

# THE CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS Playbook

## REMEMBER **FAPE**

- **FACTS:** Share only the facts that are known and are legally public knowledge. Do not speculate. You do not have to wait for all the facts to be known, though, before responding. Waiting too long creates mistrust and fosters misinformation.
- **ACTION:** Share any definitive actions the school district or local authorities are taking. Do not elaborate.
- **PROMISE:** Tell people the steps that you know will be taken and follow-ups to share new information. Let people know you recognize the problem and are responding. Do not promise anything that is out of your control or is speculation.
- **EMPATHY:** Always, always, always emphasize that the safety and well-being of students and staff are your primary concern. Let people know you understand and share their concerns.



## BEFORE THE CRISIS

- **ASSESS YOUR COMMUNITY'S INFORMATION SOURCES.** Establish where the majority of your community gets its information, as well as where specific populations such as caregivers, students, staff and demographic groups go for information.
- **ASSESS YOUR COMMUNICATION CHANNELS.** List the means you have to spread a message, including your channels such as email and a district website and other channels such as a local reporter or community member. Add access or contact information.
- **ASSESS YOUR SPOKESPEOPLE.** List with contact information your primary people for written response and interviews. Lay down the channels of who has to see any response before it goes out, along with contact information and emergency alternatives if someone can't be reached.
- **STRENGTHEN YOUR NETWORK.** Begin now to use your information sources, channels and spokespeople to convey nonemergency information to accustom yourself and your community to these information sources.

## DURING THE CRISIS

1. Gather as much information as you can, preferably in writing.
2. Write down who most needs to be informed and what they most need to know. Target your first communications response to that.
3. Determine how your message will be delivered. The mode should influence the message.
4. Share as much factual information as you can. Do not speculate or elaborate.
5. Center your message on reassuring parents that the children's well-being is your highest priority.
6. Provide next steps if you can, but do not promise anything you can't control.
7. Provide a source for further updates, such as contact information or a website where information will be posted.
8. Check with legal counsel.

## AFTER THE CRISIS

- Determine if students, staff or the public will benefit from any updates on the situation.
- Determine if any new facts have been uncovered or if there are questions that still need to be answered.
- Prepare messages for all your channels, including ones that might not have been used in the initial response.
- Reiterate all the facts that are known.
- Reiterate your central concern for the well-being of the children.
- Let people know if you expect to do further updates.



# Helpful Language

When no children are in danger and you need time to respond, it's OK to tell staff, parents or reporters: "I don't know. I will get back to you."

When a child's welfare is a concern, you can say: "The safety and well-being of our children is our first concern right now. Let me get back to you when I have more information."

## **A BETTER WAY OF SAYING, "NO COMMENT"**

We do not tolerate any behaviors that place our students and staff at risk, and we strive to create a learning environment that is safe for all.

## **CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS COMMANDMENTS**

- **Stay calm and respond quickly**
- **Think before communicating**
- **Inform without alarming**
- **Empathize without admitting**
- **Maintain neutral language on the facts**
- **Speak from the heart on your concern for the children**
- **Never say "No comment"**
- **Ask a lawyer**



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