

The  
Role of Parents  
& Families  
in  
Safe Schools  
& Crisis Response

## **The Role of Parents & Families in Safe Schools & Crisis Response**

*Although incidents of school violence have declined over the last decade, high profile incidents such as those in Columbine and here in Pennsylvania have made it necessary for all members of the school community to address issues of school safety and crisis response. School district personnel understand the importance of prevention, and work with law enforcement and other emergency responders to plan in the event of an emergency. But parents and students play an important role as well. Parents have a vested interest in the safety of*



*their children; this brochure was developed so that parents and families can understand their role in safe schools and crisis response.*

## The Role of Parents in Safe Schools

1. Carefully read all information you receive from your child's school. The school will send updates about safety procedures.
2. Follow all policies and procedures established by your child's school for parking, gaining access, and visitation. Register in the office and obtain a visitor badge even if you regularly volunteer in your child's school. It is important for all staff to know whether persons in the building are authorized to be there. Also, in the event of an emergency, it is important for school officials and emergency personnel to know how many people are in the building.
3. Contact the principal regarding any information you may have regarding the safety of students, such as threats of suicide or violence. Take all threats seriously. Don't ignore them. Don't assume they are jokes. The U.S. Secret Service conducted research on all of the incidents of targeted violence in school since 1974 and released the following findings:
  - Incidents of targeted violence at school are rarely sudden, impulsive acts. Students plan and talk about their idea beforehand. This could include threats in writing or artwork, notes between students, overhearing someone speak of harming someone else, or threats made via email or over the Internet.
  - In 75% of cases, other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or plan to attack, but did not share that information with adults.
  - There is no accurate or useful profile of students who engaged in targeted school violence. We must consider a student's thinking and behaviors, and not the type of student we perceive him or her to be.
  - Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.



- Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. In 75% of cases, the student had considered or attempted suicide.
  - In the majority of cases, the school shooters felt bullied, persecuted, or injured prior to the attack.
  - Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the school shooting.
  - In over 50% of cases, other students were involved with the attacker in some capacity.
4. Talk with your child regularly about personal safety considerations, drug and violence prevention issues, and related topics.
  5. Do not spread rumors regarding incidents. If you have information about a specific incident or if you have questions about a previous incident, contact the school directly. It is important for schools to provide appropriate information on incidents and how they were handled.

### **What Parents Should Know *BEFORE* a Crisis**

1. Schools develop crisis and emergency plans and procedures in collaboration with law enforcement and other emergency personnel. Emergency information is needed from parents in order for emergency responders to be contacted as quickly as possible.
2. Update your child's medical and emergency contact information as soon as there are changes (e.g., medical information, changes in home address, telephone or cell numbers, contact information at work, persons authorized to pick your child up at school, etc.).
3. Provide information on custody orders or other relevant court documents.
4. Know your child's daily schedule and after-school activity schedule.
5. Have a plan so that your children know what to do and where to go in the event of an unscheduled early dismissal.



6. Talk to your children and emphasize how important it is for them to follow instructions from their teachers and school officials during practice drills and during actual emergencies.

## **The Role of Parents *DURING* a Crisis Response**

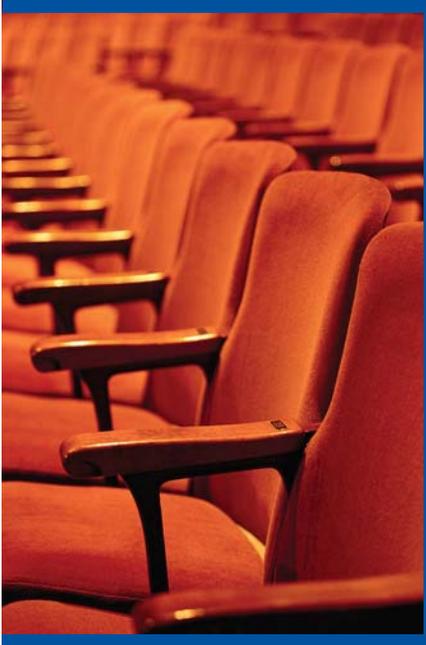
When an emergency situation occurs at a school, the first instinct of parents is to rush to the building to get their children. Understandably, parents want to know that their children are safe. However, it is important for parents to understand that school officials, police, and other emergency personnel are working hard in responding to the emergency and attempting to keep students and staff members safe. Therefore, parents need to understand how they can help school personnel with rescue efforts.



1. Parents need to stay calm and in control.
2. Do not drive to the school unless directed to do so. If many parents rush to the school site, it may interfere with the ability of school personnel, police, and other emergency responders to do their job. Traffic jams can block or delay police or fire vehicles or ambulances. Depending on the emergency, children may not be released from the building until it is safe to do so. Also, traffic may be rerouted away from the site.
3. Do not call the school or 9-1-1. Telephone lines may be overloaded. Instead, listen to your local radio and TV stations for information on what to do and where to go to pick up your children. Based on the emergency, school officials will identify the best location for parents and students to be reunited. Contact the school district administration *before an emergency* to find out how they will communicate with parents in the event of an emergency (e.g., name of radio and television stations, district website, access channel, etc.).
4. School personnel and/or law enforcement will not release children without proper identification from a parent or guardian. Do not send neighbors or others to pick up your child. Children will not be released to anyone other than parents, guardians, or persons listed on the student emergency card.
5. Obey all directions given by authorities (e.g., police, school, fire chief, etc.). Remember they are doing what is best for the safety of students and staff.

6. Parents and guardians must not park in the main access area of the school or fire lanes. These areas need to be accessible at all times to public safety emergency responders.
7. School district personnel, along with emergency responders, will decide whether to shelter-in-place, lockdown, or evacuate.

**Shelter-in-place** is typically used when there is a hazard to health or life threatening situation in the area outside of the school building. School personnel will determine if it is safe to allow anyone to enter or leave the school building. Therefore, parents *may not be able* to pick up children from school.



**Lockdown** is used when there is an imminent danger in or near the school building. This means that students and staff are locked in their classrooms and no one enters or leaves the school building except for authorized emergency personnel. Parents *will not be able* to pick up children from school.

When it is best to **evacuate** the building, school personnel will select sites away from the emergency and provide a process for parents to pick up children.

8. In the event of a bomb threat, no one should use cell phones or other electronic devices in the building. Since many students carry cell phones, they need to understand that the use of a cell phone in the event of a real bomb could be dangerous, and *could actually cause a bomb to detonate*.

## **How Parents Can Help *AFTER* a Crisis**

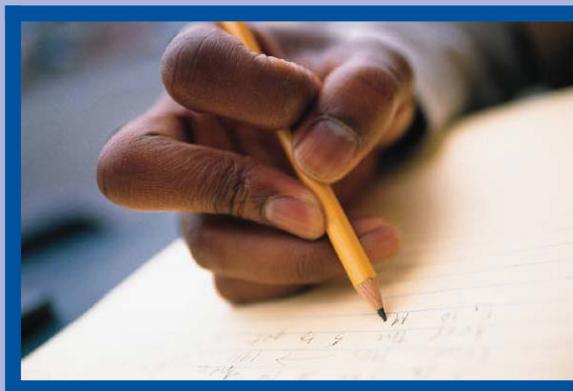
Following an emergency, the goal of the school is to return to a normal schedule as quickly as possible. Trained personnel will be available to assist students and staff in coping with the emotional aftermath of an emergency. Parents can help at home, too.

1. Be a calming influence. Remember your reaction in a crisis will affect your child's reaction.

2. Speak to your child about the crisis and provide accurate information in language that is appropriate for his/her age.
3. Talk to your child about his/her concerns and feelings. There are some children who may experience problems several months after the event. Please ask for help from your child's school.
4. Acknowledge your child's feelings and be a good listener.
5. Monitor what your child sees on the news or other programs. Watching violence or other traumatic events on television can lead to nightmares or increase fears in children.

## **Conclusion**

*We hope that none of our schools experience a crisis that could forever affect the lives of children and adults, but we must prepare for small- as well as large-scale situations. The intent of this brochure is to give basic*



*information to parents and families on their role in safe schools and crisis response. Schools cannot provide a safe environment without the cooperation of everyone.*

*Although most of the information contained in this brochure is relevant to all schools, it is not intended to take the place of the policies and procedures of your child's school district. Therefore, it is extremely important for every parent to understand what will happen in his or her child's school in the event of a crisis or emergency situation.*

