Chapter 8
Crisis Communication and Management:
Are You Prepared?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides suggestions as to what could be included in a crisis communication and management plan. It is strongly encouraged that a professional review the plan and customize it for the specific needs of a school district or business. This chapter will briefly focus on three main topics of crisis communication and management: 1) pre-crisis/preparedness, planning ahead in the event of a crisis with the main goal of preventing loss of life, injury, or damage to property; 2) active crisis/response, what to expect and what will take place after authorities are on the scene; and 3) post-crisis/recovery, debriefing after the crisis to document what occurred and discuss what could have been done differently.
INTRODUCTION

A crisis generally consists of any event that has a major impact on the normal day-to-day operation of a school or business and/or the health, safety, and welfare of its constituents.

A crisis, such as an armed intruder or a natural disaster, can happen anywhere: a school, shopping mall, church, airport, movie theater, or outdoor event. There is no place that is off limits; therefore, in order to save the most lives, should the unthinkable happen, businesses, school districts, churches, political leaders, and event organizers must be prepared. How the crisis is handled from the beginning by management is critical to the success of the outcome.

This chapter provides suggestions/recommendations as to what could be included in a Crisis Communication and Management Plan. It is strongly encouraged that your organization work with public relations and law enforcement experts to create a custom plan for your specific needs. The crisis plan is not intended to prevent a crisis but serve as a guide on how to react if a crisis were to occur. There are thousands of books and articles written on crisis planning and communication that you are encouraged to research. You may want to include topics that are included in those publications that are not included in this brief chapter, in your final plan.

According to the National School Public Relations Association (1993):

*Any crisis plan will have to be modified to fit individual circumstances, but it is necessary to have a pre-planned, prompt, and coordinated response to what may be a life-threatening situation. Crises throw people off balance. The time to build an intelligent and coordinated response to a potential crisis is when people aren’t under stress, communication is not disrupted, and there’s time for discussion and planning. (p. 616)*

This chapter will briefly focus on three main topics of crisis communication and management:

1. **Pre-Crisis/Preparedness**: Planning ahead in the event of a crisis with the main goal of preventing loss of life, injury, or damage to property.
2. **Active Crisis/Response**: What to expect and what will take place after authorities are on the scene.
3. **Post-Crisis/Recovery**: Debriefing after the crisis to document what occurred and discuss what could have been done differently.
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