

## CRISIS MANAGEMENT PROCESS: STRATEGIC BRIEFING

Prepared for:  
School Leadership

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## Executive Summary

The Crisis Management Process outlines a clear, phased approach for how a small private school prepares for, responds to, and recovers from unexpected events that may disrupt normal operations. The framework includes five stages:

- Preaction
- Onset
- Impact Assessment
- Response & Recovery
- Consequence Management

This process recognizes that early containment is difficult, even well-managed incidents can escalate rapidly into full-blown crises or operational disasters if not addressed with speed, clarity, and coordination.

The framework is designed to help schools intervene early, assess impact accurately, and prevent cascading disruptions that could compromise safety, trust, or continuity. It also acknowledges a critical reality: in a school environment, crises can escalate quickly—sometimes within minutes.

By structuring the crisis lifecycle into distinct phases, the process equips school leaders and staff with a roadmap for action before, during, and after an event.

The **Preaction** phase emphasizes preparation, risk monitoring, and readiness. **Onset** outlines immediate actions when an incident emerges. **Impact Assessment** ensures that leaders understand the scope, severity, and potential consequences. **Response & Recovery** provides the operational steps to stabilize the situation and restore critical functions.

Finally, **Consequence Management** guides the school through the longer-term restoration of trust, learning continuity, and institutional resilience.

Overall, the framework is designed to help schools intervene early, assess impact accurately, and minimize cascading disruptions that could compromise safety, trust, or continuity. It supports proactive decision-making, promotes coordination across teams, and ensures that the school community is protected through a structured, repeatable, and transparent crisis response approach.

## Phase I: Preaction (Preparation and Readiness)

The Preaction phase centers on the guiding question: “**What should we know?**” It focuses on strengthening school readiness before any potential disruption occurs.

- **Staff and Plan Readiness** — Ensuring faculty and staff understand their roles and that emergency procedures are current and actionable.
- **Training and Simulation** — Conducting drills and tabletop exercises to identify gaps in safety, supervision, communication, and reunification plans.
- **External Dependencies** — Confirming readiness of essential partners such as transportation providers, food services, technology vendors, and emergency responders. The original document emphasizes verifying “critical vendor readiness” to ensure continuity during a crisis.

## Phase II: Onset and Impact Assessment

When an adverse event begins to unfold, the school shifts to rapid monitoring and initial response.

### Onset Actions

- Activation of the School Incident Response Team (IRT).
- Continuous monitoring of the situation to determine scope and severity.
- Activation of the Crisis Management Team (CMT) when thresholds are met.

### Impact Assessment

A structured assessment is conducted to determine how the event affects students, staff, facilities, and core school operations. This assessment is rapid but disciplined, focusing on the severity, scope, and potential escalation of the incident. School leaders must evaluate key factors such as safety risks, operational disruption, resource needs, and the likelihood that the situation will worsen without coordinated intervention.

If the impact crosses predefined thresholds—such as immediate safety concerns, significant interruption to learning, or threats to the physical environment, the Crisis Management Team is activated, and the school transitions into an elevated response posture.

If the assessment determines that thresholds are **not** met—meaning the incident can be contained through routine administrative actions, normal supervision, or existing protocols, school leaders will continue monitoring the situation but avoid unnecessary escalation, preserving resources and minimizing disruption.

This structured approach ensures that activation decisions are consistent, evidence-based, and proportionate to the actual risk. It prevents both underreaction to emerging threats and over-reaction to manageable situations, supporting a balanced, efficient crisis-response practice.

## **Phase III: Response & Recovery**

When activation is needed, the school transitions into a coordinated operational phase focused on stabilizing conditions, restoring essential functions, and establishing a safe, predictable learning environment. This stage emphasizes both functional restoration and the communication infrastructure necessary to support community trust and continuity.

### **Functional Restoration and Management**

Once the Crisis Management Team is activated, the school moves into a structured recovery posture where key functions are restored in priority order. This includes:

#### **Infrastructure & Access**

The immediate objective is to re-establish the physical and technological foundations required for safe and effective school operations.

This may include:

- Restoring Wi-Fi, learning management systems, and classroom technology
- Reopening or securing damaged classrooms, offices, and common spaces
- Establishing safe building access points for arrival and dismissal
- Coordinating with facilities teams or external partners for repairs
- Relocating classes to temporary learning spaces if primary facilities are compromised.

This reflects the continuation of efforts noted in the original framework regarding the “restoration of IT systems, infrastructure, and physical access.”

#### **Command & Control**

A clearly defined leadership structure is implemented to ensure unified, coordinated decision-making. This structure clarifies:

- Who is in charge (Incident Commander / Head of School or designee)
- Who has authority for operational, instructional, and safety decisions?
- How information flows between teams, leaders, and the community
- How resources are deployed to support recovery

This prevents confusion, reduces duplication of effort, and ensures that staff understand their roles during a high-stress incident.

#### **Crisis Communications**

Communication is treated as a parallel, equally important workstream throughout the Response & Recovery phase. It is guided by two core questions:

**“What should we do now?”**

- Operational actions, safety steps, and decisions.

**“What should we say?”**

- Consistent, calm, accurate messaging that reinforces trust and prevents misinformation.

Timely, transparent updates are provided to:

- Families
- Faculty and staff
- Board and governance leadership.
- Community partners (e.g., local authorities, service providers)

Communication may include safety alerts, operational updates, status reports on restoration progress, and next-steps for the school community. As referenced in the original document, this ensures that all stakeholders remain informed and confident in the school’s ability to manage the situation.

If activation is required, the school enters a coordinated phase focused on stabilizing operations and restoring essential functions.

## **Phase IV: Consequence Management**

This phase addresses long-term impacts and the transition back to stable school operations.

- **Crisis Public Relations** — Managing community perception, reinforcing trust, and communicating transparently about lessons learned and next steps.
- **Critical Decision Support** — Providing leadership with ongoing guidance as the school navigates the final stages of recovery.
- **Return to a New “Normal”** — Recognizing that post-crisis operations may differ from pre-crisis routines, consistent with the original description that “the post-crisis environment may differ significantly from the pre-crisis state.”

# Recovery Framework Overview

Phase	Key Objective	Core Question(s)
<b>Preaction</b>	Readiness & Verification	What should we know?
<b>Onset</b>	Incident Response & Monitoring	What changed? How?
<b>Impact Assessment</b>	Situational Awareness	People? Facility? Data? Brand & Reputation?
<b>Response &amp; Recovery</b>	Restoration & Stabilization	What supplies do we need? Where should we go?
<b>Consequence Mgt.</b>	Return to Normal & Communication	What should we do now? What should we say?

## Recommendation

To strengthen your school resiliency, the following recommendations should be considered.

### Operational Preparedness

- Update emergency plans annually to reflect new threats, staffing and facility changes.
- Designate and train a School Incident Response Team (IRT) with clear roles/authority.
- Conduct quarterly drills for lockdown, evacuation, shelter-in-place, and reunification.
- Verify vendor and partner readiness, especially for transportation, food service, and IT.

### Communication and Coordination

- Create messages for common scenarios (e.g., weather closures, threats, health alerts).
- Establish a parent notification protocol using layered channels (email, SMS, app).
- Train staff in crisis communication, including how to manage rumors and social media risks.
- Include board and community partners in tabletop exercises and post-event debriefs.

## **Student and Staff Wellbeing**

- Expand mental health support during and after crises, including access to counselors and quiet spaces.
- Train staff in trauma-informed response, especially for behavioral escalations and grief.
- Monitor student sentiment and engagement during recovery phases to prevent long-term disruption.

## **Cybersecurity and Technology**

- Implement multi-factor authentication for staff and student accounts.
- Run phishing simulations and digital hygiene workshops for faculty and older students.
- Create a rapid IT recovery plan, including offline backups and alternate learning platforms.


## **Governance and Decision Support**

- Define activation thresholds for the Decision to Activate, including who decides and how.
- Use a decision matrix to guide escalation, resource allocation, and stand-down criteria.
- Track performance metrics during recovery (attendance, instructional continuity, safety incidents).

## **Facilities and Environmental Safety**

- Inspect and maintain critical systems (HVAC, fire alarms, access control) before high-risk seasons.
- Prepare for seasonal risks like flooding, heat waves, and wildlife encounters.
- Designate alternate learning spaces in case of facility damage or contamination.

**Adennill stands ready to support your school community.**

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