

The School Counselor and Safe Schools and Crisis Response

(Adopted 2000; revised 2007, 2013)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position

The school counselor serves as a leader in safe school initiatives and a vital resource in the creation, development and implementation of response plans before, during and after a crisis (Studer & Salter, 2010). A crisis or an act of violence thrusts school counselors into positions of responsibility to ensure the safety and well being of all students and staff (Fein, 2003).

The Rationale

All students need a safe, violence-free environment for learning. The impact of a crisis or act of violence within the school environment has “a tremendous and lasting effect on the school in which [it] occurred, the surrounding community and the nation as a whole” (Vossekuil et al., 2002, p. 7).

The Center for the Prevention of School Violence (2000) views “any behavior that violates a school’s educational mission or climate of respect or jeopardizes the intent of the school to be free of aggression against persons or property, drugs, weapons, disruptions and disorder” (p. 2) as characterizing an act of school violence. The school counselor’s leadership role in the creation of a safe school climate will result in the academic and personal success of all students and help schools achieve their educational missions (Hernandez & Seem, 2004).

The School Counselor’s Role

School counselors are vital resources in preventing violent incidents, intervening when concerns arise about potential violence and responding when violence occurs. Through the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors promote school safety, assist students engaging in unhealthy or unsafe behaviors and make referrals as needed. School counselors are familiar with the school community and knowledgeable about the roles of community mental health providers and first responders such as law enforcement officials and emergency medical responders.

School counselors help with the mitigation of stressors in students and staff and play a significant leadership role especially in the immediate aftermath of a crisis or act of school violence. Trained in crisis response intervention models, school counselors serve as integral members of a school’s response team in collaboration with administrators and other school staff members (Fein, Carlisle, & Isaacson, 2008).

Safe school and crisis response literature (Stallard & Salter, 2003; Carr, 2004; Heath & Sheen, 2005; Studer & Salter, 2010) suggest several important crisis prevention and response preparedness practices in which school counselors should engage, including:

- individual and group counseling
- advocacy for student safety
- interventions for students at risk of dropping out or harming self or others
- peer mediation training, conflict resolution programs and anti-bullying programs
- support of student initiated programs such as Students Against Violence Everywhere
- family, faculty and staff education programs
- facilitation of open communication between students and caring adults
- defusing critical incidents and providing related stress debriefing
- district and school response team planning and practices
- partnering with community resources

Summary

School counselors are leaders in safe school initiatives and actively engage themselves in critical response situations in schools. Through the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors are a vital resource in preventing, intervening and responding to crisis situations.

References and Resources

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