

School Crisis

Preparing and Responding
to the Death of
a Student or Staff Member

Idaho State Prevention and Support Conference

April 2015

Jeanne Buschine & Donna Decker, West Ada School District

Training Goals

- Share West Ada Crisis Response Plan
- Provide forms, checklists, and other resources
- Brainstorm—gain ideas/resources from similar sized school districts

Crisis is defined as:

a sudden,
generally unanticipated event
that profoundly and negatively affects
a significant segment of the school population
and may involve serious injury or death.



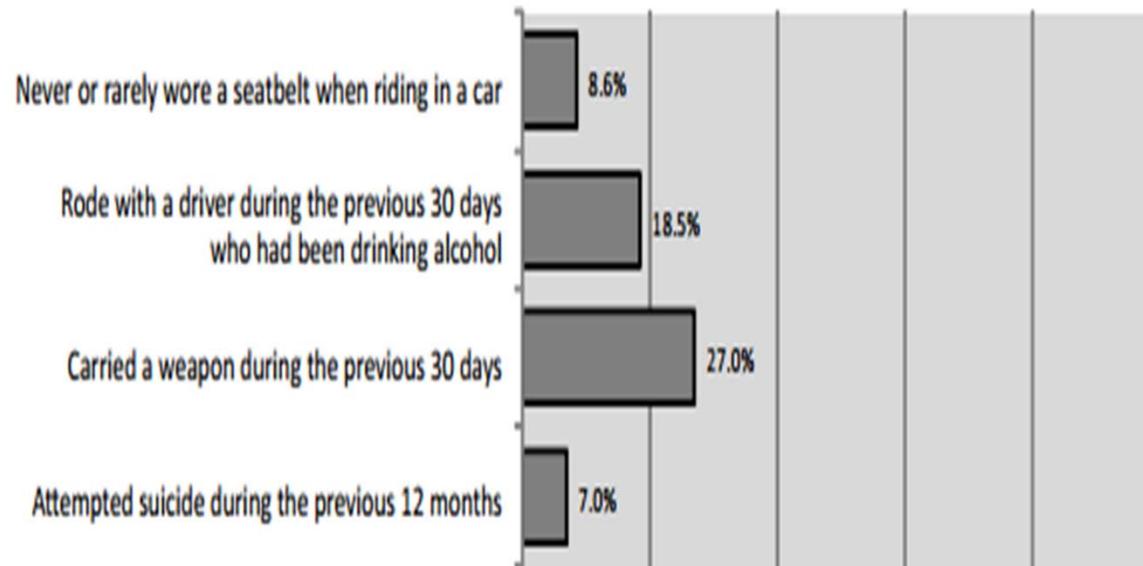
Crisis can be national news and affect a whole community

- Columbine High School
- 9-11
- Virginia Tech
- Hurricane Katrina
- Sandy Hook
- Others?

Summary Results from the 2013 Idaho High School YRBS

Summary Findings—Weighted Data

Percentage of Idaho students who:



Crisis can be smaller and affect a single school or school district but just as impactful to those involved....

In the past 12 months West Ada Crisis Response Team has:

- Assisted another local school district with a school bus accident
- Responded to 2 high school student suicides
- Responded to the death of a teacher

In our experience.....

- All Crisis situations are unique and different.
- Most common type of crisis involves the death of a student or staff member.
- Being prepared to respond helps lessen the impact of the crisis...

Preparing for a crisis

Step 1: Select/Recruit Crisis Response Team

- Characteristics of Crisis Response Team Member **Hand-out**
- Suggested formal training for Crisis Response Members
 - PREP_aRE: School Crisis Prevention and Intervention Training and Curriculum developed by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

For more information go to <http://www.nasponline.org/prepare/>

Conceptual Framework of the PREPaRE Model

P	Prevent and Prepare for psychological trauma
R	Reaffirm physical health and perceptions of security and safety
E	Evaluate psychological trauma risk
P a R	Provide interventions and Respond to psychological needs
E	Examine the effectiveness of crisis prevention and intervention

The duties of the West Ada District Crisis Response Team

- Anticipates potential problems by providing insights learned from prior experiences...
- Assists with planning of morning staff meeting and communication (announcement, letters home, etc.)
- Coordinate the district response (call other schools affected)
- Help work with individuals (students/staff) who are impacted by the crisis

Preparing for a Crisis

Step 2: Preparing for communication

- What will be the most efficient method to notify staff of a crisis?
 - Phone numbers
 - Email
 - District website

- How will parents/students be notified?
 - West Ada uses Blackboard Connect

Communication Lessons Learned

- Group text, building phone tree, etc.
 - Information must be accurate and kept up-to-date
 - Must include ALL staff, certified and classified including part-time staff
 - Practice during a regular work day. Locate and correct errors.
- Be prepared for technology to let you down.
- Keep a printed copy of contact phone numbers.

- Discuss at your table: Why do staff who are not notified have a “heightened response” to the crisis? What crisis communication lessons have you learned in your district?**

Responding to Crisis

Step 1: Verify the Information

Always verify the information

Verification of information is almost always difficult, uncomfortable, and time consuming.

Good sources of information

- Coroner's Office
 - Police Department, School Resource Officer
 - Adult family members
- Discuss at your table: Who's responsibility is it to verify the crisis information? What are the challenges has your school district experienced when verifying a crisis situation?**

Verification Lessons Learned....

- Children and adolescents are not good sources of information.
- Social media is the source of information for students

Responding to Crisis

Step 2: Administrative team notification

Efficiently notify:

- Building Level: Administrators, school counselors, school nurse, school psychologist, secretary/office

- District Level: Superintendent, district office, school board members

- **Discuss at your table: How is this step done in your school district? Who is responsible to notify the building and district level administrators?**

Responding to Crisis

Step 3: Administration team meeting

- Purpose of administrative team meeting is to prepare team members for specific responsibilities.
- In West Ada the District Crisis Response Team often consults with administrative team on these decisions.
- Checklist **Hand-out**

Responding to Crisis

Step 4: Morning staff meeting

“The single best predictor of how students will respond to a crisis event is how the adults around them are reacting. “

Ruof and Harris (1988) NASP Communique.

Morning Staff Meeting

Checklist **Hand-out**

Purpose:

- Decrease impact of crisis
- Check on staff that may be affected
- Provide staff with confirmed information, specific expectations, provide guidance and support

Responding to Crisis

Step 5: Notification of students

West Ada's experience is that secondary students already know before school starts.....(social media). Announcements can clear up misinformation and dispel rumors.

- Discuss at your table: Announcements and moments of silence---In your opinion when are these appropriate to do in a public school? When would they be inappropriate?**

Responding to Crisis

Step 6: Counseling Support for Students

West Ada Model---First Day of Crisis

- PREPaRE Model—one-on-one counseling **Hand-out**
 - Student often returns to class within 30-60 minutes.
 - Students are then monitored for next several weeks.

OR

- Some students will be determined to be highly impacted and are then re-connected to a parent/caregiver and leave school for a period of time.
- Community referrals/resources provided. **HAND-OUT**

School Counselor: Ethical Standards related to Crisis Response

- Responsibilities to Students:** Do no harm.
- Confidentiality:** How will confidentiality can be guaranteed during one-on-one but can it be guaranteed in a grief room?
- Danger to Self or Others:** Duty to inform, duty to refer.
- Group Work:** In what type of situations is this appropriate or necessary?
- Appropriate Referrals:** Gather information ahead of time. Referrals should take into consideration cultural and diversity needs.
- Monitor own (school counselor) emotional and physical health**

Safe Room/Grief Room

Pro's

- Doable method for small school district. Requires fewer school counselors/mental health professionals.
- Allows students to share feelings and talk with others who are impacted.

Con's

- Students are not professional helpers—it is important to have adults in the room monitoring students. Inaccurate information or rumors may be shared.
- No way to ensure confidentiality. Other ethical concerns....
- Students may learn more about the crisis than they need to know—thus grief response can be heightened.
- Some students may come to the grief room/safe room just to get out of class.

Safe Room/Grief Room

□ Discuss at your table: Does your school district use safe rooms/grief rooms? If yes answer the following:

- What procedures/rules do you have about using a safe room/grief room?
- Who is the gatekeeper?
- How many adult helpers are in the room? What training do the adult helpers have?
- How long is a student allowed to stay?
- Are parents notified if their child is in the room?

What if.....with your superintendent and school board's support

In order to provide one-on-one counseling the first day after a crisis

- Small school districts joined together to build a crisis response team?
- Or small school districts identified local mental health providers or trained clergy to volunteer on a crisis response team?
- Challenges for these approaches
 - Trust/Team building; Ethics
 - Training
 - Others?

Responding to Crisis

Step 7: Siblings

- Be prepared for siblings to return to school quickly.
- School is both “safe” and “normal”
- Help prepare staff for the sibling(s) to return to school---what will staff say to the student(s)?

Responding to Crisis

Step 8: Family

- Phone call to family will be the hardest, most difficult call to make.....
- Often a relative or friend answers the phone.
- Express condolences---Speak from the heart.
- Does the family need help/support, food, etc.?
- Funeral or memorial service. Open to students?

Responding to Crisis

Step 9: Additional staff communication

- Emails are efficient ways to update staff of additional or new information.
- End of the day communication
 - Thank staff for their help
 - Update information
 - Prepare for the next day
 - Staff may want to organize meals, begin to think of memorials, etc.

Responding to a Crisis

Step 10: After-Care and Support for students

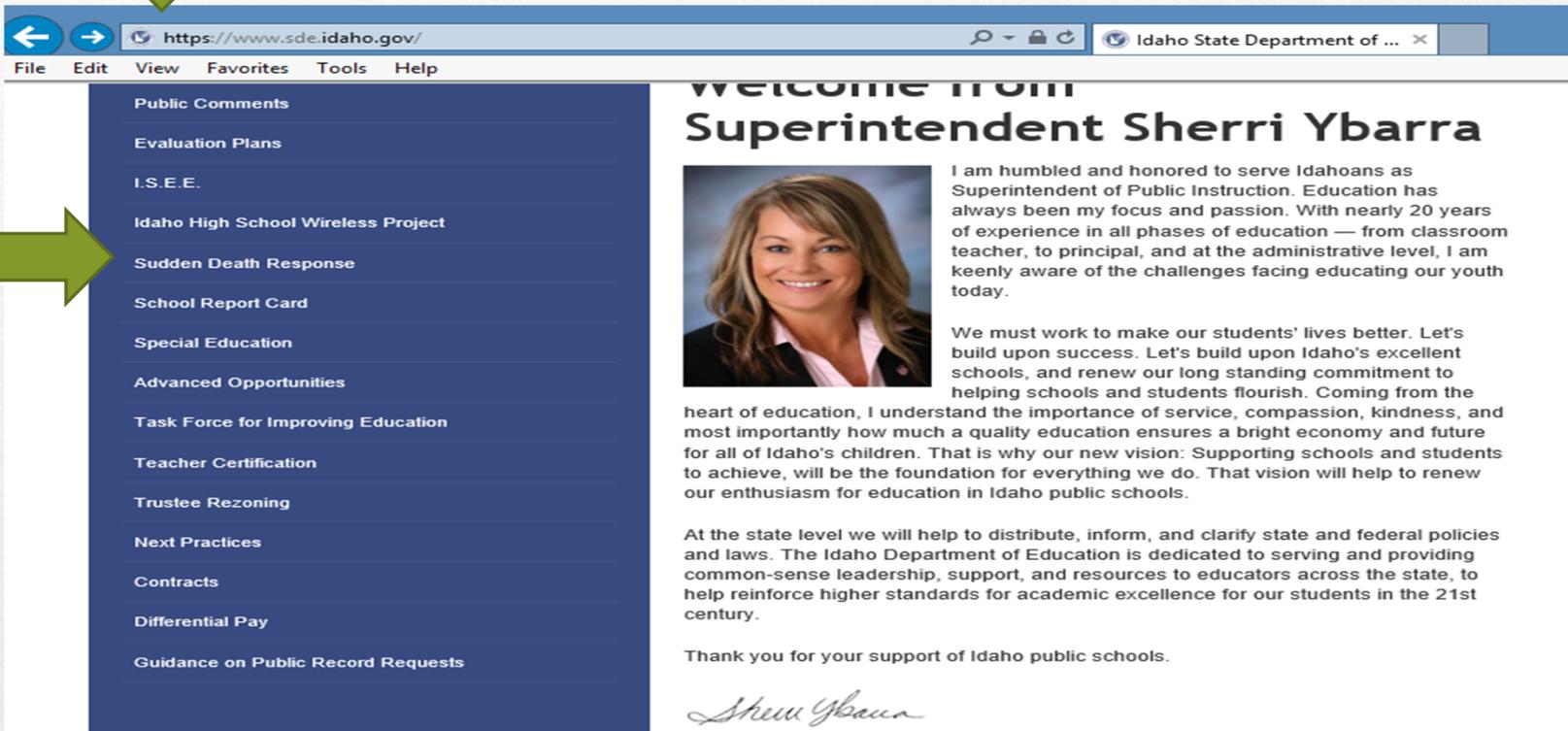
- A list of students who have been impacted by crisis is generated. School counselor checks in with individual students and their parent/guardian over the course of the next few weeks/months.
- Grief support group
- Referrals to outside counseling/therapy

Responding to a crisis

Step 11: Funerals/memorial services on school premises

- District policy?
- What you do in this crisis will often set a precedence for future crisis situations.
- Pro---the family experiences that school is a compassionate, supportive place.
- Con---can anchor grief at school
- **Discuss at your table: What district policies do you have about school buildings being utilized for funerals or memorial services?**

Idaho State Department of Education support for a sudden death of a student . . .



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://www.sde.idaho.gov/>. The browser's address bar and menu bar are visible. On the left side of the page, there is a dark blue navigation menu with the following items: Public Comments, Evaluation Plans, I.S.E.E., Idaho High School Wireless Project, Sudden Death Response, School Report Card, Special Education, Advanced Opportunities, Task Force for Improving Education, Teacher Certification, Trustee Rezoning, Next Practices, Contracts, Differential Pay, and Guidance on Public Record Requests. A green arrow points from the text above to the 'Sudden Death Response' link in the menu. On the right side of the page, there is a section titled 'WELCOME FROM Superintendent Sherri Ybarra'. This section includes a portrait photo of Superintendent Sherri Ybarra, a paragraph of text about her experience and vision, and a signature at the bottom.

WELCOME FROM Superintendent Sherri Ybarra

I am humbled and honored to serve Idahoans as Superintendent of Public Instruction. Education has always been my focus and passion. With nearly 20 years of experience in all phases of education — from classroom teacher, to principal, and at the administrative level, I am keenly aware of the challenges facing educating our youth today.

We must work to make our students' lives better. Let's build upon success. Let's build upon Idaho's excellent schools, and renew our long standing commitment to helping schools and students flourish. Coming from the heart of education, I understand the importance of service, compassion, kindness, and most importantly how much a quality education ensures a bright economy and future for all of Idaho's children. That is why our new vision: Supporting schools and students to achieve, will be the foundation for everything we do. That vision will help to renew our enthusiasm for education in Idaho public schools.

At the state level we will help to distribute, inform, and clarify state and federal policies and laws. The Idaho Department of Education is dedicated to serving and providing common-sense leadership, support, and resources to educators across the state, to help reinforce higher standards for academic excellence for our students in the 21st century.

Thank you for your support of Idaho public schools.

Sherri Ybarra

State support for a sudden death of a student...

<http://www.spanidaho.org/youth-suicide-forschools-postvention.shtml>

Call Matt McCarter at (208)334-6800

Additional Resources For School Districts

Idaho State Department of Education Safe & Secure Schools Website
https://www.sde.idaho.gov/site/safe_secure/

The Idaho Emergency Operation Planning Guide For Safe and Secure Schools

Introduction
Recommended Steps
NIMS-ICS
STEP 1 School Capabilities, Hazards, Critical & Essential Operations
STEP 2 Assign Responsibilities
STEP 3 Emergency Procedures
STEP 4 Accounting For People
STEP 5 Communication, Notification & Public Information
STEP 6 Damage Assessment & Facility Closure
STEP 7 Reporting
STEP 8 Resources
Appendix

Important to remember....

As a responder to a crisis situation it is normal to be:

- Exhausted
- Emotionally drained
- “Foggy”---difficult time concentrating
- Overwhelmed
- Even physically sick

Self-care Resource

- What About You? A Workbook for Those Who Work With Others

<http://www.familyhomelessness.org/media/94.pdf>

Final Thoughts.....

No two crisis situations are alike. Crisis is an unpredictable situation...

- Be prepared with a team, resources, tools, forms
- Identify your school district's policies and procedures
- Approach each crisis from your ethical foundation---do no harm
- Consult and communicate
- Learn from the past---evaluate and debrief
- Remember "self-care"