

# ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

## PROCEDURES FOR CRISIS RESPONSE

2950  
Procedure No.

April 1, 2012  
Date

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- I. **PURPOSE:** The purpose of this administrative procedure is to ensure effective utilization of school-based and non-school based personnel when a crisis occurs in a school.
- II. **INFORMATION:** All principals are required to form and maintain a school-based crisis team, receive annual training, and review the crisis protocol biannually with staff.
- III. **DEFINITIONS:**
- A. **Crisis:** A crisis is defined as an event which has the potential to disrupt the normal functioning of the school environment and may cause physical and/or emotional harm to the school community. A crisis may be, but is not limited to the following: a death or other traumatic event involving a student or staff member due to an accident, community violence, suicide, suicidal ideation, homicide, illness, natural disaster, or other major events that may severely impact the normal day-to-day functioning of the school.
- B. **Confidentiality:** All crisis information encountered by Prince George's County Public Schools employees is strictly confidential. The names of individuals, along with any information pertaining to the crisis must be protected. Information about the crisis may be shared with individuals within the school system who have been determined to have a legitimate "need to know". A "need to know" is generally determined when sharing information will benefit the student or is needed for the individual to carry out his or her duties.
- B. **School Crisis Team:** The team shall include:
1. Administrator or designee
  2. Professional school counselor
  3. Teacher(s)
  4. School nurse
  5. School psychologist
  6. Pupil personnel worker
  7. Others designated by the principal
- D. **County Crisis Coordinator:** The Office of Professional School Counseling will serve as the **first point of contact** in coordinating crisis response services. In the event of a crisis, the administrator or designee will immediately call the County Crisis Coordinator. The County Crisis Coordinator will dispatch trained crisis responders to the crisis site and may provide phone consultation to the school administrator.
- E. **Crisis Coordinator:** The individual designated by the County Crisis Coordinator to lead the Central Office Crisis Team and crisis response efforts in collaboration with the school administrator.
- F. **Central Office Crisis Team:** The team/crisis responders may include central office administrator(s), professional school counselor(s), school psychologist(s), and pupil personnel worker(s).
- V. **PROCEDURES:**
- A. **Communication:**
1. Refer to Prince George's County Public Schools Crisis Communication Flow Chart (see attachment 1).

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2. Refer to Prince George's County Public Schools Crisis Reference Guide.

B. Eight Essential Elements of Crisis Response:

1. Before School Meeting- Whenever possible, a meeting should be held with all staff prior to the start of the school day. At this meeting, staff is generally given all the information that has been verified to date. Depending on family requests or the sensitive nature of some situations, this might be modified. The staff is informed of the presence of the Central Office Team so they will understand why the team is there and what services are available to them. The morning announcement is shared, if ready, or at least the process is reviewed, including the process to refer students to the Central Office Crisis Team.
2. Classroom Announcements- Teachers read a prepared announcement in all classes that presents the approved/verified facts, possible reactions, and how to seek counseling support if needed. Assistance should be provided to teachers who have difficulty with this task.
3. Letter Home- A short letter approved by the school's administrative team, the Area Office and the Communication's Office should go home that day with each student. It may detail the following:
  - i. the crisis event;
  - ii. the counseling support that was available to students and staff throughout the day;
  - iii. symptoms for parents to watch for that may signify a level of grief or discomfort requiring intervention;
  - iv. information regarding viewings and funeral arrangements if known and if approved by the parent;
  - v. information regarding who to contact with concerns (administrator, school psychologist, school counselor, etc.)

This information may also be made available on the school system's website.

4. After School Meeting- A short debriefing meeting should be held with all staff at the end of the day. At this meeting the administrator should provide up-dated information concerning the crisis event. A member of the Central Office Crisis Team should talk about the activities that were carried out by the team, as well as the plans for crisis response and intervention over the next few days. In addition, the Central Office Crisis Team may refer staff for outside support such as the Employee Assistance Program in case they are having a difficult time dealing with the crisis event. Any follow-up with staff members should be discreet.
5. Memorials- Those considering memorials must remember that all deceased students/faculty must be treated equitably, and elaborate memorials may not be realistic to duplicate in later crises. Often, a memorial can be placed in a quiet location as opposed to a high-traffic area. A temporary memorial should not be displayed for extended periods of time. The location and time frame of a memorial should be announced to the students. If the death was due to a suicide, a public memorial is not advised (see Crisis Reference Guide for more information on memorials and suicide).
6. Family Contact- Affected families should be contacted and support should be offered by the administrator or designee. This designated contact person should obtain information regarding home, hospital, and/or funeral home visitation, and names and enrollments of school-age siblings/relatives. Once the information is obtained, it should be disseminated to appropriate school staff as long as the family has agreed to the sharing of information. Arrangements should be made so that any belongings of the decedent can be collected or delivered to the family.
7. Communication with Media and the Community- The school administrator or designee should coordinate with the Area Office, Security Services (301-449-7000), and/or the Office

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of Communications (301-952-6001) for the release of any information. **No one should speak with the press without approval from the Office of Communications.**

8. Post-Intervention Follow-up- A designated member of the Central Office Crisis Team should continue to assess the needs of the school community and offer support through the school administrator as needed. Such activities may include determining what follow-up is needed for designated students, faculty, and staff members.

### C. Suicide Threat/Ideation:

Students may threaten suicide to school staff or others through verbal, written, or other means. Suicidal ideation is a common term for thoughts about suicide, which may be detailed as a formulated plan, without the suicidal act itself. Most people with suicidal ideation do not commit suicide, but some may make suicide attempts. Staff members have a duty to utilize reasonable means to prevent a suicide. When a staff member becomes aware of a threat by a student to commit suicide, whether directly from the student or from other sources, the staff member is **REQUIRED** to **immediately** notify the school administrator. The school administrator then notifies the professional school counselor and/or school psychologist who will then notify the parents/guardians of the threat, even if the student denies the intention.

1. If the individual is a student, refer to the Crisis Reference Guide (see attachment 2).
2. If the individual is a staff member, the spouse, adult child, or other family members are to be contacted. Another staff member should remain with the person until a family member arrives. The supervisor or school administrator must be notified immediately.
3. The school administrator must contact the Area Office of any known adult or student suicidal ideation and/or attempts.
4. Any student returning to school who has been assisted by the above procedures is to be referred to the Student Intervention Team (SIT) to determine if additional support is needed or if a modification in the program is to be made. **Students may not be excluded from school while awaiting a physician's letter or release.**
5. 911 **MUST** be call if no responsible adult can be reached to seek appropriate treatment for the individual, adult or child, making the suicidal threat or gesture.

### D. Notification of a Risk to Self or Others After School Hours

After the Prince George's County Public Schools Central Offices have closed, a teacher or other school employee may be made aware of or discover that a student may be at serious risk of harm (by others or by his or her own actions). The risk may be discovered through a variety of methods including, but not limited to, a phone call, text message, social media posting, word-of-mouth, and/or work sample. The following actions must be taken:

- The employee must **immediately** call the parents/guardians and notify him/her of the risk and request that they seek appropriate intervention for their child or call 911 for immediate assistance.
- The employee must **immediately** alert the school administrator.
- In situations when the employee has determined that the student is of high risk for harm to self or others AND the parents cannot be reached, the employee must **immediately** call 911.
- The school crisis team must be notified by the start of the next school day.
- The school administrator must notify the Area Office at the start of the next school day.

- E. Roles: The members of the Central Office Crisis Team will have specific roles and responsibilities when responding to the crisis event.

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1. **Crisis Coordinator:** The Crisis coordinator manages activities of the team and interacts with the school's administration to carry out the following responsibilities:
  - i. Meets with the school administrator or designee prior to the start of the school day, if possible, to set the agenda for that day and plan for the morning meeting. The Crisis Coordinator will gather as much additional information as possible concerning the incident.
  - ii. Coordinates the incoming Central Office Crisis Team members and other support staff, to ensure that everyone knows their role and responsibilities, and works in conjunction with the building administrator in order to help identify staff members who may be affected by the crisis and provide them with assistance.
  - iii. Provides crisis responders with sign-in sheets for students in order to keep track of students and staff referred to the team to ensure that all are given assistance, and direct team members to their assigned locations.
  - iv. If appropriate, separates close friends and relatives of deceased/affected students for small-group announcement of the crisis and follow-up discussion.
  - v. Assists staff in the writing of the student and staff announcements about the crisis event and discusses with the building administrator the possible need for rescheduling upcoming events, such as standardized testing programs, fire drills, etc.
  - vi. Helps develop and disseminate a letter to go home at the end of the day that includes known facts concerning the crisis and possible reactions that parents might observe in students at home.
  - vii. Helps staff determine the appropriateness of class projects related to the crisis event.
  - viii. Coordinates with professional school counselors to intervene with students who are at-risk (e.g., students who have experienced recent loss or students who may be at risk for suicide) and monitors those students who are directly involved in or affected by the crisis.
  - ix. Assigns a team member to discuss the incident with support staff (cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, volunteers, substitutes, and any other support staff).
  - x. Arranges an after school meeting for the Central Office Crisis Team to meet with the school administrator to debrief, evaluate the crisis response, and determine interventions needed for the following day(s).
  
2. **School Administrator or Designee:** The School Administrator or Designee coordinates the development and dissemination of information and resources to staff, parents, and students in collaboration with the Crisis Coordinator. In addition, the School Administrator or Designee:
  - i. Verifies information concerning the crisis, which may involve phone calls to the police and/or the families involved.
  - ii. Notifies the Area Instructional Director, the County Crisis Coordinator, and the School Crisis Team of all information known about the crisis and the actions taken (see attachment 1: the Prince George's County Public Schools Crisis Communication Flow Chart).
  - iii. Updates faculty phone numbers frequently and establishes a telephone/communications tree.
  - iv. Schedules an emergency faculty meeting before the start of school to brief the staff about the crisis situation.

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- v. Notifies families using RoboCall of the crisis, the provided support, and the letter to be expected at the end of the school day.
  - vi. Works with the crisis coordinator to help identify staff members who may need special assistance (e.g., breaks from class, support in reading the announcement, or leading follow-up discussions).
  - vii. Works with the crisis coordinator to identify and utilize members of the School Crisis Team.
  - viii. Arranges for rooms (large and small) for crisis team members to work with students.
  - ix. Provides crisis team members with a floor plan of the school and a list of faculty and their room numbers.
  - x. Identifies close friends and siblings of the victim/deceased who attend other schools and notify their schools of the crisis situation.
  - xi. Stops any notifications that may be sent home (report cards, disciplinary letters, attendance letters, etc.) for the deceased.
  - xii. Provides an approved written statement that includes the facts that will be disseminated to staff in consultation with the help of the Central Office Crisis Team and School Crisis Team.
  - xiii. Prepares an announcement to be read in all classes at a set time so that all students are given the same information concerning the crisis event.
  - xiv. Convenes an after-school staff meeting that can include disseminating information, updating facts about the crisis event, obtaining information about the emotional functioning of staff and students, determining the need for follow-up support and the procedures used.
  - xv. Determines memorial procedures (with help of the School Crisis Teams and consultation with the Crisis Coordinator).
  - xvi. Provides a brief summary of the crisis response to the appropriate Area Instructional Director and the Office of Communications.
3. Crisis Responders: Crisis Responders provide support and strategies to assigned groups of students and staff. Crisis Responders:
- i. Maintain an attendance sheet with crisis responder's name as well as students who were seen. Children who may benefit from follow-up at a later date and/or a call home should be indicated.
  - ii. Lead guided-activities such as memory books, cards, drawings, journals, lists, honoring someone's memory, making a large mural, etc.
  - iii. Model physical calming activities such as progressive muscle relaxation and deep breathing.
  - iv. Teach students skills and strategies necessary to reenter the classroom.
  - v. Provide students with take home skills and/or a plan of what to do when experiencing grief at home.
  - vi. Familiarize students with what emotions may result from grief so that they can monitor themselves and look out for others who may be experiencing grief as well.
  - vii. Proofread any materials (such as cards addressed to families) that are collected to ensure their appropriateness.

F. Crisis Team Review Meetings:

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1. School Crisis Teams shall meet, at a minimum, quarterly to review procedures, discuss previous crisis response intervention activities, and to receive training and updates on new information and resources.
2. Central Office Crisis Team members should meet triannually to review procedures, discuss previous crisis response intervention activities, and to receive updates on new information and resources.

G. Professional Development:

1. School Administrators shall review procedures for crisis responses with all school employees annually.
2. The Central Office Crisis Team shall receive professional development annually.

V. **RELATED PROCEDURES:** Administrative Procedure 5162, Emergency Care in School; Administrative Procedure 6114.7, Emergency Operations – Under Condition of Actual or Threatened Fire or Explosion - Bomb Threats - Bomb Devices or Suspicious Packages; Administrative Procedure 6115, Emergency Procedures-Under Conditions of Armed Suspects in Schools/on Grounds, Hostage/Barricade in School Facilities; Administrative Procedure 6116, Emergency Procedures-Under Conditions of Unauthorized Departure of Student from School or Facility, Child Stealing/Kidnapping/Abduction; and Administrative Procedure 10201, Disruptive Acts Requiring Security Measures.

VI. **MAINTENANCE AND UPDATE OF THESE PROCEDURES:** These procedures originate with the Division of Student Services. Regular updating of these procedures will be accomplished as needed.

VII. **CANCELLATIONS AND SUPERSEDURES:** This Administrative Procedure cancels and supersedes Administrative Procedures 2950, dated March 1, 2003.

VIII. **EFFECTIVE DATE:** April 1, 2012

Approved by:  
William R. Hite  
Superintendent of Schools

Attachment 1: Prince George's County Public Schools Crisis Communication Flow Chart  
Attachment 2: Administrator's Checklist For Responding To A School Crisis

Distribution: Lists 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, and 12