

# Introduction—Preparing for the Workshop

Over the last few years, we have been horrified by incidents of violence in our schools, all too often perpetrated by one or more students. The immediate trauma of injury and loss of life is often made worse by confusion and disarray. School administrators, teachers, district officials, local law enforcement, and medical emergency agencies all try valiantly to carry out their essential responsibilities, but too often there is little coordination and there are no guidelines to distinguish respective duties and areas of responsibility.

Consequently, many states, Indiana among them, have issued mandates to school districts to develop emergency preparedness plans in conjunction with local emergency-response agencies and to train staff to perform required roles. Typically, such plans are to be reviewed and updated frequently.

Even when no state mandate exists, parents and community leaders demand that schools be prepared to ensure the safety of student and staff and to respond swiftly and appropriately to the earliest suggestions that there is the potential for an act of violence that may occur on campus.

In response to a need for guidance in developing such plans, the Agency for Instructional Technology (AIT) in Bloomington, Indiana, and the Metropolitan School District of Lawrence Township, Indianapolis, Indiana, a leader in the development of comprehensive emergency preparedness plans, worked together to produce a video kit called *Youth Crises: Planning the Response to Hostage Taking, Shootings, and Suicides*. These materials were designed to help school districts design their own crisis-response plans. They provided detailed guidelines to three kinds of crises.

Many districts have now either developed crisis plans, or at least are in the process of drafting such plans. The current kit, *Youth Crises II: Play It Safe—Plan for Crises*, was developed by AIT with support and advice from the Indiana School Safety Specialist Academy. This material introduces district personnel to the features of local plans and/or provides them with guidelines for review and evaluation. *Youth Crises II* suggests

models for fleshing out draft or incomplete plans; for training school staff as well as district personnel in their responsibilities during various crises; and for adding guidelines for handling specific emergencies in addition to those dealt with in AIT's 1997 *Youth Crises*.

## CRISIS RESPONSE PLANS

To be prepared for a crisis *before* it occurs, schools and districts must have developed plans that provide for intervention and follow-up of a variety of emergency and traumatic situations. Such plans must spell out the respective responsibilities of school and district office administrators, teachers, counselors, and community agencies, including law enforcement and mental health services. Plans should provide precise directions for handling crisis situations. School and community officials need to know how to respond if a student or an outsider is believed to have brought guns into the school, in order to avoid the likely consequences of hostage takings and shootings, or to respond to events as they occur. School administrators need to know when to evacuate their buildings and when to call for a room lockdown. After such traumatic crises, school and district personnel will need to know how to handle media questions and what to announce to staff, students, parents, and the community. Crisis plans must include provisions for the immediate implementation of support, counseling, and intervention when students and staff are affected by a traumatic event.

In general, school crisis plans rest on two foundation stones: (1) intervention in and containment of an actual, ongoing emergency situation; and (2) provision of follow-up support and assistance to members of the school community in the aftermath of a traumatic event.

This kit, *Youth Crises II: Play It Safe—Plan for Crises*, supports the parts of plans dealing with emergency preparedness by describing the main elements of such plans and by presenting dramatic, in-depth portrayals and analysis of three possible crises: a bomb threat, a shooting on campus, and a fight between students.