

## 1 **The School Counselor and Safe Schools and Crisis Response**

2 (Adopted 2000; revised 2007, 2013, 2019)

### 4 **American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position**

5 School counselors serve as leaders (ASCA, 2016; Oliver, Fleck, & Money-Brady, 2016) in safe  
6 school initiatives and a vital resource in the creation, development and implementation of  
7 response plans before, during and after a crisis (Studer & Salter, 2010). A crisis or an act of  
8 violence thrusts school counselors into positions of responsibility to ensure the safety and well-  
9 being of all students and staff (Fein, 2003).

### 11 **The Rationale**

12 All students need a safe, violence-free environment for learning. The impact of a crisis or act of  
13 violence within the school environment has “a tremendous and lasting effect on the school in  
14 which [it] occurred, the surrounding community and the nation as a whole” (Vossekuil et al.,  
15 2002, p. 7).

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

### 24 **The School Counselor’s Role**

25 School counselors are vital resources in preventing violent incidents, intervening when concerns  
26 arise about potential violence and responding when violence occurs (Jonson, 2017). Through the  
27 implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program, school counselors promote  
28 school safety, avail themselves for disclosure of threats, redirect students engaging in unhealthy  
29 or unsafe behaviors and make mental health referrals as needed (Duplechian & Morris, 2014;  
30 Nijs, Bun, Tempelaar, de Wit, Burger, Plevier, & Boks, 2014; Kingston, Mattson, Dymnicki,  
31 Spier, Fitzgerald, Shipman, & Elliott, 2018). School counselors are familiar with the school  
32 community and knowledgeable about the roles of community mental health providers and first  
33 responders such as law enforcement officials and emergency medical responders (Cowan,  
34 Vaillancourt, Rossen, & Pollitt, 2013).

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

42 Safe school and crisis response literature (Garran & Rasmussen, 2014; Rajan & Branas, 2018;  
43 Swartz, Osborne, Dawson-Edwards, & Higgins, 2016) suggests several important crisis  
44 prevention and response preparedness practices in which school counselors should engage,  
45 including:

- 46 • Providing individual and group counseling

- 47 • advocating for student safety
- 48 • providing interventions for students at risk of dropping out or harming self or others
- 49 • offering peer mediation training, conflict resolution programs and anti-bullying programs
- 50 • supporting student-initiated programs such as Students Against Violence Everywhere
- 51 • providing family, faculty and staff education programs
- 52 • facilitating of open communication between students and caring adults
- 53 • defusing critical incidents and providing related stress debriefing
- 54 • engaging in district and school response team planning and practices
- 55 • promoting trauma-informed practices
- 56 • advocating for restorative justice programs
- 57 • partnering with community resources

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### 59 **Summary**

60 School counselors are leaders in safe school initiatives and actively engage themselves in  
61 fostering safety and in responding to critical response situations in schools. School counselors  
62 are a vital resource in preventing, intervening and responding to crisis situations.

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