



Lesson Learned: Communication and Planning Enhance Flexibility

In 2007, administrators at Heidelberg Middle School received an evacuation order that took the students out into inclement weather and away from their rehearsed evacuation site. Despite these obstacles, all seven hundred students left the school in silence and gathered at an alternative evacuation site in another building. While the actual threat turned out to be a false alarm, the lessons learned from this successful evacuation are real.

Throughout the incident, the staff and the students stayed alert and calm. “Our staff just filled in where they were needed,” explained Principal Stephanie El Sayed. “It’s really a beautiful thing to watch.”

It was no accident that the Crisis Management Team, led by Assistant Principal Susan Gehring, was able to respond flexibly. Through the years they have made a point of working with installation officials to prepare for any unforeseen circumstances that could arise in a crisis. Having relationships and procedures in place that are built upon mutual trust paid off during the incident.



When the initial alert was received, the staff immediately implemented their crisis management procedures and the designated crisis team member remained in constant communication with authorities. Since emergency responders had worked with the school they knew where the usual evacuation site was located. For security reasons, they directed school personnel to a different location.

Not only did the adults remain calm during the incident, but the students behaved exceptionally well. The students remained silent, took the situation seriously, listened to the instructions to move to the new evacuation site, and did so expeditiously. Principal Stephanie El Sayed attributes this to the fact that the teachers, and the students themselves, had been well-briefed and rehearsed on crisis response. “Some people say practice makes perfect. At Heidelberg Middle school, we say ‘Practice Makes Permanent.’ Our students and staff know what to do in a crisis and understand the importance of practicing exercises.” ■

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Red Ribbon Week October 18-26, 2008

Red Ribbon Week is a timely way to engage students in events and discussions focused on living and staying drug-free. This annual observance pays tribute to the memory of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Special Agent Enrique Camarena who was killed by drug traffickers on February 7, 1985.



By wearing red ribbons and participating in community anti-drug events, young people honor the sacrifice of Agent Camarena by pledging to live drug-free lives.

Red Ribbon Week can also be fun for students. The U.S. Department of Justice offers a booklet entitled *101 Ideas for Red Ribbon Week*. Following are five examples:

- ◆ Have students make large red tissue-paper flowers and give them to parents as a pledge to stay “Drug Free.”
- ◆ Have students form a circle around the school and hold a red ribbon. Then, have each person say why they are “Drug Free.”
- ◆ Organize a run, with “Drug Free” pledges.
- ◆ Add a red ribbon to your Halloween costume.
- ◆ Have students create spooky, “Drug Free” messages (Drugs are Scary!).

Red Ribbon Week started as a series of local clubs in Camarena’s hometown of Norwalk, California. Student club members pledged to lead drug-free lives in memory of their local hero. Within two years the National Family Partnership was coordinating Red Ribbon Week events

at schools across the nation with President and Mrs. Reagan serving as the National Chairpersons.

For more information about how your school can participate in Red Ribbon week, check out *101 Ideas for Red Ribbon Week* at www.usdoj.gov/dea/ongoing/red_ribbon/101RedRibb_Bklt.pdf. To download a Red Ribbon Week Planning Guide, go to www.nfp.org/. ■

Study Finds Students Going Online for Suicide Prevention

Suicide hotlines have been around since Chad Varah founded the Samaritans in England in 1953. Sometimes called “Emotional Support Hotlines,” they provide telephone counseling and support to people of all ages who are in distress. A recent study, however, has found that teenagers are more likely to turn to the Internet for support instead of talking to a counselor or calling a hotline.

The study, led by Elaine Greidanus at the University of Alberta, found that the online support worked somewhat differently than the telephone support. Students familiar with online social networking appreciated these differences. For example, due to the nature of online threads, students who had initially logged-on to receive support often offered help to others. Greidanus pointed to students writing messages such as, “Stop hurting yourself, I care for you,” and “You should go see a doctor.” She noted that these messages help students develop a sense of community with their peers.

Understanding how adolescents interact with one another on the Internet can create new approaches to helping distressed youth. For live online suicide prevention resources, visit www.befrienders.org. ■

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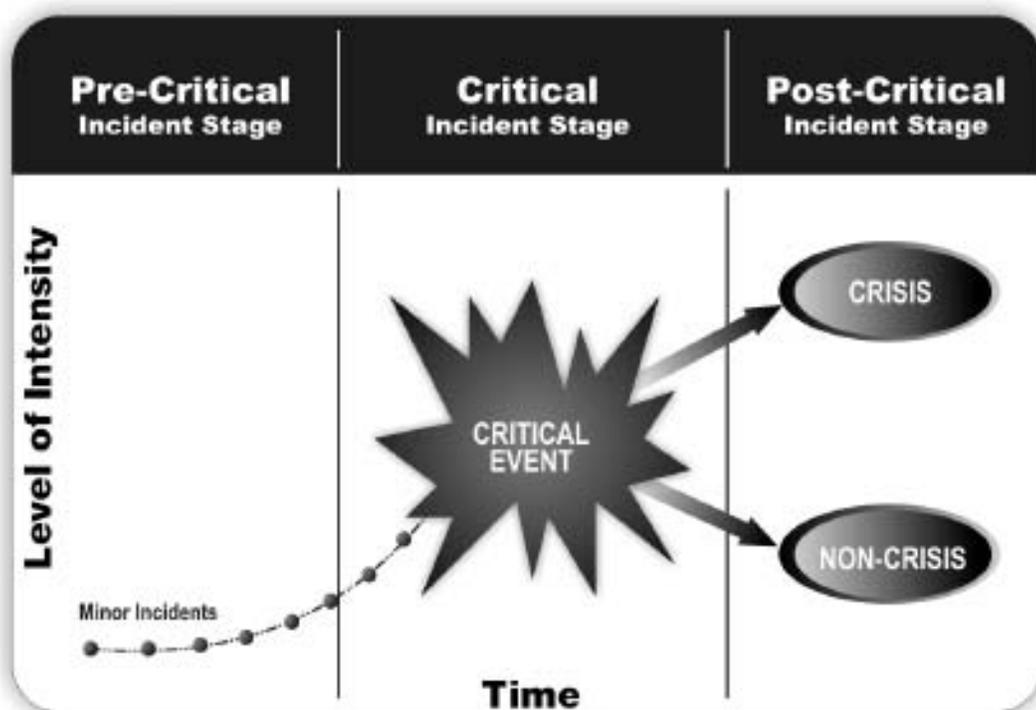
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Risk Reduction Makes the DoDEA Safe Schools Program Different

The distinctive characteristic of DoDEA’s Safe Schools Program is the emphasis on Risk Reduction. Most approaches to school security dwell on how to respond to a critical incident. Although Crisis Management is important, and DoDEA provides several resources to assist administrators and Crisis Management Team members in preparing to respond to incidents, DoDEA’s Safe Schools Program concentrates on using policy, prevention programs, and physical security to address vulnerabilities and students’ problems before they escalate.

In May 2007, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) testified to the House Homeland Security Committee that most schools had Crisis Management Plans in place. Typically, these plans covered preparation and response to various types of hazards. However, DoDEA’s Safe Schools Program includes not only how to respond to an incident, but also how to reduce the risk of an incident occurring by addressing observable behaviors as soon as they are detected.

The normal worries of childhood and adjustment to adolescence can be compounded by bullying and concern for parents deployed overseas. All of these factors contribute to students’ psychological stress. The Incident Escalation Graphic at right depicts how a vigilant Crisis Management Team can help students by addressing observable behaviors. The dots leading up to the potential critical event symbolize observable behaviors such as:



- ◆ A student crying between classes,
- ◆ A normally prompt student suddenly becoming tardy, or
- ◆ A sudden decrease in academic performance.

These are a few examples of the seemingly innocuous observable behaviors which present opportunities for further investigation by vigilant administrators. Throughout DoDEA, counselors and school psychologists have worked closely with administrators and faculty to streamline the procedure for student referrals. In some schools, the same crisis management teams that meet to plan how to respond to a major incident convene on a regular basis to discuss how to provide extra support to students exhibiting signs of psychological stress.

Concentrating security efforts on risk reduction provides both near- and long-term benefits for the school. The long-term benefits include a decrease in violence and self destructive behaviors. The near-term benefit is an improvement in school climate. When students see how the administrators, counselors, and educators work together to support those experiencing psychological stress, it creates a climate of trust in the school. ■

Tips for Children and Teens with Grieving Friends and Classmates

Administrators across DoDEA currently use the guidelines developed by The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) to help children deal with loss. The guidelines also contain information about how young people, and even adults, can be supportive and helpful to grieving peers. The following are excerpts from those NASP guidelines on helping children grieve:

- ◆ Particularly with younger children, it will be important to help clarify their understanding of death.
- ◆ Seeing their classmates' reactions to loss may bring about some fears of losing their own parents or siblings, particularly for students who have family in the military or other risk related professions. Children need reassurance from caregivers and teachers that their own families are safe. For children who have experienced their own loss (previous death of a parent, grandparent, sibling), observing the grief of a friend can bring back painful memories. These children are at greater risk for developing more serious stress reactions and should be given extra support as needed.
- ◆ Children (and many adults) need help in communicating condolence or comfort messages. Provide children with age-appropriate guidance for supporting their peers. Help them decide what to say (e.g., "Steve, I am so sorry about your father. I know you will miss him very much. Let me know if I can help you with your project . . .") and what to expect.
- ◆ Help children anticipate some changes in friends' behavior. Grieving friends may act differently, but this should not be a lasting change in their relationship.
- ◆ Explain to children that their "regular" friendship may be an important source of support for friends and classmates. Even normal social activities such as inviting a friend over to play, going to the park, playing sports, watching a movie, or playing outside may offer a much needed distraction and sense of connection and normalcy.
- ◆ Children need to have some options for providing support – it will help them deal with their fears and concerns if they have some concrete actions that they can take to help. Suggest making cards, drawings, helping with chores or homework, etc. Older teens might offer to help the family with some shopping, cleaning, errands, or with babysitting for younger children.
- ◆ Encourage children who are worried about a friend to talk to a caring adult. This can help alleviate their own concern or potential sense of responsibility for making their friend feel better. Children may also share important information about a friend who is at risk of more serious grief reactions.
- ◆ Parents and teachers need to be alert to children in their care who may be reacting to a friend's loss of a loved one. These children will need some extra support to help them deal with the sense of frustration and helplessness that many people are feeling at this time.



NASP has made these materials available in order to promote the ability of children to cope with unsettling loss. For information on helping students grieve, visit NASP at www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/griefwar.pdf. For more information on grief counseling, refer to the *DoDEA Crisis Management Guide*, available online at www.dodea.edu/instruction/crisis/resources/docs/DoDEA_Crisis_Manag_Guide_07.pdf. ■

Students Are Protecting Personal Information Online

Many teenagers are using social networking Web sites such as Facebook and MySpace to create a personal profile which connects them with other users. Commonly, users link their profiles to those of friends and other people whom they know personally. While social networking sites can be used to communicate with friends, play games, and post digital media (pictures, music, videos, etc.), it requires a careful balancing act to share interesting personal information with friends while at the same time protecting that same information from people they do not know.

Many students are, however, effectively maintaining their online privacy. An April 2007 report by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, entitled *Teens, Privacy, and Online Social Networks*, found that the majority of teens with online profiles were taking some measures to protect their personal information online. Pew is a non-profit organization that studies the impact of the Internet on children, families, and communities, schools, and health. The study found that of teens with profiles:

- ◆ 79 percent have included photos of themselves.
- ◆ 61 percent have included the name of their city or town.
- ◆ 49 percent have included the name of their school.

When it came to more personally revealing information, the majority took more comprehensive security steps. For example, only nine percent included their last names. Additionally:

- ◆ 40 percent included their instant message screen name.
- ◆ 39 percent linked to their blog.
- ◆ 29 percent included their e-mail address.



This screenshot of a Facebook Web page shows the menu where a user can change their "Privacy Settings." All major social networking Web sites, blogs, and Instant messaging programs allow users to control who can contact them online and what information is visible to the public.

Though these numbers are somewhat reassuring, the report also points out that "63 percent of teens with online profiles believe that a motivated person could eventually identify them from their online profile." In fact, 32 percent of all teens using the internet, and 43 percent of teens using social networking sites, say that they have been contacted online by someone they did not know.

Most social networking sites provide privacy or security settings that allow profile creators to limit access at differing levels. If you have specific questions about the privacy settings on social networking sites, send them to safeschools@csc.com. For more information on cybersecurity programs for students, visit the DoDEA Office of Safety & Security Web site at www.dodea.edu/offices/safety/safeSchools.cfm?sid=5. ■

Comic Book Teaches Substance Abuse

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has collaborated with Marvel Entertainment and the Elks USA to develop a special comic book that discourages substance abuse. The comic book, *Hard Choices*, teaches drug awareness to fourth through eighth graders. According to SAMHSA, *Hard Choices* urges kids to become “real-life heroes by making healthy choices.” The comics use superheroes to educate students about the dangers of drugs and alcohol.



SAMHSA's free comic book, Hard Choices, uses known superheroes to teach students about the dangers of substance abuse.

Students can read this free resource as a traditional comic book or view it online. An interactive version is available at www.marvel.com/news/comicstories.1735.Spidey~and~the~FF~in~a~Drug~Awareness~Video~Comic. To order more than five paper copies, fax a request to (240) 221-4292. Include a name, address, phone number, e-mail, and the number of copies requested.

SAMHSA includes a free hard copy of the *Hard Choices* teacher's guide with requests for 25 copies or more. The teacher's guide features interactive activities for educators, parents, and youth leaders to use with kids. A PDF version of the teacher's guide is available online. For more information on the *Hard Choices* comic book or other substance abuse prevention strategies, contact the Safe Schools team at safeschools@csc.com. ■

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Meet the Team: Bert Garcia, Security Analyst

Bert Garcia, a graduate of The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., brings an engineer's perspective to the Safe Schools Team. Bert has supported the DoDEA Safe Schools program since 2003, helping DoDEA administrators to integrate crisis management and security planning with technology.

One of Bert's key contributions to the team is his extensive knowledge and familiarity with the technology that students use daily. He writes about cybersecurity and Internet safety for the Safe Schools Newsletter, translating technical jargon into lay terminology. Bert recognizes that keeping kids safe online may be a journey into uncharted territory for many educators and parents. But he believes anyone can learn how to keep kids safe online: “We shouldn't be intimidated by evolving technology,” explains Bert. “We can all learn how new computer programs, Web sites, and gadgets are used, and we can teach students how to use them safely.”

Outside of the office, Bert is an avid cyclist, and is a volunteer white water kayaking and rock climbing instructor for local youth organizations. If you have a question about internet safety, send it to Bert at sgarcia22@csc.com. If he doesn't know the answer, he will find it. ■

