

Key Components of Recovery

Schools and their larger community are confronted with putting the pieces back together following sudden, tragic events such as death or serious injury to students and staff, bus accidents, fires, natural or man-made disasters and violence. The aftermath of tragedies on individual children and adults is not simple to predict. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, research indicates that both adults and children demonstrate a wide range of reactions following a catastrophic event.

The goal after an emergency is to return to the business of learning and restore the infrastructure of the school as quickly as possible. There are four key components of recovery that need to be addressed so that a smooth transition can be achieved back to a relative state of normalcy and the healing process can begin. They are:

1. **Emotional Recovery**
2. **Academic Recovery**
3. **Physical/Structural Recovery**
4. **Business/Fiscal Recovery**

Emotional Recovery

The purpose of emotional recovery is to promote coping and resiliency for students, staff, and their families following an emergency or crisis. An assessment of their emotional needs is important to determine those who will need intervention by a school counselor, school psychologist, or other mental health professional. Community based resources need to be identified prior to an emergency and available for families, who may seek treatment. Planning for emotional recovery involves establishing key community partnerships, developing policies, providing training, and developing memorandum of understanding (MOU).

For some trauma victims, adverse effects fade with emotional support and the passage of time. Others are more deeply affected and experience long-term consequences. These reactions are normal responses to an abnormal event. Although no one can predict who will experience the most severe reaction to trauma, the more direct the exposure to the event, the higher the risk for emotional harm.

According to the **National Institute of Mental Health**, research indicates that both adults and children demonstrate a wide range of reactions following a catastrophic event. The range of human responses can include physical, cognitive and emotional symptoms including:

- Nausea
- Sleep Disturbance
- Slowed thinking
- Bad memories
- Regressed behavior
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Depression
- Anger
- Various other responses

Suggestions for Schools

- Restoring a learning environment as quickly as possible
- Modeling how to recover from the event
- Maintaining basic educational goals

Suggestions for administrative staff, counselors and teachers

- Reducing conflict among groups
- Creating working partnerships among groups inside and outside of the school
- Following familiar school routines
- Acknowledging the trauma through shared activities and observances
- Representing safety and security
- Supporting children and their families
- Creating opportunities to support caregivers
- Having trained crisis intervention personnel be highly visible in the schools following a crisis
- Remembering that children and their communities are resilient when supported adequately

Academic Recovery

The following collection of recovery measures is designed to assist teachers and other professionals as they help students as well as adults begin the recovery and healing process. It is essential for school administrators to recognize that recovery is a long-term process of supporting normal people who have experienced abnormal stressors. Initially, individuals may be in shock and may require support to meet basic physical and social support needs. Restoring structure and routine is the key purpose of Academic Recovery and a quick return to “a normal school day” will enhance the healing process.

Short Term Academic Considerations:

- Quick decision making regarding school/academic routines
- Brief administrators and staff
- Communicate with parents/guardians on events and the plan
- In general, maintaining the school routine is helpful
- Can the school remain open?
- Can the school routine be maintained? Modified?
- Are academic materials needed?

In the months and years that follow a critical incident, individuals may require additional assistance and continued academic support.

Long Term Academic Considerations:

- Arrange for Homebound/tutoring services for students unable to attend school
- Encourage and support students in the hospital
- Rearrange tests or assignments
- Determine curriculum “triggers”
- Allow for periodic visits to school counselors (around anniversaries, similar events, etc.)

Physical / Structural Recovery

In the aftermath of a crisis, buildings and grounds may need repairing, repainting and/or landscaping. Restoring facilities to enable the educational operations is an essential part of the planning process. Relocation of educational services and administrative operations may be necessary. Communication will be key with all stakeholders; students, staff, parents and community.

Considerations for Physical Recovery:

- Assess building/structural component (e.g., Damage Assessment Team)
- Ensure human safety at educational sites and staff availability to teach
- Resume transportation and food services
- Determine availability of equipment and supplies (books)

Business / Fiscal Recovery

Critical business functions within the school/district have to be restored as soon as possible after the occurrence of an emergency or crisis. It is imperative that the staff are supported. Administrative functions such as payroll systems, accounting departments and personnel records will be necessary for full operation of the school district. Unexpected expenses can tax the budget or large dedicated donations and gifts can require time and resources to manage.

Considerations for Business Recovery:

- Determine responsibilities to continue educational function
- Identify, in advance, who has responsibility for closing schools, or sending students/staff to alternate locations
- Identify who is responsible for restoring which business functions for schools/districts
- Identify succession plans
- Ensure systems are in place for rapid contract execution in the event of an emergency
- Institute a system for registering out of district students, and for registering students into other schools