

Next Steps in Crisis Management Planning for Schools: Ensuring Seamless Recovery and Reunification Procedures

Michele Gay, M.Ed.
michelegay@safeandsoundschools.org

Melissa Reeves, Ph.D, NCSP, LPC
mereev@aol.com

1




Planning Considerations for Parent-Child Reunification

Module 3




Often Neglected

- Only 68% of school districts require family reunification procedures
- One of the most frequently ignored aspects of emergency planning
- Poorly executed plan is source of chaos
- Risk of secondary trauma increases with duration of separation and distance of evacuation
 - Young children, those with cognitive delays at greater risk; unable or too afraid to provide info to assist

Welko (2013); Crepeau-Hobson, et al (2012); Trump et al (2011); Dorn (2013)




What Does It Look Like?

- Circumstances of Crisis Dictate Reunification
 - Type of Crisis
 - Safety of the building and campus
 - Presence of emergency responders
 - Capacity of Site
- Logistical Models
 - On Site
 - Drive Through
 - Off Site





On-Site Reunification

- When your school is NOT "ground zero"
- The building and campus area are deemed safe
- Reunification can take place without interrupting other emergency processes (crime scene, investigation, triage, etc.)
- You are able to secure the location/restrict outside access
- Similar to an unscheduled "early dismissal" without buses
- Students may be able to remain in classrooms





Off-Site Reunification Areas

- Accessibility for all students and parents
- Parking, security, and traffic flow
- Ability to quickly move students to designated points
- Communication needs (fax, phone, internet; electrical plug-ins)
- Sufficient number of separate entrances and exits

- Ability to reduce crowding
- Should be at least a few miles from crisis scene



Brock et al (2016); NEA Health Education Network (2007)




Drive-Through Reunification

- School campus and building are safe
- Can streamline the release process
- Protects parents and students from emotional stress
- Contains parents
- Consider allowing parents to print/fill out reunification cards ahead of arrival.



- Requires additional communication, signage, and staff support for parents waiting in car line.
- Practice as a community!



Selecting A Reunification Team

- Overall characteristics of team members
- Back up team and substitutes at the ready
- In-house team
- District level team
- Coordinate & practice with Emergency Responders



Handout: Family Reunification Roles & Responsibilities

Reunification Team: Roles & Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Lead <i>(Student Accounting & Release Team Leader)</i>	Guides set-up, substitutes positions, maintains flow, troubleshoots, final accountability
Greeter	Familiar face, welcomes, establishes interventions, provides assistance
Checker	Examines ID's, checks cards, cross references, directs individuals
Runner	Receives reunification cards from check-in, retrieves students from student holding area, brings to reunifier at reunification point
Herder	Gathers students, organizes classes, assesses students
Entertainer	Leads students in activities and entertainment
Scribe	Recorder, observes and tracks times & events during the process, manages information
Reunifier	Connects students & caregivers, checks with students before release
Accountant <i>(Student Accounting & Release specialists)</i>	Receives torn cards, cross checks names, checks for accuracy



Who's on Your Team?

- Think about the human resources available in your school community. Select 2-3 people that could serve in each role:

- Greeter
- Checker
- Runner
- Lead
- Accountant
- Herder
- Entertainer
- Reunifier
- Scribe

Handouts: Reunification Team Handout & Reunification Role Cards

I Love U Guys, Adams 12 Five Star Schools



What Will I Need? The Reunification Go-Kit

- Have at least two identical kits
- One at school, one off-site
- Consider student medications—plan with nurse and district
 - Bull Horn/PA
 - Reunification Cards
 - Clipboards
 - Safety Vests
 - Hand held radios
 - Batteries
 - Snacks



- Pens and Paper
- Signs
- First Aid Kit
- Flashlights
- Water
- Space Blankets

Handout - Family Reunification Go-Kit (expanded list)



Preparing the Community-Before a Crisis

- Provide Basic Elements of Reunification Plan
 - School Handbook
 - Back-to-School Night
 - School Website
- Teach Basic Actions
 - Stay Home
 - Stay Informed
 - Stay Ready



Sample Reunification Card



Reunification Information PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY
 Have photo identification out and ready to show school district personnel.

Student Name _____
 Student Grade _____ Student Cell Phone Number _____
 Name of person picking up student _____
 Signature _____
 Phone number of person picking up student _____
 Relationship to student being picked up _____
 Photo identification matches name of person picking up student? Y or N _____

Parent completes:
 Print Student Name Again _____
 Student Grade _____
 Student Birthday _____

School personnel completes upon release of student

I Love U Guys




Sample Reunification Card

Handout: I Love U Guys
Sample Reunification Form

Reunification
 First, we want to thank you for your patience during this reunification. We share the same goal during this process: Getting you and your student back together as quickly as possible. The reason we're going through this is that an event has occurred at the school that mandates we personally reunite you with your child.

Instructions

1. Please complete the information on the other side of this card.
2. Prepare identification (if you don't have ID with you, please move to the side of the line, it may take a little longer to verify your identity)
3. Select the check-in line based on either student last name or student grade.
4. After check-in, staff will split this card and a runner will be sent to recover your student. Please step over to the Reunification Location.
5. If there has been injury or other concerns, you may be asked to meet a counselor.
6. Please don't shout at school or district staff. We'll get through this as quickly as possible.

Parent Guardian Sign Off
 I have read and understand these instructions.

Print Your Name _____ Date _____
 Signature _____

I Love U Guys




Preparing the Community Ahead of Crisis

Adams 12 Five Star Schools:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-Ya8Mf5174>




Communication During Reunification

- Communicate the Situation
 - Robo-calls
 - Social Media Channels
 - Student Texts
- Provide Instructions for On-going Information
 - Utilize multiple channels to communicate next steps
 - Provide frequent and consistent communication with updated information (designate frequency of updates)
 - Encourage information channels other than calling school
 - Develop phone scripts for those answering phones
- Prepare Reunification Site Before Announcing





Reunification Process at a Glance

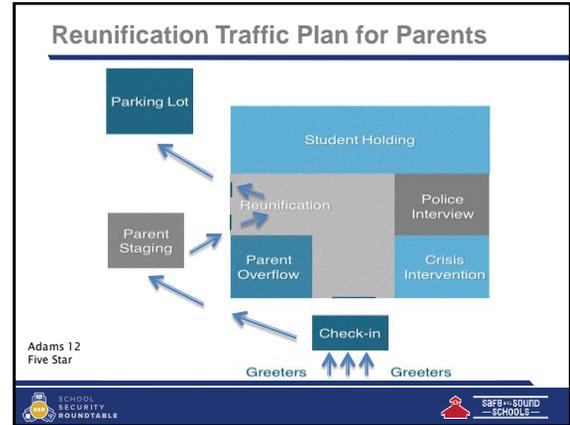
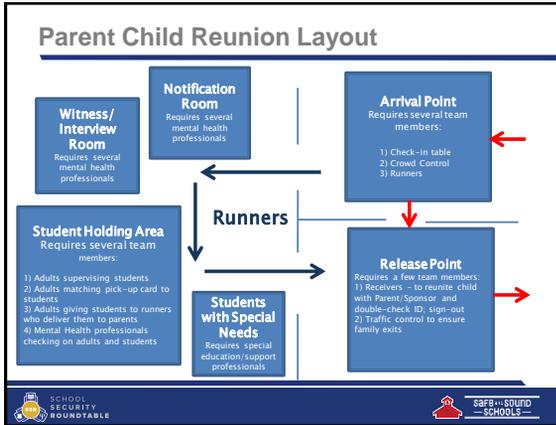
1. Parents arrive – signs and Greeters provide direction to check-in location
2. Parents line up according to last name or grade at check in
3. Parents complete reunification card– Greeters direct & assist
4. Checkers verify ID, Greeters verify those with no ID
5. Parents directed or escorted to reunification or notification area
6. Runners take Reunification Card (e.g. bottom portion) to Student Holding Area, bring students to Reunification Area
7. At Reunification Area, ID's are double-checked, student signed-out and released, bottom portion of Reunification Card given to Accountant.




What Does It Look Like?

Planning for a Formal Reunification Process
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbRTGqgN3IU>



- ### A Set up for Success: Layout Considerations
- Use separate rooms or natural barriers to break line of sight
 - Prevents parents from jumping the line
 - Maintains order and calm with students
 - Prevents parents of injured or missing students from viewing reunification of others
 - Contains areas of interview, triage, and counseling
 - Protects victims and victims' families
- I Love U Guys & Adams 12 SD (2011)
- SCHOOL SECURITY ROUNDTABLE | SAFB • SOUND SCHOOLS

- ### Special Considerations
- Notification of Student Death or Injury
 - Police Investigations and Interviews
 - Mental Health Supports for students, parents, staff
 - Student Perpetrator
 - Special Needs Students
 - Custody Verification
-
- SCHOOL SECURITY ROUNDTABLE | SAFB • SOUND SCHOOLS

- ### Death or Injury Notification
- Injured students
 - Identify and record location of transportation
 - School personnel accompany if possible
 - Law enforcement typically takes lead
 - Establish "notification room" that is private
 - Mental health supports must be available
 - Assign a primary contact/support person
 - Provide age-appropriate resources-anticipate presence of younger siblings
 - Provide protection from media
- SCHOOL SECURITY ROUNDTABLE | SAFB • SOUND SCHOOLS

- ### Imagining Reunification
- Using your building as an example, imagine how you might lay out key areas of the reunification process to establish flow:
- Greeting
 - Check-In
 - Parent Staging
 - Student Holding
 - Special Needs
 - Crisis Intervention
 - Police Interview
 - Media Holding
 - Release
- Handout: Reunification Layout
-
- SCHOOL SECURITY ROUNDTABLE | SAFB • SOUND SCHOOLS

Custody Verification

- "Whitelist"- confirms parent/guardian via photo ID and matching to emergency card
- "Blacklist" – predetermined list of persons with custodial restrictions
- Decisions to be made in advance:
 - Guardian without ID
 - Release of students 18 years and older
 - Translation capability for non-English speakers
- Consider paper and electronic verification

I Love U Guys & Adams 12 SD (2011); Brock et. al (2016)

Room – Student with Special Needs

- Familiar location if possible
- Trained teachers/parent volunteers to help keep calm and regulate; familiar faces
- Activities to keep entertain and regulate students
- Supplies to address medical and comfort needs



Additional Considerations

Handout: Reunification Plan Checklist

- Crisis team is incapacitated/still in lockdown during school-wide evacuation
- Students not picked up by a caregiver
- Managing parents/staff who have lost emotional control
- Runners unable to keep pace with demand
- Communicating if cell phone towers become overwhelmed, internet access interrupted
- Culturally specific norms - guardianship, extended family, emotions etc.

Moving/Transporting Students

- Schools are responsible for "chain of custody"
- Supervise staging, transport, & arrival
 - Verify who gets on/off bus
 - Verify attendance again at off-site location
- Be aware of movement of vehicles
- Keep unauthorized persons away from scene
- Provide medical and mental health support
- Adults must stay calm!



Brock et al (2016)

Reunification: Practice

- Use stuffed animals as students – place cards on them with specific details
- Practice at least once a year; include district personnel and first responders*
- Consider recruiting parents to help staff run through reunification practice—assign roles (i.e. upset parent, uncooperative parent, parent demanding information)
 - At minimum, conduct table-top exercise

OPSI School Safety Center; NASP; I Love U Guys

Reunification: The Start of Recovery

