

Being a resilient leader in the face of a school crisis is extremely important. Leading a trauma-sensitive educational institution fosters a safe learning environment in the midst of a crisis for both students and teachers by providing a foundation built on communication, safety, empathy, and compassion. Effective administration requires the preparation of a crisis-plan, collective communication, trained personnel and community resources. Trauma-sensitive educational institutions must be prepared to make decisions, evaluate the results, and adjust as needed.

Essential features of a trauma-sensitive educational institution include a crisis-plan, communication strategies, supportive staff, and community resources. Procedures for during and after a crisis must be prepared in advance to include communication between administration, teachers, staff, students, and families as well as resources from within the building and from the community. Crises can occur at any moment, therefore, it is imperative to create plans in order to effectively and efficiently handle situations. It is important for trauma-sensitive leaders to control their emotions while in the midst of the crisis as not to create any more angst.

Crisis Plans should include building and district level administration, whom will begin to notify and facilitate communication between essential teachers, staff members and families within the school community. Each building leader may play an identified role in communicating with building staff, the community, and the district level leaders. Administration and support staff need to identify the most likely affected by the crisis and prepare to work with those in need in a more direct manner. It is vital to create a script, to include information approved by the family or district administration, depending on the situation. Trauma-sensitive leaders should create a script for teachers and staff to read at the beginning of the school day. The script should

be available at the start of the school year and easily adjustable given the situation. Teachers and staff must read the script to their first class at a set time. The school social worker or school counselors will begin setting up resources for the building and the family as needed. In order to deliver the most effective information, administration should check with the family about sharing information and meet with staff in an emergency faculty meeting prior to the start of the school day.

Leaders should collaborate with staff members and community agencies prior to the start of each school year to ensure relevancy and providing the most up to date resources and information to the family and community. It is essential to create a crisis plan based on building and community resources, previous experience, and an open mind to improve and try new methods.

Trauma-sensitive leaders should proactively have a referral process in place to help identify at risk students with mental health conditions. This process will allow teachers and staff to provide background information, recent changes, and connections for students at risk. A small team consisting of an administrator, social worker, and counselor should create a plan for identified students and share with the team of teachers in a meeting. Procedures need to be in place for the displaying behavior in order to keep staff and students safe and to assist the student.

In my experience, it is vitally important to identify the staff and students most closely affected by the crisis, provide alternative methods to teachers to continue the school day, and provide staff and students safe spaces to grieve or work with a counselor.