

Promoting Resilience in an ‘At Risk’ World: What Can Public Schools Contribute?

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(narration available audio version only)



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Thank you for joining me in taking a look at “Promoting resilience in an ‘at-risk’ world: what can public schools contribute?” To begin, let’s note that communication is key to successfully handling any crisis situation.

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Crisis Communications Guide & Toolkit

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Being Prepared
BEFORE
A Crisis

Being Responsive
DURING
A Crisis

Being Diligent
Moving
BEYOND
Crisis

Hands-On
Assistance
TOOLS
For
Educators

Note: This site is best viewed with Microsoft Internet Explorer.

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To assist school staff and administrators in meeting their communication needs – before, during, and after a crisis has occurred – NEA created the Crisis Communications Guide & Toolkit.

4 volumes:

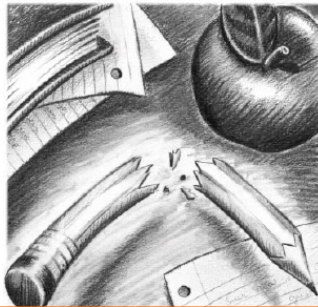
- 1) “Being Prepared - **Before** a Crisis” – developing a crisis plan and concrete procedures, so everyone will know their role and what they need to do before a crisis occurs
- 2) “Being Responsive - **During** a Crisis” –
 - Guidance on how to respond on day 1, day 2, day 3 and beyond.
 - A sample curriculum for handling the first day back at school.
 - Assistance on gauging what is an appropriate level of response.
 - Ideas on how to support resilience and healing in terms of school and district participation in memorials or funeral services, managing the media, responding to copycat threats.
- 3) “Being Diligent – Moving **Beyond** Crisis” – decisions about how to deal with physical reminders of what happened, anniversary dates and other important, benchmarks, such as graduation.
- 4) “Hands-On Assistance: **Tools** for Educators”

Icons are used throughout: Take Action; Get Assistance; State Example, Remember, Tool



VIOLENCE IN COMMUNITIES AND SCHOOLS:

*A Stress Reduction Guide
For Teachers And Other School Staff*



Contents

- Violence and Schools: Separating Myth from Fact**
- Stress 101: A Primer on Stress for School Employees**
- Reducing Violence-Related Stress in Schools**
 - **Identifies Top 4 Stressors**
- Recommended Resources**

After the terrible, high-profile incident at Columbine High School in Colorado, there was increased concern about the impact of violence-related stress on teachers and other school staff. So, the NEA Health Information Network teamed up with SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services to produce a 42-page guide, *Violence in Communities and Schools: A Stress Reduction Guide for Teachers and Other School Staff*. This guide presents statistics on violence in schools, which indicate that schools are actually among the safest places of all for kids, and an overview of stress, called Stress 101. It also presents, in section III, what an advisory group saw as being the top 4 stressors in relation to school safety concerns.



SECTION III
REDUCING VIOLENCE-RELATED STRESS IN SCHOOLS

Accompanying Stress Self-Assessment Measures:

- 1) Connection v. isolation and influence v. powerlessness.
- 2) Skills and/or training needed to meet demands of job.
- 3) Campus administration/management issues.
- 4) Safety concerns.

a tool for advocacy/change

Section III also presents recommendations
for how to address each of four stressors..

To accompany that section, they also provide a stress self assessment instrument, developed by a psychologist with expertise in developing valid and reliable assessment tools, that measures these 4 stressor domains – 1) do I feel connected or isolated at school? Do I feel that I have opportunities to influence what goes on at school or do I feel powerless?, 2) Do I have adequate skills or training to handle what comes my way and what’s asked of me?, 3) Are there campus administration or management issues, such as the level of support that I feel I receive from my principal?, and 4) Do I have concerns about safety at school? If needed, this assessment instrument can be used, along with the stress guide, as a tool for advocacy and change. Ideally, it can be helpful to have everyone at school complete the assessment, turn in their results anonymously, and then be given an opportunity to compare their own, individual results with the overall average. Section III of the guide presents a list of recommendations that specifically address each of the 4 stressors measured.

Contributions to Resiliency After a Crisis Occurs

Protective Factors

- Connections provide sense of belonging.
- High expectations convey focus on strengths and assets.
- Caring relationships are sources of understanding, respect, and trust.
- Participation in meaningful activities contributes to self-esteem.
- Stabilizing routines help re-establish normalcy.

In the days and weeks following Sept. 11, schools did an incredible job contributing to the mental health of kids -- and, in many cases, to the well-being of adult school staff too. Let's look at some of the protective factors -- factors that contribute to resiliency in difficult times -- that exist in school environments.

[read slide]

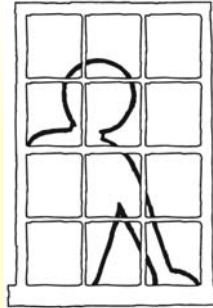
On Sept. 11 and beyond, teachers and other school staff contributed greatly to the mental health of the country by connecting with what was right, with what was working, with what was still okay. In the media, we heard and read a lot about PTSD – post-traumatic stress disorder. We saw lots of checklists of symptoms to identify those who needed help. With resiliency in mind, instead of producing another list of symptoms, here's something different.

Focus on Protective Factors

Environment → **Person**

applying resiliency thinking

**Dealing with
trauma and loss:
Practical strategies
for enhancing resilience**



We'll focus, of course, on protective factors. We'll shift our focus from protective factors in the environment to protective strategies for individuals. Applying resiliency thinking, we'll look at "Dealing with trauma and loss: Practical strategies for enhancing resilience."

1 - Normal reactions to an abnormal situation.



what's normal? common crisis reaction symptoms

- Physical: Appetite change, sleep loss, tension, more accident prone.
- Cognitive: "Spacing out," decreased ability to focus or concentrate.
- Emotional: Frustration, anxiety, depression, mood swings, nightmares.
- Interpersonal: Isolation from others, intolerance, distrust, decreased sex drive.
- Spiritual: Emptiness, loss of direction, doubt, apathy.

Experiencing some symptoms for a period of time is considered normal.

The events of September 11th were so extraordinarily abnormal and intense that in NYC, in DC, in Pennsylvania, in states across the country and, in fact, around the world, everyone was impacted. And, for many people, for the first time in their lives, they experienced what essentially could be considered psychiatric symptoms.

The human psyche's natural defense mechanisms were called into play to such an extent that we could consciously notice ourselves experiencing them. In a traumatic and abnormal situation such as this, having "symptoms" doesn't mean that one necessarily has a mental health problem. In fact, for some people, just the opposite is true. Experiencing some symptoms while being exposed to trauma or for a period of time after the trauma or loss has occurred is considered normal. It can be a normal reaction to what is an abnormal situation.

2 – “More to process than my processor can handle.”



Stress symptoms should lessen or disappear over time.

Take comfort and have faith in what we know:

Research and past experience tell us that most people gradually feel and function better over time.

Adapting – helpful tips:

At a minimum, give yourself time to *breathe*.

- *Patience* – give/get permission to recover over time.
- Ask for *help* and *support* from others when needed.
- family - mental health professional - spiritual counselor –

Another difference between what's normal and what's not: stress symptoms should lessen or disappear over time. We're flexing psychological muscle here that we've not had to call on before. So, even though the stressor of terrorism isn't, by its very nature, contained in time and, therefore, hasn't disappeared from our radar screens, the symptoms we experienced earlier should have lessened or disappeared because we've been adapting.

If we're not adapting, then we need to address that honestly by seeking assistance. Assistance can come from many forms -- a mental health professional, a minister or other form of spiritual counselor, from connection to family -- whatever will help us to anchor ourselves emotionally. Sometimes, it takes someone who is specially trained in providing trauma or loss-related mental health care.

3 - Good news! Media literacy works!



Freedom of choice.

- Personal control → Selective exposure.
- Time management reduces stress.

Freedom of speech/press.

- Stay informed – create a personal media consumption strategy.
- Be a pro-active media consumer
 - channel surf
 - talk back
 - engage with other people
- Avoid repetition.

Now, here's some good news -- there's something that we all have at least some degree of control over. Let's put our media literacy skills to work. Exercise personal control over what you watch, what you read and what you listen to. The benefits of media literacy skills are two-fold: (1) you can exercise selective exposure, controlling what you or your children take in and (2) it contributes to time management. No one is served by losing sleep or not getting other basic needs met because they've been being glued to the tv. However, it's also important to stay informed. So, when you do connect with the media, do so actively rather than passively. Ask yourself, what do I need or want to know. Channel surf aggressively. Skim the headlines, check who the author is, consider the source before you give it your time and energy. You probably don't need to see, hear or read the same news stories over and over again. Get the information you need. Take full advantage of our freedom of the press. Get what you need and then disconnect from the tv, the newspaper, the Internet and re-connect with the tangible life that surrounds you.

Now, for tip #4...

4 - Be gentle with yourself and others.

Our American work ethic
can motivate us to show up for life.



In getting there,
let's remember to drive gently.

Be gentle with yourself and others. Let's let our American work ethic motivate us to show up for life. But, in getting there, let's remember to drive gently. Finally, tip #5...

**# 5 - Living with uncertainty –
– it's ok to not know all the answers.**



This new level of uncertainty that
you're experiencing is shared by many –

– including those for whom you have the
greatest respect and admiration.

**Education gives students tools
to develop a sense of mastery over their environment.**

Living with uncertainty - it's ok to not know all the answers. It can help to know that this new level of uncertainty that you're experiencing is shared by many...including those for whom you have the greatest respect and admiration.

September 11 was an unprecedented teachable moment. It's ok not to know all of the answers. Yet, as educators, we want to help the students build a framework for the events of that day. As resiliency thinkers, we know that giving students the capacity to develop a sense of mastery over their environment is one of the best contributions that we can make to help their resilience.

“teachable moments” in history

*President Kennedy’s
assassination*

Vietnam

Apollo Moon Landing

*Martin Luther King’s
“I Have a Dream”
speech*

Birmingham

Johannesburg

Brown v. Bd. of Ed.

Watergate

Oklahoma City

Berlin Wall

Columbine H.S.

James Byrd, Jr.

Matthew Shepard

September 11, 2001

Let’s think for a moment about other “teachable moments” that have become history during the lifetimes of recent generations, including our own. How did these events become incorporated into the curriculum? How are they presented in our text books? How do we handle them in terms of student participation in class and at school?

Resources

- *NEA Crisis Communications Guide & Toolkit (Vol. 1-4)*.
- *Violence in Communities and Schools: A Stress Reduction Guide for Teachers and Other Schools Staff*. + accompanying stress self-assessment
- “Dealing with Trauma and Loss: Practical Strategies for Enhancing Resilience” pamphlet.

This presentation was created with support from/in collaboration with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s Center for Mental Health Services

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Here is a list of the resources covered in this presentation. Be sure to also take a look at the accompanying list of recommended resources for this training package, as well as the discussion points and questions. It’s been a pleasure to share this presentation with you. Thanks for listening!