



MASSACHUSETTS  
GENERAL HOSPITAL

PSYCHIATRY ACADEMY

# Crisis Management in School Settings

Michael Jellinek, MD

Former Chief, Child Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital  
Professor of Psychiatry and of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School



# Disclosures

## **If you have disclosures, state:**

“My spouse/partner and I have the following relevant financial relationship with a commercial interest to disclose:” followed by disclosures

**or**

## **If you do not have disclosures, state:**

“Neither I nor my spouse/partner has a relevant financial relationship with a commercial interest to disclose.”

**Note:** Disclosures must match the information provided on your disclosure form.



# Crisis

A time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger...often when decisions have to be made.

Death – Homicide, suicide, chronic disease, serious accidents

Senior leader - Initiate immediate response



# Crisis Team Goal

## Goal:

- Create an environment that “holds” the community lowers anxiety
- Restore equilibrium
- Sense of safety
- Connectedness,
- Provides leadership

Crisis team members are also under stress, have their own worries and memories. They will need to maintain their perspective under stress and debrief after the event, individually and as a group (Red Cross, reunions).



# Crisis Team Members

Team leader...principal or Asst. principal

School nurse

School psychologist, Social Worker,

Head Guidance Counselor

Dean of students

Senior teachers (well regarded)

Consulting Child Psychiatrist/psychologist

Crisis team members are also under stress, have their own worries and memories. They will need to maintain their perspective under stress and debrief after the event, individually and as a group (value or reunions).



# Crisis Team Tasks

- Get team together quickly, speed over full membership
- Confirm Identities and details of events
- Contact family, one selected contact, and reach agreement on disclosure
- Assign roles - Internal communication, PTO, school board/superintendent, press/media
- Create a concise, accurate disclosure for known facts and specific times for update (keep this and all promises)

Internal disclosure - Phone tree, text, email...Catching up before you start!

- Consider system as disclosure will go to other feeder schools, siblings, system etc.

External Disclosure - School Board, Mayor, press etc.



# Crisis Team Tasks

- Arrange for faculty meeting after school that day or before school the next day.
- Manage belongings, locker, desk etc.
- Manage emerging memorials
- Assess plan for home room meetings and discussions, prepare teachers, talking points, guidance back-up, consider modifications regarding homework, exams, school schedule.



# Crisis Team Tasks

- Assign head of guidance to liaison and lead review of high-risk students with their team (Close friends, depression, substance use, divorce, trauma etc.)
- Have guidance staff checking in with many additional students. (Teachers, home rooms and guidance as a support/safety net for student body).
- Recognize and orient staff to major issues: Anxiety, Guilt, Anger, Powerlessness/no control, previous major loss
- Identify infirmary or separate space for counseling center





# Crisis Team Tasks

- Assess security needs for staff and building
- Follow-up regularly with any school staff directly involved or close to crisis
- Prepare list of internal and external resources to distribute
- Assess/evaluate any external offers of help (Red Cross, “therapists”)
- Use predicted briefings to continue to provide information
- Crisis team to meet as needed, at least twice a day, until resolution
- Debrief key personnel (guidance, nurse, security) twice a day



# Crisis Team Tasks

- Alert parents when student is considered at risk
- Create short-term standing group to plan faculty meetings, homerooms, impact on curriculum, final debriefs
- Create longer-term groups to assess crisis response, short term and any longer-term memorial
- Express appreciation and call outs for helpers throughout crisis
- Consider reunion/debrief/recognition for crisis team



# Crisis Examples

- Senior student suicide by gunshot – Key issue faculty concern about pressure
- Freshman student suicide by hanging in school – Key issue immigrant integration, suicide “prevention”, culture of school
- Reporting of sexual abuse of students, now adults, by teacher – Anger at school administration, peer teacher guilt, culture of safety
- School bus transporting junior high band crash killing 4 students – impact on school, school system, transportation safety



# Takeaways

- Crisis team structure helps balance of views, decision making under stress
- Crisis team is focus point to hold anxiety through communication, safety, returning sense of control
- Short term – Manage crisis, minimize related bad outcomes
- Medium term – Go back to routines, predictability, sense of control
- Long term – Memorials/values, Learnings, Evolution of Culture



MASSACHUSETTS  
GENERAL HOSPITAL

---

PSYCHIATRY ACADEMY

- Questions and discussion