



A crisis can happen at any time. Crises such as a school shooting, student suicide, or death of a teacher can emotionally debilitate teachers and students. If a friend or family member has been seriously injured or killed, a home damaged, or school environment changed, there is a greater chance that the child will experience difficulties coping. Whatever the circumstance, the emotional effects on children can be tremendous. These external factors have a direct impact on the child's mental and emotional feelings. This could result in the need for crisis management and intervention.

Why is crisis information important?

When compared to their developmental peers, children in crisis

- Have lower levels of academic performance
- Are more likely to exhibit changes in behavior
- Are more likely to feel more anxious or worried than usual
- Are more likely to have anger or conduct problems
- Are more likely to isolate themselves from friends or family, or have a sudden, new group of friends
- Might have the inability to concentrate
- Are more likely to hurt other people, destroy property, or harm themselves
- May resort to drugs and/or alcohol to ameliorate the pain
- Are at risk for suicide

Age appropriate reactions and related symptoms associated with crisis

- Sadness and crying
- School avoidance
- Physical complaints (headache or stomach ache)
- Poor concentration
- Irritability
- Regressive behavior
- Aggressive behavior
- Anxiety
- Confusion
- Withdrawal/social isolation
- Attention seeking behavior

Early Adolescence

- Withdrawal/isolation from peers
- Loss of interest in activities

- Rebelliousness
- Generalized anxiety
- School difficulty, including fighting
- Fear of personal harm
- Poor school performance
- Depression
- Concentration difficulties

Adolescence

- Anxiety and feelings of guilt
- Poor concentration and distractibility
- Psychosomatic symptoms (e.g., headaches)
- Antisocial behavior
- Agitation or decrease in energy level
- Poor school performance
- Peer problems
- Withdrawal
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed

When is help needed?

Help from a physician or mental health professional will be needed if the child or adolescent:

- Threatens or attempts suicide
- Has reactions that interfere with daily functioning over a prolonged period of time
- Re-experiences the trauma through flashbacks, hallucinations, or constant reenactment through play with other children
- Exhibits aggressive, violent, or intensely irrational behavior
- Excessively uses alcohol and/or drugs

What can educators do about it?

- Become a more active observer of student behavior in and around the classroom.
- Consult with school personnel who are trained in crisis response and crisis intervention.
- Inform caregivers and school clinicians about your observations of the student.
- Educate students regarding likely responses to the crisis.
- Give students an opportunity to discuss their feelings and reactions to the crisis.
- Create a feedback loop with caregivers and school clinicians to reassess student symptoms.

- Ask school clinicians to present on different treatment approaches for crisis intervention and management.
- Use empathy and listen in a non-critical and non-judgemental manner when students are discussing their feelings.
- Allow students to express themselves through other modes of communication, especially those students who are hesitant to verbalize their feelings.
- Develop classroom activities and assignments, and homework assignments that address students' feelings regarding crisis.

Crisis intervention is ongoing. Further discussions may need to ensue and address residual feelings regarding the crisis.

Resource Links

National Association of School Psychologists

When It Hurts to Be a Teenager

<http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/mental-health/mental-health-disorders>

National Association of School Psychologists

Communiqué Depression: Helping students in the classroom. Vol. 35(3) by Huberty, T. (2006).

https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Resources%20and%20Publications/Handouts/Families%20and%20Educators/Depression_Supporting_Students_at_School.pdf

National Center for PTSD

PTSD in Children and Adolescents

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/specific/ptsd_child_teens.asp

National Alliance on Mental Illness

A Family Guide: What Families Should Know about Adolescent Depression and Treatment Options

<http://cpancf.com/pdf/namifamilyguidedepressionadolescentsandchildren.pdf>

Youth Suicide Prevention School Program

Maryland State Department of Education

<http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DSFSS/SSSP/Suicide/index.aspx>

Mental Health First Aid Maryland

<http://www.mhfamaryland.org/>

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an initiative of



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