

Psychological Responses to Traumatic Events

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GANAG

Conference Theme: “Ensuring Balance in Our Work”

Goal: To understand the psychological responses to traumatic events.

Access to Prior Knowledge: T-Chart Activity (Small Group)

New Information: The impact of trauma adults, children and how schools can respond

Application of Learning: T-Chart Activity (Individual)

Generalize: Understanding the impact of trauma is critical for school safety coordinators as they develop Emergency Operations Plans (EOP's) that include goals and objectives for before, during and after a crisis

Get into Groups of 3 or 4
People

T-Chart Activity- Work in Group

- **Access Prior Knowledge**
 - Complete the T-Chart for a National Emergency Event
 - Complete the T-Chart for a State Emergency Event

Symptoms of Trauma for Adults (APA)

- Intense or unpredictable feelings.
- Changes to thoughts and behavior patterns.
- Sensitivity to environmental factors.
- Strained interpersonal relationships.
- Stress-related physical symptoms.

Five Mission Areas From FEMA

New Information

- Prevention
- Protection
- Mitigation
- Response
- Recovery

(U.S. Department of Education, Office of Secondary Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students, 2013)

Key Components of the Recovery Phase

1. Physical/Structural Recovery
2. Business Recovery
3. Restoration of Academic Learning
4. **Psychological/Emotional Recovery**

“All disasters, both natural and manmade, carry with them destruction, devastation, stress and trauma”

(West, 2006)

What is Traumatic Stress?

- Traumatic stress is an acute distress response that is experienced after exposure to a catastrophic event
- Traumatic stress occurs because the event poses a serious, or perceived threat to:
 - The individual's life or physical integrity
 - The life or a family member or close friend
 - One's surrounding environment

(Rems TA Center, 2010)

Four Elements Related to Traumatic Stress

1. The event was unexpected
2. Person was unprepared for the event
3. Nothing could be done to prevent the incident
4. The event happened repeatedly

The Impact of Trauma

- Acute Stress Disorder (ASD)
 - ASD considered to be more immediate, short-term response lasting between 2 days to 4 weeks
 - Conditions include emotional disconnection, temporary amnesia, depersonalization
 - If symptoms persist for more than a month, the condition may be called PTSD
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
 - Emotional numbness, restlessness, anxiety, irritability, violent behavior
 - Feel isolated, disconnected and different

(West, 2006)

PTSD

- PTSD is an Anxiety Disorder (American Psychological Association)
- Causes
 - Personal Assault
 - Natural or Human Disasters
 - Motor Vehicle Accident
 - Physical/Sexual Abuse
 - Military Combat

PTSD

Study by psychologist Roxane Silver

- Studied the 9-11--1 terrorist attacks in NY and Washington D.C.
- People that witnessed the planes crash into the trade center experienced PTSD
- People that suffered financial losses due the attack did not
- Those with pre-existing mental/physical health difficulties were more likely to suffer from PTSD

(Silver, 2011)

Trauma Disorders are Common and Costly

- Estimated 5.2 million people aged 18-54 suffer from PTSD each year
- Women (10.4%) will experience PTSD as some point in their life
- Men (5%) will experience PTSD as some point in their life

“Recognizing the importance of the role trauma plays in the lives of disaster survivors is essential to developing adequate preparation and response protocols”

Two Steps to the Healing Process

1. Regain Normalcy
 - a. Re-establish a normal routine
 - b. Go to work, go to school, participate in social gatherings
2. Peer Support
 - a. Differences in age, gender, culture, personality and geographic location may impact how we respond and heal from an event

Goal of the Recovery Phase in Schools

- Restore a safe and healthy learning environment
- Ensure that students have emotional and/or mental health support
- Example of how these goals are completed in one district.....Crisis Response Teams

Crisis Response Teams

- Structured Plan as Part of the EOP
- Members:
 - Counselors
 - Social Workers
 - Nurses
 - Psychologists
- Pre-Designated Crisis Response Teams and Protocols

Crisis Response Teams Protocol

1. Determine Level of Response Needed
 - a. Minimal Level
 - b. Building Level
 - c. District Level
 - d. Community Level

Crisis Response Teams Protocol

2. If District or Community Level Response Needed.....
 - a. Crisis Response Teams Implemented
 - b. Reaffirm physical health and safety of students
 - c. **Begin to evaluate psychological trauma and move to Psychological Triage**

Psychological Triage

- Physical Proximity
 - How close was person to the event
- Emotional Proximity
 - Close relationships with those involved in the event
- Internal Vulnerability Risk Factors
 - Individuals that have difficulty coping, history of trauma
- External Vulnerability Risk Factors
 - Lack of family resources
 - Isolation

Crisis Response Teams

- Determine where and how Crisis Response will take place
 - Individual
 - Small Group
 - Classroom
 - Other
- Re-establish social support systems
- Empower survivors and their caretakers

NOTE: Crisis Intervention may cause harm if not truly needed

T-Chart Activity- Work in Group

Application

- Complete One T-Chart related to an incident that happened at your school that resulted in trauma for students or staff
 - Examples:
 - Suicide
 - School Shooting
 - Death of a Staff Member
 - Bus Accident
 - Other?

How Do Traumatic Events Impact Teaching and Learning?

- Example from a homicide...
 - Increase student **absenteeism** due to fear:
 - “This heightened sense of fear has caused an alarming increase in **school violence** (notably fights in hallways) and a precipitous **drop in school attendance rates.**”
- Example from a suicide....
 - Increase student **absenteeism** due to psychosomatic issues:
 - “Students became more aware of their own symptoms as a result, internalizing behaviors (anxiety, depression, other) increased, causing a heightened need for **emotional support.**”

How Do Traumatic Events Impact Teaching and Learning?

- Example from a school shooting...
 - Increase in student **violent behavior** and disciplinary problems:
 - “After the incident, firearms incidents increased 58%, mainly due to fear and students feeling a need to protect themselves.”
 - “The principal reported that in previous years there were about 10 discipline referrals per month. Since the incident, the average has increased to about 15 discipline referrals per month.”
 - “The middle school enrollment was only 66% of last year’s. The primary reason given by parents for transferring their students to other districts was **fear for their safety** and **frustration at what was seen as a slow response to problems resulting from the incident.**”
(High School Shooting)

How Can Schools Support Psychological/Emotional Recovery in the Short Term?

- Identify those impacted
 - Provide mental health resource materials, for families, students and staff
- Have individual and group counseling available
- Promote self-care among staff and utilize Employee Assistance Programs
- Be aware of prior history for those affected
- Psychological First Aid (PFS-S)
 - Stabilize emotions and behaviors of students
 - Return students to an improved emotional state and read to attend and engage in learning

How Can Schools Support Psychological/Emotional Recovery in the Short Term?

- Provide long term interventions
- Conduct assessments and monitoring of the mental health of students and staff
- Monitor attendance, grades and utilize counselor visits
- Be aware of key dates such as trials, anniversaries and holidays

How Schools Can Prepare for Psychological Recovery?

- Develop a clear plan for how to respond to psychological trauma
- Train staff
- Develop checklists for response teams
- Develop template letters for alerting parents, families, guardians, students and staff
- Consider a district policy for memorials
- Ensure a process is in place for parental consent for mental health services
- Parent reunification

Generalize-What was learned
today?

Generalize

Understanding the impact of trauma is critical for school safety coordinators as they develop Emergency Operations Plans (EOP's) that include goals and objectives for before, during and after a crisis

References

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