



2019 RESPONSE TO SCHOOL WIDE CRISES BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Introduction

In November 2018, the Child and Adolescent Health Center Program (CAHC) initiated a discussion about responses to school-wide crises for all CAHC program models (including Clinical Health Centers, School Wellness Programs, Behavioral Health and RN only models). Some challenging events impact not only individuals, but the school community as a whole. Unfortunately, these types of events are occurring more frequently in schools across the state. While CAHC programs are **not required** to have formal policies addressing school crises; as members of the school community, they are often called upon to respond to these events. This guidance document provides information and resources about school-wide crises that may be appropriate for CAHC programs. The guidance should not be interpreted as a program requirement but rather as **an informational document** for those who decide to pursue a more formal response to school-wide crises.

What is a school-wide crisis?

For purposes of this guidance, a school-wide crisis is defined as: a challenging event or events that impact a sizable portion of the school community. The impact may be primarily emotional, or may involve both physical and emotional spheres. There are various kinds of school-wide crises, and responses will differ depending on the nature of the event. School-wide crises include: natural disasters such as floods, fires, tornados; other events that can result in life-threatening danger and/or physical destruction, as well as emotional loss. Another type of school crisis involves violence. Violence can take many forms including intruders in the school, violence between school community members (e.g. between students), or violence in the larger community that involves and/or impacts school community members. Violence may result in one or more deaths or injury. Violence that happens in the school building is particularly impactful, and affects the sense of safety for students and staff. Finally, a school-wide crisis may result from the death of one or more school or community members due to illness or intentional or unintentional injury. The nature of the death, and connection of the deceased individual(s) to the school community, will impact the breadth and degree of crisis that is experienced.

Responding to school crises

Crisis response begins before a crisis occurs. There has been increased emphasis over the past few years about the importance of planning for crises. Planning emphasizes collaboration between the school community, first responders, and the larger community (e.g. hospitals and mental health providers) to provide safe and effective interventions in the event of a crisis. It involves determining appropriate roles, and may include practicing aspects of the plan such as evacuation or sheltering in place. It also involves planning for all phases of a crisis including prevention, initial/immediate responses and longer-term responses. Crisis response planning involves determining differential responses appropriate to different types of crises. There are many organizations that have developed guidance for developing and implementing crisis response plans. This document includes information about some of those organizations.

Recovery for staff

An important, often overlooked, component of crisis response planning is support and recovery for CAHC and school staff during and following a school crisis. Attending to the needs of staff is vital, if they are to maintain their roles as supports for students as well as educators, health care and mental health providers. Preparation, support during the crisis, debriefing following a crisis, and long-term follow up are all aspects of caring for caregivers that should be included in any crisis response plan. The resource section of this document highlights resources specific to the topic of recovery for staff.

Role of CAHC programs

The role of CAHC programs in school crisis response varies based on multiple factors including: program type (e.g. school-based or school-linked); the CAHC-school relationship, the nature of the crisis, and the policies of the fiduciary organization. CAHC programs are encouraged, at minimum to: know the emergency response plan for their specific schools, and participate in that plan to the degree that is appropriate and possible. Currently, CAHC program involvement related to school-wide crisis occurs along a continuum from active participation in school/community emergency response teams and planning, to little or no participation in school crisis responses.

Role of CAHC state team

The role of the CAHC state team is two-fold: (1) to support individual CAHC programs when they experience a school-wide crisis and (2) to provide technical assistance for the development and implementation of crisis response plans.

In the support role, the assigned administrative and mental health consultants will contact the center's coordinator, and/or mental health provider, to offer support and resources at the time of a school-wide crisis. This response is dependent on the state team learning about the crisis through the media or from members of the CAHC staff.

In the technical assistance role, the CAHC state team will share information and resources about crisis response planning. This document is a first step in that process. The information will be shared electronically and posted on the CAHC website.

Resources for CAHCs

The remainder of this document includes resources that CAHCs may find helpful as they consider implementing, or increasing a school-wide crisis response plan. The resources are contained in the following sections: examples of current practices in CAHCs; resources and guidance from the Michigan Department of Education and national organizations; and training resources. These materials are also posted on the CAHC website and will be updated periodically.

Current practices in CAHCs:

Currently, CAHC programs across the state participate in school-wide crisis response in a variety of ways. The following are examples as reported by those present at the November 2018 CAHC coordinator meeting. The responses are organized by type of participation.

- **Communication:** Several sites identified good communication as their primary strategy for crisis response. For some, this is an informal process based on good relationships with school personnel. For others, specific tools are utilized to increase communication and alert staff to a crisis event. The tools include: walkie-talkies, phone trees, mobile apps, and email notifications.
- **Crisis Planning:** Many CAHC programs participate on school and/or community crisis planning/response teams. In that capacity, the CAHC staff participates in the development and review of emergency response plans. This may happen annually or more frequently in some sites. Participation in crisis response teams ensures that the CAHC staff is aware of specific emergency response protocols and practices. It also increases the likelihood that they will have specific roles in the plan.

Another way that many CAHCs are involved in crisis planning is to participate in emergency response drills such as lock down drills, active shooter drills, fire drills, etc.

- Policy/Protocols: CAHC programs may follow emergency response policies/protocols from one or more sources, including their fiduciary, school building/district, or community-wide teams. Some of these policies/protocols delineate specific roles for CAHC staff, others do not. Some policies address specific situations, such as active shooter events, and others are more broadly framed as crisis or emergency response. Emergency response protocols or policies are required for each school in Michigan. Current guidance for the development of emergency response protocols is discussed in the next section.
- The roles that CAHC programs play in crisis protocols/policies vary. Some examples described by CAHC staff include: participating in drills (as described above); participating on student threat assessment teams; providing safety education to students/parents; serving as a safe haven with lockable doors; serving as a building entry point for police and other first responders; providing mental health services following a crisis; providing school-wide education/debriefing following a crisis; and coordinating with internal and external partners (e.g. community mental health agencies) to provide grief services following a crisis.

State and National Resources

- Michigan State Police and Michigan Department of Education: School Crisis Planning Guidance: This document is in the process of being revised. The current version is available by emailing MSP-SchoolSafety@michigan.gov. The guidance includes information about mitigation & prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.
- Michigan State Police (MSP): The MSP website has information under emergency preparedness and homeland security including a video about Active Shooter responses and information about STEP (Student Tools for Emergency Planning) training. Go to www.michigan.gov/msp, click on Divisions; Emergency Management & Homeland Security; MIREADY.
- National Association of School Psychologists: The NASP has developed a school crisis prevention and intervention training curriculum entitled PREPPaRE. For more information about the curriculum go to their website (www.nasponline.org).
- National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement: The center is dedicated to helping schools through crisis and loss. The center provides crisis response/technical assistance, education & training; and advocacy & research. The website includes additional information and resources (www.schoolcrisiscenter.org)

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: The NCTSN is funded by the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and jointly coordinated by UCLA and Duke University. Their website (www.nctsn.org) includes resources for a wide range of traumatic events including school and community disasters. The site also includes information about training and resources for *Psychological First Aid* (PFA) and *Skills for Psychological Recovery* (SPR). These are promising practices for disaster behavioral health response and recovery.
- Safe and Sound Schools: Founded by parents who lost children at Sandy Hook, the organization provides research-based tools and resources for crisis prevention, response, and recovery to help protect every school and every student, every day. Their website (www.safeandsoundschools.org) contains tools and resources for safer schools.
- US Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, and Justice; FBI and FEMA: A “Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans” was published in 2013. The guide is available at www.2ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/index.html.

Caring for Caregivers

Several of the resources cited above include information about caring for caregivers. The Psychological First Aid curriculum includes a handout about self-care (<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/pfa-s-provider-self-care>). The NCTSN website also has many resources related to compassion fatigue and self-care.

