and community affiliation.

WE COMMIT to resist a standardized approach and instead:
- Consider historical and community context

- Honor multiple perspectives

- Recognize and remediate the historical and present day harms that have been done to people with targeted identities within our school communities

- Call upon the strengths of community members in the response; they are the experts in their own healing

- Support students, families and other community members to choose what they need

- Share control and decision making about our response with those most affected

- Challenge white supremacy and other oppressive structures within ourselves and our systems, even when and especially when responding to traumatic events

- Call upon the Safe & Connected Guiding Principles regularly to help shape our approaches and inform our decisions

What is Trauma? [4]

Trauma is the mind, body, spirit, and emotional response to an event or events that are highly stressful, scary, and/or destabilizing to the person experiencing them. Think of trauma as the impact, rather than the event itself, and consider that impact is highly personal and varies from person to person.

What is a Traumatic Event?

Traumatic events or experiences are those that violate one's safety, health, and integrity. Traumatic experiences may be directly experienced or indirectly experienced through witnessing. They may be primarily physical experiences, or primarily emotional experiences, and/or a combination of both. They may be caused by people, by accidents/acts of nature, by systems and institutions, by grief and loss, to name a few.

What Types of Traumatic Events/Crises/Critical Incidents Can Impact School Communities?

Critical incidents do not always involve the death of a student, parent or faculty member, though when a death happens it reverberates deeply. Traumatic incidents might also include natural disasters such as an earthquake, flood, or ice storm that impacts the whole community, as well as the school. Other events might include suicide, public health threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and gun violence (or other types of violence) incidents in the geographical region of

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[4] Definition adapted from
https://traumainformedoregon.org/resources/new-to-trauma-informed-care/what-is-trauma

the school. It should also be noted that critical incidents are not always brief and acute. The COVID-19 pandemic is an example of a prolonged critical incident. For school communities repeatedly impacted by neighborhood gun violence, such incidents are not isolated to one single event and occur over time (chronic), intersecting with systemic oppression.

Simply, there is no way to predict every type of acute crisis that may impact a school community. What matters most is that school leaders are equipped to notice and respond to impact, based on the unique needs of those impacted. Less important is whether or not an incident meets a threshold of predefined criteria for what comprises "crisis." It can be helpful to think ahead to the types of incidents and experiences that may cause harm/impact a school community. This list is not exhaustive. As stated, the line between acute and chronic crisis is often blurry, as is the line between local and macro level crisis. For example, a school community might be greatly impacted by an act of violence happening elsewhere in the country if it inspires similar behavior on campus, or a community response that rises to the level of unsafe. **School community members should be empowered to determine together whether or not a situation necessitates a mental and behavioral health response.**

Safe & Connected Schools Guiding Principle

Co-Created, Transformative Responses to Systemic and Individual Harm, Ensuring That Power is Shared with Those Most Impacted

This principle reminds us that the unique needs of those most impacted should be a driving force behind the implementation of our mental and behavioral health response plan. How will we know if our response plan is successful in supporting those most impacted? How will we adjust together as we go, being responsive and adaptable? School communities already invested in authentic restorative practices might have an easier time co-creating responses after a critical incident.

Examples of Traumatic Events Impacting School Communities:

- Gun violence of any kind that happens on or around school grounds, impacting the school and/or the neighborhood:
    - Domestic violence / teen dating violence related
    - Gang or community violence related
    - Extremist, terrorist related
    - Police shootings and/or racist profiling
    - Hate crime / white supremacy, anti-lgbtqia, etc
    - Interpersonal, targeted
    - Mass shootings, all types
    - Guns on campus

- Other violence of any kind that happens on or around school grounds, impacting the school and/or neighborhood:
  - Stabbings
  - Hostage situations
  - Physical attacks
  - Hate crime: white supremacy, anti-lgbtqia, etc.
  - Bombs and other explosive devices

- Health related crises:
  - Pandemics
  - New, sudden toxicity in the environment (dangerous air quality, for example)
  - Students and staff being denied access to what they need to survive, such as when food, housing or utilities become unavailable (this is a example of where the line between acute and chronic can be very blurry)

- Disasters (man made and/or natural):
  - Fire
  - Earthquake
  - Flood and other natural disasters
  - Building collapse or other dangerous conditions

- Grief and loss:
  - Suicide specific
  - Death of a student, by any cause
  - Death of a staff member, by any cause
  - Special consideration for death related to violence of any kind

- Staffing related crises:
  - Staff absences reach a critical, unmanageable level (e.g. not enough adults in a building to keep kids safe)

- Crises specific to oppression and hate:
  - Groups of students or individual students being targeted with violence simply because of their identities, by people/groups inside or outside the school
  - Hate speech graffiti, swastikas, white supremacist recruitment fliers, homophobic and/or transphobic messages, other visual representation of hate intentionally placed on campus
  - Police shootings and/or racist profiling

4. Nurturing Environments Prepared to Support All School Community Members Impacted by Traumatic Events

As stated, school communities that are pro-actively committed to and engaging in restorative, trauma-informed and equitable approaches, where connection and authentic relationships are prioritized, will be better equipped to initiate a dynamic mental and behavioral response after a critical incident. This means engaging in universal prevention strategies that benefit all students and staff. Wherever your school is in the process, this guide can assist your planning, though we urge schools and districts to continue enhancing your equity and trauma-informed strategies as critical components of crisis management. We recommend you reference the "Safe & Connected Schools Lens" to support you in this ongoing effort.

Another critical component of nurturing environments that are prepared to support all school community members is intentional and pro-active staff wellness. This can be an incredibly daunting task given the current stresses on schools and educators. And, it's a necessity for crisis navigation. As with all diverse environments, there's no one-size-fits-all approach to staff wellness. We recommend that school leaders collaborate with staff to determine what is needed most, and is within scope of control.

Considerations for Promoting Staff Wellness

- All staff should be considered in wellness planning, not just certain classifications.

- Transparency from leadership, during good times and bad, is part of staff wellness.

- Relationship building among staff colleagues is as important as teacher-student relationship building:
  - How are you building trust among staff?
  - How are you building connection among staff?
  - When do staff get to laugh together, have fun together?
  - How will staff know that diversity is an asset to your staff team?
  - How will your team negotiate inevitable conflict?

- Encourage staff time to genuinely recognize successes with students.

- Staff need ritual and routine as do students - what can you build into your staff meetings?

- When in doubt, name what's happening, even if you don't know what comes next; ignoring local and national tragedies or offering shallow, meaningless responses can actually cause harm.

- Seek help if you need assistance in how to meaningfully address local and national trauma.

- Leadership should demonstrate to staff how they receive and integrate feedback.

- Don't expect staff to engage strategies they haven't been properly trained in.

- During non-crisis times, school leaders should develop a practice of discerning what is actually urgent, and what can wait, as they delegate tasks, responses, and expectations.

- This is a historically difficult time, and there are many crises (no denying that); school members are best able to navigate a crisis within a climate that is not defined by constant urgency (outside of crisis).

- Recognize that all staff in a building, including you, will be impacted; everyone needs care, consideration, collaboration and the permission to ask for help.

Ongoing Professional Development Themes to Support Mental and Behavioral Health Crisis Response:

- Trauma-informed, healing centered K-12 education strategies

- Restorative approaches to K-12 education

- Psychological and Mental Health First Aid

- Suicide prevention

- Justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in K-12 education

- Reducing the school to prison pipeline

Equity-Centered, Trauma-Informed Reminders for Environment Building for All

- **School staff should be encouraged to use names of students as often as possible, and to recognize relationship building and connection as a critical investment in strong mental and behavioral health crisis response.**

- **School staff should be celebrated and elevated (in words and actions) as often as possible. This is a critical component of building an environment with the resources to navigate crisis.**

- **Building leadership must have a clear communication mechanism to share critical information with all staff; every adult in the building should know when a critical incident has occurred, as soon as possible.**

5. Identifying the Diverse Needs of Your School Community to Structure a Response after a Traumatic Event

Because your school community is made up of people from diverse backgrounds, with shifting demographics, we offer the following set of critical inquiry questions to aid in your proactive response planning. You will need to revisit these questions as staff and student body change. These questions can guide decision making and help you stay connected to equity and trauma-informed approaches when responding to traumatic events. **You can adapt these questions to ask them directly of school community members proactively, which is ideal.**

Safe & Connected Schools Guiding Principle

Transparency and Accountability

This principle reminds us to be transparent about the fact that your school is going through a planning process for how to promote positive mental and behavioral health for the whole school community after traumatic incidents, and invite school community members to be co-creators. You might consider hosting feedback groups or listening sessions with these questions, organized by school role, remembering to be as inclusive and comprehensive as possible in your invitations:

- **Students (if developmentally appropriate)**
- **Parents**
- **Educators**
- **Admin / Leadership**
- **Classified Staff**
- **Community Partners**

Accountability can and should be built in to your collaborative planning and information gathering, meaning that those who contribute to feedback sessions should:

- **Know how and when plans will be implemented/timeline**
- **How and when they can give feedback**
- **How plans will change and adapt based on feedback**
- **Who is the point person they should contact**

Furthermore, these questions should also align with ongoing school climate and trauma-informed, equity efforts, and can provide valuable information that can support a school in creating environments where everyone feels like a valued member - not just in relation to a crisis. Your response planning team can decide which questions to start with, how many, and which are the most relevant. These questions are examples, and not an exhaustive list, and are informed by the Safe & Connected Schools Guiding Principles.

Many schools have access to school based mental health support staff such as counselors, guidance counselors, social workers, psychologists and nurses. These staff members generally have skills and information related to managing routine situations. They can intervene, assess, and provide referrals to district-based response teams and community resources. In some critical incidents, however, the emotional needs of the school might overwhelm the capacity of the school's mental health support staff, who we can expect to be deeply impacted as well. Additionally, while identifying students who need a specific trauma intervention and making a referral is critical, it's not a replacement for whole community, collective responses to traumatic events.

Critical Inquiry Questions for Identifying Diverse Needs

- How can the act of engaging in this planning process build connection and community?

- How has your school community perpetuated harm that has caused mistrust? Who has been most impacted by this harm?

- How can your school work to repair so that community members feel safe and validated during crisis response?

- How will you identify which communities in your school need culturally specific support?

- How do members of communities specific to your school care for each other after loss and trauma?

- What are the types of experiences where members of your school community state they feel the most connected, the most cared for? How can you promote these types of experiences following a critical incident?

- Where and when do members of your school community feel they have the most voice and choice? Are there some that have never had much of a voice? How will you change that?

- Where in this school do community members feel the safest?

- What does healing look like for communities within your school, remembering there is no one-size-fits-all approach, and that healing is not linear?

- How does the school community collectively choose to respond to local and national incidents that specifically impact communities that have been marginalized?

- Are the adults in the building who will engage in implementation of the recovery plan representative of the school community? Are they properly informed about the specific needs of school community members? If not, what can be done to sufficiently center unique cultural needs, post-incident?

- How can you increase transparency in communication around next steps and decision making processes following a crisis (to staff, students, families)? What specific steps will you take to ensure transparency? Who will be responsible?

- How are you choosing to move towards anti-racist, anti-oppressive actions and choices as you build and implement your plan?

- How do school community members feel about memorializing those you've lost?

- Which community partners are important when responding to a crisis? Do these community partners know how and when you might call on them to aid in your mental and behavioral response implementation? Have you considered culturally specific providers? What agreements do you have?

- How will staff share the emotional labor of your mental and behavioral response plan during the recovery phase?

When assessing the diverse needs of your school community, understanding how mental health is perceived, treated, and discussed by members is crucial. A basic starting point for school administrators, counselors and social workers is to be familiar with therapeutic models recommended for trauma recovery and healing, particularly for young people. The following is not an all inclusive list, but a few common therapeutic orientations intended to support survivors of trauma. As with all mental health services, culture should always be centered – but so often isn't. You will need to work with your school community and community based mental health resources to determine which are most appropriate when building your referral network.

For all ages
- Trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy

- Narrative therapy

- Art therapy

Specifically for children, youth and families
- Child-parent psychotherapy

- Play therapy

- Parent-child interaction therapy

> **Consider spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental impacts. Holistic approaches to well-being should be supported over the course of a response period. Moreover, people recover from traumatic events relationally; school communities should aim to reduce isolation and increase connection, for all members of the community.**

6. Immediate aftermath

Assess Impact

After relative safety has been re-established and the emergent crisis is over (or in the ending stage depending on the nature of the crisis), your Mental and Behavioral Health Response Planning Team should convene with as many members as is feasible, or at least establish a communication loop. At this point, assessing the impact of the incident will be critical to implementing your plan. When you are able to assess mental and behavioral health impact really depends on the nature of the crisis; use your best judgment.

- Determine who was the most impacted (staff and students), or closest to the traumatic event.

- Identify students and staff who may be at increased risk of harm or significant detrimental impact. Some examples may be those individuals who were close to the deceased/impacted party, or anyone who may have witnessed or been impacted by a death, violence, crime, police response, illness, etc.

- **Is the impact school wide or clustered to specific groups or individuals? should the whole school be considered, and is there a learning opportunity (ie in instances of hate related critical incidents)?**

Safe & Connected Schools Guiding Principle

Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

This principle reminds us that safe and connected schools are environments where oppressive actions, including hate related violence of any kind, will not be tolerated. An equitable school culture is one where acts of hate are named, condemned, and repair and healing for those impacted is centered in the response. This is also critical to mental and behavioral health promotion for the whole school community.

- Determine whether or not your school needs to request additional support for your mental and behavioral health response.

- Contact additional support even if you don't know exactly what you need yet; your allies can be thought partners.

- Is there risk of this crisis reoccurring or escalating? This may happen in incidences of gun violence or suicide. If there is a feasible possibility of recurrence, the Flight/SMART team or other crisis response team should remain engaged.

After Assessing Impact:

- Of those most impacted, who knows them best and can share helpful information about connecting with them? Who within the school community do they trust and might communicate with? Consider staff and students alike.

- Identify who will reach out to impacted people and make an immediate action plan for what that looks like.

- Determine how the delivery of the news will happen within the school system. Individual classroom announcements by teachers to students, following a teacher's meeting, are recommended. Teachers should have clear information about the message they are delivering to students, with ideas on tone and phrasing that is equity-centered, trauma-informed, and normalizes complex emotions and reactions. If a suicide death has occurred, please refer to **Section 9** of this guide, for information on safe messaging in communication. Teachers should feel supported by building administration and school counselors/psychologists/coaches, etc as they deliver difficult information to students.

- Conversely, announcements over the loudspeaker or large assembly notifications are not recommended. Be certain to have sufficient support staff to assist with the support of the students, faculty and parents. This may include both an Internal Team (employees of the school system/district) and an External Team (such as Disaster Behavioral Health Response Team, Community Agencies).

- Determine how and when parents and other community partners will be informed, prioritizing immediacy and transparency in your communications as much as possible. Include relevant support resources. Try not to overwhelm with too much information.

- If a suicide has occurred, the county postvention lead should be contacted prior to public announcements and can provide additional supports and resource allocation when needed.

- Set up designated rooms (Safe Rooms) for emotional support for students and a place for adults (parents and faculty). Provide emotional support to the students, faculty and parents. Call in outside help if needed and available.

- Determine the day's schedule and adjust as necessary, keeping in mind that routines should be as typical as possible. School staff should be reminded that routine is helpful for people impacted by trauma, and we can make space for the emotions of the day while also sticking with routines (with flexibility and adaptability). For example, try to stick to a similar time schedule, but offer activities that are low stress and don't require a lot of energy. Deadlines, testing, etc should be adjusted to meet the needs of trauma impacted students and staff.

- Recognize that the media may want information, and prepare for a thoughtful response that is in alignment with your response planning. Share information with school staff about expectations related to what they share on social media and/or with the media.

- If needed, designate a staff member to coordinate volunteers and donations.

- A staff meeting at the end of the day should be held to allow faculty to review the day, share information and resources.

- If death has impacted the school community, staff should be given the opportunity to debrief, with future opportunities presented for further grief processing, separate from a procedural debrief.

Supporting the Parents and Family of a Victim

There are two different groups of parents to be considered: the parents of the deceased or victim and parents of the other children in the school.

- Family members should be contacted by a representative of the school in the immediate aftermath.

- Determine the language access and cultural needs of the family; seek culturally specific support from partners when needed.

- If the victim(s) are deceased, the school representative should express condolences and sympathy in a formal and if possible, face to face manner. The school representative would ideally have the capacity to carry this conversation, and if possible have some connection to the family or student.

- The school representative should be prepared to hold space with compassion and kindness, knowing there will likely be a range of complicated emotions that might include anger or disbelief.

- People express grief and loss in a myriad of complex ways, informed by cultural norms and experiences; be open and validating.

- The school representative should receive emotional support and thought partnership from the Mental and Behavioral Health Response Planning team before and after this contact.

- Consider designating one contact person to interact with the family over time, to verify information and minimize intrusion.

- Returning the possessions of the victim is another task that requires careful consideration and the utmost respect.

- The school may also play a role in referring parents, siblings and other relatives to counseling resources and support groups, taking careful considerations around culture.

Supporting All Parents and Family in the School Community

The needs of other parents and family should also be addressed. Parents may be invited to meet with school administrators individually or to a general informational meeting.

These meetings should focus on:
- Providing up to date and accurate information

- Prevention measures to be taken by the school

- Common reactions to critical incidents

- Suggested coping strategies for adults and children

- Available school and community resources, with equity and cultural considerations

- Any information you can share about school community healing

- Emphasis on community building, connection, care

- Details about the mental and behavioral health response plan, with indication that there will be short and long term strategies

- How parents and family members can provide feedback, make suggestions, and ask ongoing questions

School administrators should be careful in planning large group meetings if tensions and emotions may be running high, as there may be potential for such a meeting to actually escalate trauma responses if not facilitated artfully. You should seek assistance if you feel ill-equipped. Who in your school community is resourced to lead this meeting? Another option is to divide parents into small group discussions in a classroom setting, sharing a consistent message and information. The school administration should decide if media presence will be allowed, in consultation with the parents, depending on the nature of the critical incident.

Additional Tips for Immediate Aftermath and Beyond

- Promote a sense of community and connectedness within the school, ensuring that students, parents and staff most often marginalized by schools and other systems are considered.

- Review all decisions through an equity lens that challenges and avoids replicating white supremacy and other oppressive actions; avoid resorting to military style "incident command" mentality when it comes to mental and behavioral health.

- Maintain stability of school operations as much as possible.

- Provide support for staff and community partners and other helpers, even if just time to connect over snacks, as helpers.

- Maintain consistency of information control, prioritizing transparency as broadly as possible.

- Request assistance when internal school or district resources are overwhelmed or insufficient to meet needs; assume this will be a need and prepare accordingly.

7. Short Term Response

The short term response phase, after the immediate hours and days following a traumatic event, are crucial for mental and behavioral health. School leaders should demonstrate that community, connection, care, and compassion are center stage.

Glossing over, ignoring, or creating a leadership driven environment that implies avoidance is the preferred response should be interrupted. If some school community members authentically share that they would like to avoid thinking about or discussing the event as a way of coping, your team will need to be prepared for multiple-pronged strategies. Some will want to connect about it regularly, some will not. But the standard default should NOT be set to avoidance, which is all too common in environments where trust and relationships have not been established.

Your team should continue assessing specific needs at each phase. Below are considerations for the short term response phase assessment. As you build your school specific response plan, measure these needs against your available resources, always prioritizing the needs of those most impacted and specifically marginalized communities.

Common Needs of Everyone Affected

- Physical safety

- Equal access to clearly communicated information about the event (transparency)

- Equal access to clearly communicated information about next steps/ the response

- Permission to and a place to grieve

- Emotional support

- Meaningful routines and rituals

- Culturally relevant healing practices and activities

- Authentic, connected relationships

- Rest and breaks

- Flexibility and adaptability when needed based on current state

- **Space and time to connect with school community members**

Safe & Connected Schools Guiding Principle

Connection Through Authentic Relationship

This principle reminds us that healing happens in the context of relationships. Sometimes schools need to prioritize relationships above all else. It may feel like a departure from academic metrics, but consider it an investment in students' future learning. Safe & Connected Schools maintains that in order for schools to be places of learning, they also need to be places of healing.

Administrator Specific Needs

- Information about those directly affected

- System for contacting necessary resources and supports

- Strategy for responding to staff, student, parent, community and media requests

- Supportive colleagues who can provide a listening ear and thought partnership

- Ongoing equity analysis to ensure oppressive patterns aren't being replicated for marginalized community members

- District support

- Mechanisms for ensuring that diverse community needs are being met

- Everything under "Common Needs of Everyone Affected"

Building Staff Specific Needs

- Attention to equity and justice in response implementation

- Equal access to clearly communicated information about the school's response plan

- Preparation support for depth of students' responses

- Guidance in structuring school activities, both in response to the incident and resuming typical routines

- Identification of students at risk of harm

- Information about resources for school community members needing emotional support

- Everything under "Common Needs of Everyone Affected"

Student Specific Needs

- Attention to equity and justice in response implementation

- Non-punitive responses to trauma symptoms

- Ongoing, consistent outreach, especially to those students most affected by the incident

- Notification of case workers or other agency points of contact assigned to student who are under supervision of the juvenile court or are in the custody of child welfare

- Clearly communicated and accessible information about resources within the school and community

- Everything under "Common Needs of Everyone Affected"

Parent Specific Needs

- Equal access to clearly communicated information about the status of their child's safety and well-being, with language access addressed, with information offered in a variety of formats such as voice recordings, video clips, text messages, phone calls, etc.

- Equal access to clearly communicated information about the school's response

- Culturally relevant information and support for preparing for their children's potential response to the incident (ie, what are trauma symptoms, and how to support a young person impacted by trauma)

- Opportunity to be of service to and a part of the school community and the response plan

- Everything under "common needs of everyone affected"

Community Partner Specific Needs

- General information about how the school is managing the incident and the response plan

- Opportunity to be of service in appropriate ways

- Authentic/trusting relationships with schools (not only be called upon when there is a crisis) so that partnerships feels organic and trusting when navigating crisis

- For their efforts and contributions in in the school community to be honored

- School partners should be aware of how much they are asking of community partners and check in about capacity

- School and community partners should be able to continually check in about their role(s) in the school during/after the crisis

8. Long term response

Ongoing Support

- The Mental and Behavioral Health Response Planning Team should meet quarterly, monthly or bi-monthly, as needed, to monitor stress or grief reactions in both students and staff and respond accordingly.

- Provide support services as necessary, for as long as needed.

- Update plans and communication loops as needed to prepare for the future.

- Schedule an After Action Meeting to review the mental and behavioral response to the critical incident to capture any lessons learned from the incident; focus on how equity was or was not achieved in the response.

- Integrate lessons learned into evolving future plans.

- Continue to utilize the Safe & Connected Schools Guiding Principles to support long term response strategies, which can be aligned with other school wide initiatives related to equity and school climate, multi-tiered systems of support, restorative practices, etc.

- Consult with students and families about what they want and need as they have more time and space from the incident.

- Elevate the care and compassion demonstrated during the response when revisiting the incident in story or in healing events/practices.

- Celebrate ongoing acts of care and connection; recognize those who contribute.

- Continue to assess the culturally specific needs of school community members, being careful to honor and respect cultural ways of knowing and healing from diverse backgrounds.

Anniversary Planning

For incidents that impact the entire school community, i.e., an act of violence or a disaster, it may be important to note milestones. Designate a staff member to notice milestones that may come up as the year moves along and plan how to manage these times with students and staff. Recognize that the actual anniversary date may evoke stress or grief reactions from involved parties. Provide support or check in with students or staff who may have been significantly impacted.

Consider holding an event to honor the victims or mark the anniversary in a communal, healing centered way. Seek support from community or district partners if your Team lacks the capacity to coordinate or facilitate an event. If age appropriate, students should be supported to co-create events for the anniversary.

Before planning any memorial or event to honor a deceased student, the parents of that student should be consulted with and have decision making authority. If they consent to the event, they should be invited to participate as much or as little as they would like in the planning and the event itself. From the lens of suicide prevention best practices, every death should be remembered with the same type of community rituals, so that special things don't happen for some deaths and not others. Shared community traumatic events can be remembered in the ways that make sense for the community, but in the case of individual deaths, it's important to mark every death ritual with the same care. Please refer to chapter 9 for more information about navigating death and loss.

9. Mental and Behavioral Health Response Specific to Grief and Loss

On Memorialization

A school death is a tragic event that impacts the whole community, some members more than others. It is common for grieving communities and families to want to set up a physical memorial or tribute to the person(s) lost. Memorials are truly meant for the living. They help individuals move through the grieving process and realize that this person, their loved one, will not be forgotten. These memorials help the living make the transition back into their daily life and routine. There is no correct answer for what's best for specific schools, other than being thoughtful and in process with your specific community. There are many ways in which a memorial can be made to honor the deceased individual's life. However, there are certain aspects of the process that need to be considered in advance, particularly so that equity is centered.

> **Schools are encouraged to develop a policy for memorials before being faced with making decisions under the time pressure and emotional grief that occurs after a sudden death or tragedy. Consistency when developing a policy regarding memorials is critical.**

School leaders must ensure that some communities aren't privileged over others. Additionally, "contagions" must be considered. Schools may view these deaths differently, but many families will expect that the same type of memorialization occurs regardless of the circumstances of the death. This is why having a policy is critical. Given the complexity of these situations, some schools adopt a policy which minimizes their role in memorialization and encourages memorialization to occur in the community.

> **If the death was a suicide, care should be taken to reduce the risk of contagion.** Please refer to guidance regarding postvention (interventions to reduce risk and promote healing after a suicide) to prevent the idolizing of the death and possible future suicidal behavior.

School's Attendance at the Service

Regarding attendance of their loved one's services, the wishes of the family of the deceased must be honored. The family may openly invite and encourage the schools' and students' attendance and participation. On the other hand, some families may not want school staff and students present. Respect the family's wishes.

Allow school faculty and staff to attend services during a school day according to district policy. This type of closure and ritual is an important aspect of many peoples' lives. If many teachers are interested in attending services, decide how to handle their absences.

> **Recognize that the day of the funeral may be difficult. Have additional support available. Honor that how people grieve and memorialize loved ones varies from culture to culture, and there is no "correct" way. Be open and responsive to the needs of family and community.**

Navigating Suicide

Seek Immediate Postvention Support Following the Occurence of Suicide

When a suicide has occurred, multiple senate bills require school notify their county Postvention Lead about a death, however resources such as Rapid Response can be deployed to help any school who needs more support onsite in the immediate aftermath of a suicide. The Postvention Lead can also work to help identify long term postvention responses and resources to help those most at risk of contagion and support community healing.

Considerations for Staff and Students

While any sudden traumatic death can have a profound impact on a school community, suicide deaths are more complex and require special considerations. These considerations are for staff and students, and include:

- Anticipating the personal and complex nature of grief following a suicide.

- The social spheres of the deceased person, influence of the person who has died within the school community, their membership on teams or in clubs, whether or not they were well known. The ripple effect of a well- known person's death should not be underestimated.

- If the person who completed suicide was a target for harassment and/or bullying within the school community, special care will need to be taken to check in with other students who experience harms like this at school, as well as increased strategies to prevent bullying and harassment. If the harassment was specific to racism, homophobia, sexism, transphobia, ableism and/or classism, the school community should plan accordingly for trauma sensitive, anti-oppression interventions.

- Anyone who knew the deceased is at an increased risk for suicide, and the closer the relationship, the more durable the risk.

- Watching out for suicide pacts.

- Reducing the risk of suicide contagion; seek consultation from qualified mental health professionals as needed.

- Ensuring responsible reporting and safe messaging; glorification and permanent memorialization at the school should be avoided (think about this when you develop your memorialization policies and protocols).

> **Following a suicide death, it is important to provide information about warning signs for suicide as well as the contact numbers for suicide prevention resources:**
>
> - **National Suicide Prevention Hotline / Lines for Life 1-800-273-8255**
>
> - **Multnomah County Crisis Line 503-988-4888.**

Complicated Bereavement

Due to the nature of suicide death, friends and family will often be left feeling a range of emotions including guilt, anger, self-blame, regret and rejection as well as intense grief and shock. They will often replay over and over again in their mind their last interaction with the person and wonder what they could or should have done differently. Since having known someone who dies by suicide is itself an increased risk factor for suicide, it is important to provide supports to these individuals. These supports must be culturally specific and responsive to the unique needs of those impacted.

Suicide Pacts

Suicide pacts occur when two or more individuals have an agreement to die by suicide. Following a suicide death or serious attempt, it is important to ask close friends if they have any knowledge of a suicide pact.

Locating and monitoring social networking sites and online forums linked to funerals or obituaries can be an important tool in identifying potential suicide pacts, as well as who is at increased risk for suicide. While it is not unusual for posts to be heartfelt and emotional, posts such as "I miss you and will see you soon" or "I will follow in your path" should be cause for concern and immediate follow up with the individual should be carefully attempted. Members of your planning team should be aware of who is monitoring and who is following up with impacted school community members.

Contagion

Though a rare event, research indicates that the suicide death of an individual may influence others who are at risk for suicide to act on their suicidal impulses. Young people are especially prone to contagion. Reducing the risk of contagion is an important consideration when thinking about memorials for an individual who dies by suicide. Permanent plaques or memorials or dedications such as in the high school yearbook may inadvertently increase the risk of contagion. Research has demonstrated that sensational media reports may contribute to suicide contagion. Therefore, it is essential that educators become familiar with safe messaging guidelines as well as the media recommendations for reporting on suicide. Safe messaging guidelines should be followed when crafting any message to faculty, students, community or the media following a suicide death. If the media are involved, they should be provided with a copy of the media recommendations and encouraged to follow them.

Risk

One of the biggest risk factors for suicide is having known someone who dies by suicide. If the family and law enforcement agency agree, the fact that a suicide has occurred should be shared with the school community.

Schools can help mitigate risk by being truthful about the suicide death and actively taking steps to reduce risk and promote healing after a suicide death.

Additionally, a key component of trauma-informed approaches is transparency, even with difficult information. Schools that have not been open about the death being a suicide are typically faced with two very unhealthy scenarios:

- One is that most students know it is a suicide death but the administration / teachers / staff won't acknowledge it or deal with it directly so students deal with it amongst themselves.

- The second is that rumors (such as drugs, murder / conspiracy etc.) and innuendo replace facts and can spread emotional distress and chaos through the school community. These rumors may be far more impacting and unsettling for the entire student body and much more difficult for school staff to contain than truthfully disclosing that the death is a suicide.

The school administrator's role is to do what is best for the entire school community. There will be some situations where a sudden death occurs and while suicide may be suspected an official cause of death may not be made for weeks pending results of toxicology reports. School officials should rely exclusively on official determination of death and not speculate as to cause of death when providing information to students or the extended school community. Even without an official cause of death, the school can openly disclose the death, and if given the go ahead from law enforcement, assure the school community that foul play is not suspected. It will still be important to take active steps to reduce risk and promote healing which can and should be done without mentioning the (suspected) cause of death.

Safe and Effective Messaging for Suicide Prevention

This document offers evidence-based recommendations for creating safe and effective messages to raise public awareness that suicide is a serious and preventable public health problem. And, it must be stated again that pro-active, trauma and equity informed whole school climate and culture efforts (these can be linked to equity practices, social and emotional learning curricula, multi-tiered systems of support/universal tier one strategies, etc) are critical to preventing suicide and promoting mental health.

> **When a school is welcoming, inclusive, and psychologically safe to all members, messages that normalize human struggles and health-seeking behaviors are far more successful.**

Schools should intentionally integrate mental, emotional, and behavioral well-being approaches in to daily school programming and curricula, as a foundation to suicide prevention. These approaches should amplify student strengths, protective factors, community and connection.

The lists below should be used to assess the appropriateness and safety of message content in suicide awareness campaigns. Recommendations are based on the best available knowledge about messaging. They apply not only to awareness campaigns, such as those conducted through Public Service Announcements (PSAs), but to most types of educational and training efforts intended for the general public.

These recommendations address message content, but not the equally important aspects of planning, developing, testing, and disseminating messages. While engaged in these processes, one should seek to tailor messages to address the specific needs and help-seeking patterns of the target audience. For example, since youth are likely to seek help for emotional problems online, a public awareness campaign for youth should be web / social media based.

The Do's: Practices That May Be Helpful in Public Awareness Campaigns[5]

Do emphasize help-seeking and provide information on finding help. When recommending mental health treatment, provide concrete steps for finding help. Inform people that help is available through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800- 273-TALK [8255]) and through established local service providers and crisis centers.

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[5] The Do's and The Don'ts Sections adapted from Suicide Prevention Resource Center, www.sprc.org, 877-GET-SPRC (877- 438-7772) Education Development Center, Inc. 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02458-1060

Do emphasize prevention. Reinforce the fact that there are preventative actions individuals can take if they are having thoughts of suicide or know others who are or might be. Emphasize that suicides are preventable and should be prevented to the extent possible.

Do list the warning signs, as well as risk and protective factors of suicide. Teach people how to tell if they or someone they know may be thinking of harming themselves. Include lists of warning signs, such as those developed through a consensus process led by the American Association of Suicidology (AAS). Messages should also identify protective factors that reduce the likelihood of suicide and risk factors that heighten risk of suicide. Risk and protective factors are listed on pages 35-36 of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention.

Do highlight effective treatments for underlying mental health problems. Over 90 percent of those who die by suicide suffer from a significant psychiatric illness, substance abuse disorder or both at the time of their death. The impact of mental illness and substance abuse as risk factors for suicide can be reduced by access to effective treatments and strengthened social support in an understanding community.

The Don'ts: Practices That May Be Problematic in Public Awareness Campaigns[5]

Don't present suicide as an inexplicable act or explain it as a result of stress only. Suicide is complex and the experiences and circumstances of each suicide are complex and unique, even when we believe we see larger patterns. No details about the means/methods or known motivations should be shared with students. Students families, community, and faith communities may have philosophical views on suicide that may compliment or conflict with the larger public health framework. Staying neutral and offering support in processing grief is likely the safest path for discussion.

Don't glorify or romanticize suicide or people who have died by suicide. Vulnerable people, especially young people, may identify with the attention and sympathy garnered by someone who has died by suicide. They should not be held up as role models.

Don't normalize suicide by presenting it as a common event. Although significant numbers of people attempt suicide, it is important not to present the data in a way that makes suicide seem common, normal or acceptable. Most people do not seriously consider suicide an option; therefore, suicidal ideation is not normal. Most individuals, and most youth, who seriously consider suicide do not overtly act on those thoughts, but find more constructive ways to resolve them. Presenting suicide as common may unintentionally remove a protective bias against suicide in a community.

Don't focus on personal details of people who have died by suicide. Vulnerable individuals may identify with the personal details of someone who died by suicide, leading them to consider ending their lives in the same way.

Don't present overly detailed descriptions of suicide victims or methods of suicide. Research shows that pictures or detailed descriptions of how or where a person died by suicide can be a factor in vulnerable individuals imitating the act. Clinicians believe the danger is even greater if there is a detailed description of the method.

Suicide Postvention Training: Promoting Healing and Reducing Risk after a Suicide

Since knowing someone who has died by suicide is one of the highest risk factors for suicide, postvention (response to a suicide death) becomes an important part of prevention efforts. Postvention training is offered to school community members who may respond to a death by suicide and take an active role in promoting healing and reducing risk in the school community after a suicide death. It is critical to also understand the role of key service providers and ways to integrate an effective community response to the suicide death of a school community member. Ideally, postvention training is provided in *preparation* for a suicide death to enable school communities to incorporate postvention protocols into suicide response plans. This training is designed to help prepare school communities for a tragedy, such as the suicide of a student or member of the community, through review of national best practice guidelines for suicide crisis response, communication, memorial services, and media response. An understanding of how youth culture and social media impacts suicide response and help-seeking is helpful in recognizing warning signs of suicide in those who may be at risk after a suicide death. Also, staff should be aware of online memorial sites.

10. Resources for Enhancing Your Equity-Centered and Trauma-Informed Lens in Response Planning

Oregon Department of Education Resources

- [School Safety and Prevention Systems Guidance offers](#) an abundance of resources and critical reflection questions for decision making that are well aligned with Safe & Connected Schools Guiding Principle.

Trauma and Trauma-Informed Resources

- Putting content to practice with [Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education](#)

- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) has created many excellent [resources for students, staff, and families affected by school shootings](#) and [Creating, Supporting, and Sustaining Trauma-Informed Schools](#)

- [Trauma-Informed Oregon](#) serves as a centralized source of information and resources for trauma-informed efforts.

Anti-Racist, Anti-Oppressive Schools Resources

- The book, [Start Here, Start Now](#) addresses many of the questions and challenges educators have about getting started with anti-bias and antiracist work, using a framework for tackling perceived barriers from a proactive stance

- [Why Black Girls Are Targeted for Punishment at School – And How to Change That](#) Monique W. Morris TED talk

- [Literacy Is Liberation: Working Toward Justice Through Culturally Relevant Teaching](#) By Kimberly N. Parker

- [Sing a Rhythm, Dance a Blues: Education for the Liberation of Black and Brown Girls](#) By Monique W. Morris

Grief and Loss Resources

- At [Dougy Center](#), you will find support, resources, and connection before and after a death

- [Learning from Loss – A Trauma-Informed Approach to Supporting Grieving Students](#) By Brittany R. Collins

- [My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies](#) By Resmaa Menakem

- Bereavement support for children and teens who have experienced a significant loss is available through [Providence Health](#) and Legacy

- [Fostering Grief-Ready Workplaces: A Starter Kit for Mental Health and School Mental Health Leadership](#) from the Pacific Southwest Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Suicide-Specific Resources

- [Sources of Strength](#) – A best practice youth suicide prevention project designed to harness the power of peer social networks to change unhealthy norms and culture, ultimately preventing suicide, bullying, and substance abuse

- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)

- [Connect Postvention Training](#) - This training is offered through the Postvention Lead for Multnomah County and can be offered to your school community yearly

TOOLS for

Navigating Crisis Together: Mental & Behavioral Health Recovery Planning for School Communities

TOOL 1
How to Use TOOLS for Navigating Crisis Together

Welcome! These tools are a supplement to "Navigating Crisis Together: Mental & Behavioral Health Recovery Planning for School Communities." They are meant to provide additional guidance and resources for enhancing existing crisis response plans and/or creating new plans. Just as with "Navigating Crisis Together," these implementation tools are indicated for *after* environments have been secured (or even better, for use proactively), and not a reference for how to increase physical safety *during* a critical incident.

The TOOLS do not stand alone, and we strongly recommend that school communities review and familiarize themselves with "Navigating Crisis Together" before you take up any of the exercises and worksheets offered here. In fact, some of this content may not fully land if you've not already gotten to know "Navigating Crisis Together." These tools are available to school communities at any time, and you can pick and choose tools in any order and combination based on the needs of your school community.

> Because of the varied nature of traumatic events impacting whole school communities, specific mental and behavioral health response plans are most successfully developed after the incident. They should be developed in response to what has occurred and to who is impacted, ideally spearheaded by a nimble, resourced team. "Navigating Crisis Together" can support you in your response plan, after an incident. However, proactive teaming, trust building, and considerations related to the unique nature of your school community are crucial and can and should be done proactively. The TOOLS support that process, in concert with "Navigating Crisis Together."

Members of your Mental and Behavioral Health Response Planning Team should be involved in developing and/or updating your school's specific plan and associated training. District wide response teams can use these tools, as can individual school teams. Each school community and response team is different; you can use what is a good fit now, and revisit other items in this guide at a later time if necessary. Think of the tools as jumping off points for digging into your

own process, meeting you where you are. You can and should complement these tools with all the existing district resources and wisdom available to you.

Because it's so foundational to "Navigating Crisis Together," it also must be stated here: Environments and relationships rooted in equity and justice, demonstrated in actions as well as words, are a necessary component of supporting mental and behavioral health before, during, and after a traumatic event – particularly for students, parents and staff impacted by marginalization and oppression. **Proactive, trauma and equity informed universal supports will always be necessary for the success of any crisis response plan to promote positive mental health.**

Tips for Using the TOOLS to Build Your Crisis Response Team:

- Know that it may take multiple sessions to utilize all of these tools; start where you need to start

- Your process should be iterative and adaptive

- Don't let perfect be the enemy of good

- Dream up your north star team, also be real about what's possible

- Seek support from Safe & Connected Schools, including the Guiding Principles

- Refer to "Navigating Crisis Together" often

- Adapt questions and prompts as needed to make best use of your time and process; think of this as a living document

"We need a shift. We can no longer be reactive. We can't wait until after a racist incident to address racism. We can't wait until after an individual or community crisis to address trauma... A proactive, universal approach not only helps individual students impacted by trauma but also creates a more equitable and trauma informed environment for everyone in the school community."
- Alex Shevrin Venet

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Proactively Building Equity-Centered, Trauma-Informed Environments That Support Your Crisis Response

(from Chapter 2 of Navigating Crisis Together)

It would be difficult for any developed/developing crisis response team to reflect on every aspect of school culture and climate, as you build your plan. However, we do encourage you to think through some of the current school wide efforts that can exist alongside your crisis response plan. When it comes to navigating crisis, your universal support approaches truly are foundational to your crisis response plans. They should be talking to each other.

Consider the School Climate, Culture, Equity, SEL, Restorative Justice, etc. efforts that are currently being implemented

For some districts, some of these are interchangeable, overarching/nestled, and some are distinct and discrete; engage with this prompt in a way that works best for your school/district.

Area	Brief description of what's being done	How can it inform your crisis response plan, or be a resource? Remember that you are building a plan to support positive mental and behavioral health following a traumatic incident
School Climate		
School Culture		
Equity		
SEL		
Restorative Justice		
Other:		
Other:		

Are any of these efforts already linked with how your school community navigates crisis? Do you need to consider more linkages?

Notes:

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Enhancing Your Mental and Behavioral Health Response Planning Team

(from Chapter 2 of Navigating Crisis Together)

Members of your Mental and Behavioral Health Response Planning Team should be chosen thoughtfully, with a diverse makeup that reflects your school community as much as possible. Depending on the district, this team may be school based or district wide.

Who is on your current Crisis Response Team?

Include people even if roles and membership aren't formally defined – practically speaking, who are the acting key players in your school or district's response to a critical incident?

Only your team knows how many people should be on your team – 7 is not the answer (unless it is). This team may be your Flight Team, may be parallel to your Flight Team, or may be something else entirely. Each school will have its own needs, interests, and capacities.

Name	Title	Current Role or Assignment on Crisis Response Team (if assigned)

Thinking about how your team has functioned, what critical perspectives, representative of your school community, should be added?

If you don't have a team, think about your dream team. Consider experience, school role, community affiliations, capacity. Note your reflections on areas where you believe additional team members should be added, if possible.

Relevant Experience	Eg: "We need someone on the crisis response team who has experience helping parents access mental health services through OHP" or "We need someone experienced with reducing the risk of suicide contagion."
Role in School Community	Eg: "We need a member who is familiar with all that's going on during recess, given how many critical incidents we've experienced during that time."
Community Affiliations	Eg: "We need someone who is trusted by or knows how to build trust with the Somali Immigrant community."
Decision Making Capacity	Eg: "We need a member who can make decisions about communications to parents, or to be a liaison to a decision maker."
Other:	

Knowing what you know right now, can you get specific about *who* you might ask to join your crisis response team, if there are gaps that need to be filled?

If there are no gaps to fill, and/or no capacity to fill them, you can revisit this question when circumstances change.

Name	Title	Is there a specific role on the Crisis Response Team you'd like them to fill, if they are able?

Members of your Mental and Behavioral Health Response Planning Team should be chosen thoughtfully, with a diverse makeup that reflects your school community as much as possible. Depending on the district, this team may be school based or district wide.

For more information, contact:

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Your crisis response team may not have designated roles like "secretary" and "chair" - or you might, depending on what's already working for your school community. Regardless of whether or not your team has roles, you may want to think about assignments specific to the nature of the incident you are navigating together.

Assignments needed for team members are challenging to predict, and many will need to be identified in the moment, often during the Immediate Aftermath (Chapter 6 in "Navigating Crisis Together) and the Short Term (Chapter 7) phases of your response. It is also recommended that once you establish the frequency with which your team will meet, that you revisit assignments (such as team leader) for fit and capacity. Individual faculty assignments for the team are recommended so that after the crisis occurs, faculty are reminded of their assigned roles and can determine if they are able to perform these tasks, based on their proximity to the event and their own ability to navigate the impact of the situation.

The team leader may also be the liaison to the community, depending on circumstances specific to your school. If not the team leader, someone should be identified to community members as the point person for on-going inquiry, feedback, and accountability.

Questions to consider as you establish your team's liaison to the community

Consider	Notes	Next steps or changes needed:
Who has been acting as the community liaison? If no one has been assigned, can you make this assignment clear and intentional?		Who:
		What:
		When:
What reflections do you have about communication with the school community about your crisis response plan? Does anything need to change?		Who:
		What:
		When:

		Who:
What types of supports does the community liaison need? Think about training needed, breaks, peer support, etc.		What:
		When:
What does your community need from the liaison? Do you need more information from your community to answer this?		Who:
		What:
		When:

All team assignments should take priority over other job assignments following a critical incident, particularly during the immediate aftermath and short term response phases, so that the team can convene quickly when necessary.

Are team assignments able to take priority after a critical incident?

Consider	Notes	Next steps or changes needed:
How is this working?		Who:
		What:
		When:
What needs to change?		Who:
		What:
		When:
Are there expectations that need to shift?		Who:
		What:
		When:

A team leader(s) should be identified, who has the decision-making authority to coordinate assignments and to communicate with the school administrator, in a collaborative manner.

If your team already has a lead, consider these questions together:

Some of these questions may be vulnerable and will require some level of trust and psychological safety to discuss honestly

Consider	Notes	Next steps or changes needed:
Do they have the capacity to continue?		Who:
		What:
		When:
If no, is there another person available?		Who:
		What:
		When:
Do they need additional supports to continue? What are they? *think about training needed, breaks, peer support, etc.		Who:
		What:
		When:
Do they need to delegate more or less?		Who:
		What:
		When:
Does the team lead have the support they need to make quick decisions when necessary? If not, what is needed?		Who:
		What:
		When:
Is there anything about the leadership role that needs to change?		Who:
		What:
		When:

		Who:
Is co-leadership needed?		What:
		When:

If your team does not yet have an assigned leader, consider these questions together:

Consider	Notes	Next steps or changes needed:
Can you assign a leader? If not, what's in the way and how can you address it?		Who:
		What:
		When:
What specific qualities are you looking for in a team lead? Think about experience, role at school, perspective, logistics, etc.		Who:
		What:
		When:
What support will the leader need (refer to table above)?		Who:
		What:
		When:
Can you suggest a name of a specific person? If so, when can they start?		Who:
		What:
		When:

Examples of assignments/roles for Crisis Response Teams

This list is not exhaustive, and is not compulsory - this is meant to support your thinking. Your team assignments will vary based on the specifics of your school community and the critical incidents you experience.

- Team leader

- Community liaison

- Admin: note taking, scheduling, logistics of meeting and planning

- Equity point person, always bringing an equity lens

- Mental and behavioral health lead or liaison

- Accountability and follow through lead (accountability to school community including parents)

- Trauma informed lead, always bringing a trauma informed lens

- Media communications point person (communicating about mental and behavioral health response, not critical incident debriefing)

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Your crisis response team should meet proactively, and continue to meet even when there's no present critical incident.

How often can your team realistically meet?

We suggest quarterly, but also know that schools and districts face several constraints - do the best you can with what you have.

Frequency throughout school year, ie quarterly:

Time allotted for meetings (hours):

Who and how do meetings get scheduled? Assign this if needed.

Suggested agenda items for ongoing Crisis Response Team meetings

Consider these questions in addition to what you typically bring:

- How are we doing? How is our school community doing?

- Are we caring for each other on our crisis response team?

- What feels connective and restorative right now in our school community? How does it speak to our crisis response?

- What has changed in regards to our most recent or pressing critical incident?

- Who in our school community is coming to our attention as needing extra support related to the last traumatic event? What can we do and who will do it?

- How have we observed students, parents, staff showing up for each other? Have we celebrated that as a community?

- What have we learned, since our last meeting, about culture and equity related to the trauma and healing happening in our school community?

- What next steps are needed right now to promote school wide mental and behavioral health?

- Do team assignments need to rotate?

- Does the team need specific resources or training? How can we get those?

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Enhancing Your Community Behavioral Health Resources

(from Chapter 2 of Navigating Crisis Together)

Identify external community behavioral health resources and build relationships, prioritizing communities facing inequities before the crisis.

Consider the following about your community behavioral health resources/relationships:

This won't be an exhaustive list – just do the best you can with the information you have right now.

Mental & Behavioral Health Resource Organization, entity, program, etc. that your school community utilizes	Communities they have trusted relationships with To the best of your knowledge	Primary point of contact, if there is one. Does your team and the org have a shared understanding of their role in your crisis response plan? If not, who can make this happen?

Does your team need to do anything to enhance your relationship with any of these community resources?

Notes:

What are your next steps for doing so?

Notes:

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"Navigating Crisis Together" invites school communities to commit to resisting a standardized approach to mental and behavioral health crisis response. This is a tall order, and many systems and organizations gravitate to standardized approaches in the face of crisis and the unknown. Rather, we suggest you embrace the approaches below as you navigate the uniqueness of each critical incident.

There's no equation for when, where and how to integrate these approaches into your crisis response planning and implementation. They should be considered "evergreen" considerations, and school communities are encouraged to visit these proactively and as often as you are able. You can bring this list to your regular crisis response team meetings, focusing on what's most salient in the moment. Additionally, many of these approaches are interconnected and not always distinct. Below are some examples to aid in your critical inquiry and reflection process.

Consider historical and community context Example: ● Who in our school community has been impacted by this type of traumatic event before? ● What additional factors in the community/city/nation are at play? ● Are school community members impacted by marginalization, inside and outside school, uniquely affected by this incident?	
Honor multiple perspectives Example: ● How we explain trauma and recovery can vary by experience and culture. Are we allowing for multiple experiences at once? ● A sense of urgency in our response feels aligned for some and not for others. How will we reconcile that? ● Different cultures and families express grief differently. Does our plan have enough flexibility to be culturally responsive?	

Recognize and remediate the historical and present day harms that have been done to people with targeted identities within our school communities

Example:

- Is this event related to historical and contemporary oppression, such as racial profiling or transphobic violence?
- If so, has our school caused harm in the past or may be currently causing harm?
- If so, how can we change course through accountability to impacted communities?

  Connect first with communities most impacted to explore what they want and need.

Call upon the strengths of community members in the response; they are the experts in their own healing

Example:

- Invite guest speakers to school wide events, featuring trusted community members.
- Are their parents with skills and strengths related to what our school communities need? Do they want to help us plan some part of our response, like an event, memorial, vigil, or healing activity?

Support students, families and other community members to choose what they need

Example:

- Don't make assumptions about what students, families and community members need as part of your response plan - ask them within your abilities to do so.
- Support educators to facilitate conversations with students about what they need following a traumatic event, and make sure the information gathered is shared with your crisis team and authentically considered; communicate about the outcome of the request even if the answer is "no" - share why.

Share control and decision making about our response with those most affected Example: • Invite those most impacted to meet with the crisis response team if possible, appropriate and desired by those people. Or, have a liaison meet with them about key decisions. Listen to and respect their requests. If you can't, communicate why. • Host school community meetings for planning decisions that can be authentically shifted to those most impacted; do NOT seek feedback unless you can authentically and practically implement said feedback (you can set parameters around decision making, but clear about why and what)	
Challenge white supremacy and other oppressive structures within ourselves and our systems – even and especially when responding to traumatic events Example: • Notice when the response is becoming more about logistics and business as usual rather than a deep exploration of what's needed to promote mental and behavioral health; name it, make a shift. • Consider whose perspectives are being elevated and why. • Always assess who might be left out of planning and response, and be committed to iterative change.	

Call upon the Safe & Connected Guiding Principles regularly to help shape your approaches and inform your decisions

Safe & Connected Schools Guiding Principles

Connection Through Authentic Relationship

Physical and Psychological Safety

Transparency and Accountability

Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

Co-Created, Transformative Responses to Systemic and Individual Harm, Ensuring That Power is Shared with Those Most Impacted

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