

EXAMPLE CRISIS STATEMENTS

LETTER TO FAMILIES – PART I

Dear CREC families,

We want to make you aware of an incident that occurred this morning that affected students on the Coltsville campus and the Learning Corridor campus. During the morning commute, CREC received a threat toward the CREC Two Rivers Magnet High School from an unidentified individual. The safety of students and staff is our first concern. We take all threats of this nature seriously.

When the threat was received, we contacted local emergency response officials. We ordered that all schools located at our Coltsville and Learning Corridor sites implement security procedures. With support from police, our crisis team personnel began searching the school and grounds, including conducting a search of all schools on both sites and all incoming school buses. No weapons or suspicious packages were found.

While the vast majority of school threats involve situations where no weapons are present, we believe that it is appropriate to always notify public safety officials and conduct a thorough scan of the grounds and facility whenever a threat is received.

All threats to our school or students are taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. We are working with officials to conduct a full investigation. Please discuss the day's events with your child and emphasize the seriousness of this issue. If you discover anything that can assist in the investigation, please contact us immediately.

If you have any questions, please contact your principal or the school district's central offices at (860) 524-4096.

Dina Cowl, Superintendent of Schools

STATEMENT TO BOARD OF EDUCATION AND DISTRICT PARTNERS

Dear CREC Council and HASA Members,

We want to make you aware of an incident that occurred today that affected CREC students who attend school on the Coltsville campus and the Learning Corridor campus. During the morning commute, CREC received a threat toward the CREC Two Rivers Magnet High School from an unidentified individual. As a matter of precaution, we take all threats toward our school communities of this nature very seriously.

When the threat was received, we contacted local emergency response officials. We ordered that all schools located at our Coltsville and Learning Corridor sites implement security procedures. With support from police, our crisis team personnel began searching the school and grounds, including conducting a search of all schools on both sites and all incoming school buses. No weapons or suspicious packages were found. CREC received the threat through an online remailer service that allows the sender to remain anonymous and makes it challenging for officials to trace the source.

We want to thank the Hartford Police Department and the CREC security team for their diligent work. Their quick action allowed us to capably and efficiently handle the incident.

We have notified all CREC parents and we sent information to local media about the incident. We have asked our families to discuss the day's events with their child and emphasize the seriousness of this issue. We are continuing to work with officials to conduct a full investigation.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Bruce Douglas, Executive Director

EXAMPLE CRISIS STATEMENTS

MEDIA STATEMENT

An incident occurred this morning that affected students who attend school on the Coltsville campus and the Learning Corridor campus. During the morning commute, CREC received a threat toward the CREC Two Rivers Magnet High School from an unidentified individual. The safety of students and staff is our first concern. We take all threats of this nature seriously.

When the threat was received, we contacted local emergency response officials. We ordered that all schools located at our Coltsville and Learning Corridor sites implement security procedures. With support from police, our crisis team personnel began searching the grounds and all incoming school buses. No weapons or suspicious packages have been found.

All threats to our school or students are taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. CREC received the threat through an online remailer service that allows the sender to remain anonymous and makes it challenging for officials to trace the source. We have informed all CREC families of the incident. We are currently working with officials to conduct a full investigation.

Julia Winer, Chief of Staff

LETTER TO FAMILIES – PART II

Dear Two Rivers Families,

I know that today was difficult for the members of our school community. I am proud of our staff and students for how they handled themselves and for following all security procedures.

Open communication is an important part of building a strong partnership with parents. For this reason, I want to provide you with some additional information about the incident that occurred today.

At CREC, we take all threats to the safety of students and staff very seriously. This morning, I received an email from an anonymous person threatening that they were planning to bring a gun to school today. Our crisis team immediately contacted the authorities and initiated our emergencies procedures. The schools on the Coltsville campus and the Learning Corridor were placed into a lockdown procedure, which requires that students remain in their classrooms. In partnership with the Hartford Police Department, we searched all student backpacks and lockers, and we did a thorough search of the school grounds. During the course of our search, we did not find any weapons or suspicious packages.

At this time, we have not identified the person responsible for the threat. At the end of the school day, we had a staff meeting during which we discussed the events of the day and any possible leads that may help us identify the source of the anonymous email. The email originated from an online App or website called a “remailer” service. These sites allow the sender to remain anonymous, and they make it difficult for school officials or public safety officials to trace the source.

We need to work together, as a community, to create a safe and supportive learning environment. We ask that you please discuss the day’s events with your child, emphasizing the seriousness of this situation. Encourage them to come forward if they have any information, and if in your conversations, you discover any information that can assist us in our investigation, please contact me immediately.

School will proceed as scheduled tomorrow. As a precaution, we will search all student backpacks again tomorrow morning. We are also increasing school security and requesting a police presence at both sites.

If you have any questions, please contact me. Thank you for your support. Our partnership ensures a safe and supportive learning environment for all of our students.

Bob McCain, Principal Two Rivers High School

Dear Parents,

(Purpose)

Our school is committed to the safety and education of all our students. Essential to this commitment is open communication with parents about safety issues when they arise. For this reason, I want to make you aware of the facts surrounding the building evacuation that occurred today.

(Description of the incident)

This morning, a hand-written note was found which indicated that a bomb had been placed in the school.

(School's response/follow up activities)

Safety and security of students and staff is our first priority. We contacted the local authorities immediately, and with their guidance, it was decided to immediately evacuate the building. With the help of the police department and district personnel, the building and campus were searched and nothing was found. However, all after school activities and practices for the day and evening were cancelled.

The police department is now investigating the threat.

Classes will resume as usual tomorrow. However, there will be an increased police presence in and around the school. Counselors will be available if any students would like to talk to someone about this event.

(What parents can do.)

All threats to our school or students are taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. Please discuss the day's events with your child and emphasize the seriousness of this issue. If you discover anything that can assist in the investigation, please contact us immediately.

(Closing)

Please feel free to call me at 555-5555 or email me at principal@school.edu if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your continued support. Our partnership ensures a safe and supportive learning environment in which all students are provided the opportunity to achieve at high levels.

Sincerely,

Dear Parent,

(Purpose)

In our effort to provide the very best education, _____ School is dedicated to maintaining a strong partnership with parents. Key to that partnership is open communication. For this reason, I want to make you aware of an accident that occurred this morning.

(Description of the incident)

One of our school buses transporting _____ students home was involved in a traffic accident on _____ Road.

(Response)

Safety of students is our first concern. Emergency medical personnel were contacted immediately. All parents of involved students were called to inform them of the incident. Four of the students were transported to XXX for observation after complaining of neck and back pain. Fortunately, these injuries were not life threatening, but we always take the proper medical precautions to ensure the safety and well-being of our students. All other students were cleared by medical personnel on scene and allowed to board another bus home. I reported to the scene and checked on the students at the emergency room. All of the students were treated and released last night.

The driver of the school bus was not injured. Local law enforcement is investigating the cause of this accident, and proper system protocol will be followed.

(Closing)

Our transportation department has a very safe driving record, and this was an isolated incident. Regardless, we want you to be aware as we partner with you for the safety of your child. Thank you for entrusting your child to our care. Please contact me should you have questions.

Sincerely,

Dear Parents/Guardians,

(Purpose)

In our effort to provide the very best education for students, _____ School is dedicated to maintaining a strong partnership with parents. Key to that partnership is open communication. For this reason, I want to make you aware of a situation that happened this morning.

(Description of the incident)

During second period in one of our math classes, a student was preparing for class when a kitchen knife fell out of his/her backpack. The knife blade was covered with the manufacturer's protective covering. There is no evidence that the student intended to use the knife to harm anyone. Rather, it appears this was a case of poor judgment.

(School's response)

The teacher immediately took the knife and followed our school's safety plan which prompted her to call our campus security staff to escort the student out of class. Police were contacted and began an investigation.

The situation was resolved quickly and without incident. At no time were students or staff in danger. Safety of students and staff is our first priority. This is a good reminder to talk with your child about the school and district's strict rules about not bringing any knives or anything that could be considered a weapon to school.

(Praise for staff and students)

I'm proud of how our staff and students handled this situation with minimal disruption to the class or school day. We regularly train using our school safety plan with our safety staff, teachers, and our school resource officer. We recognize that training pays off in handling situations like this quickly and safely.

(Closing)

I will continue to keep you informed of important issues at our school. Thank you for your continued support. Our partnership ensures a safe and supportive learning environment in which all students are provided the opportunity to achieve at high levels.

Sincerely,

Sample Letter to Parents

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian,

It is with deep regret that we inform you about a recent loss to our school community. On (INSERT date), (INSERT name of the deceased)¹ (INSERT brief facts about the death)². This loss is sure to raise many emotions, concerns, and questions for our entire school, especially our students.

Our school (and INSERT name of school district, if applicable) has a Crisis Intervention Team made up of professionals trained to help with the needs of students, parents, and school personnel at difficult times such as this. At our school, we have counselors available for any student who may need or want help or any type of assistance surrounding this loss. We encourage you, as parents, to also feel free to use our resources.

(Include the following paragraph only if suicide has been confirmed as the cause of death or is presumed to be the cause of death AND the family has given permission for the likely cause to be discussed) Given that the cause of death was suicide (or is presumed to be due to suicide), we will be holding an information meeting for parents/guardians on how to talk to children about suicide and steps that children and adults should take if they are concerned about depression or thoughts of self-harm in themselves or in friends or family members. The meeting will be taking place on (INSERT date(s) and time(s)) at (INSERT location). We hope that you will be able to join us for this meeting (or one of these meetings).

We have enclosed some information that may be useful to you in helping your child at home. If you would like additional information or need assistance, please do not hesitate to contact (INSERT name of Communications Coordinator or Counseling Services Coordinator) at (INSERT phone number).

We are saddened by the loss to our school community and will make every effort to help you and your child as you need.

Sincerely,

(Type the name of the signer and title. This letter is usually signed by the principal, superintendent, or crisis team coordinator)

Examples of information to insert in the opening paragraph:

¹John Smith, one of our 9th grade students
Mrs. Jones, who taught 7th grade English

²died by suicide *(before stating that the cause of death was suicide, ensure this has been confirmed by the authorities or the circumstances are highly consistent with suicide – such as a death by self-inflicted gunshot when a suicide note has been left -- AND the family has given permission to release that the likely cause was suicide; if unconfirmed AND the family has given permission to release that the likely cause was suicide, it is best to describe as presumed, such as “died by an overdose that is considered likely due to suicide”)*

DRAFT TALKING POINTS – MISSING CHILD

1. **CREC is committed to the safety and security of every CREC student.**
 - a. We are working closely with local police officials to provide as much background information as possible to assist in the search for the child.
 - b. CREC may alert other schools if the child has a sibling as a student.
 - c. CREC leadership and staff are dedicated to making all CREC schools a safe environment for students.
 - d. We will provide you with additional information when we have it – you can also speak with [insert appropriate law enforcement personnel/spokesperson here].

Note:

Before responding, have as much information on hand as possible. Do not share information in statement as it may open the door for more questions. But have it available in the event you are asked. For example:

1. How many times has this happened before?
2. What was the outcome in those circumstances?
3. Is there a policy for how to handle a missing child? If so, what is it?

DRAFT TALKING POINTS – INTRUDER IN SCHOOL

1. **CREC is committed to the safety and security of every CREC student.**
 - a. CREC schools regularly drill a simulated lock down so that students and teachers know the protocol.
 - b. Our staff followed all appropriate protocol and [result].
 - c. CREC immediately alerted local police to assist with the situation.
 - d. Prior to this incident, CREC has never had an incident of an intruder in a school.
 - e. The only time that a CREC school has had to initiate a lock down has been when a crime has occurred near a school.
 - f.

Note:

Before responding, have as much information on hand as possible. Do not share information in statement as it may open the door for more questions. But have it available in the event you are asked. For example:

1. How often do you drill for a lockdown?
2. What is involved in a lockdown procedure?
3. Who decides when to call off the lockdown?
4. What is the process for releasing students and staff following a lockdown?
5. How often has this happened before? What was the outcome?
6. In the event of a medical emergency as a result of an intruder, are there any medical personnel on staff? A school nurse? When are the on school premises?

DRAFT TALKING POINTS – STAFF ISSUE

- 1. CREC leadership does not comment on issues involving a staff member when an investigation is underway.**
 - a. CREC will work with local authorities if their assistance is required and will provide any information that is helpful to an investigation.
 - b. Any issue of this nature will be handled on a case-by-case basis.
 - c. CREC is committed to maintaining the privacy as well as the safety of its students, families and staff.

Note:

Before responding, have as much information on hand as possible. Do not share information in statement as it may open the door for more questions. But have it available in the event you are asked. For example:

1. How often has this happened before?
2. What was the outcome?
3. What state authorities have been contacted?
4. Will CREC also conduct an internal investigation?
5. What are the possible outcomes of an internal investigation? Dismissal? Suspension? Withholding pay?
6. Will CREC inform parents? If so, how?

DRAFT TALKING POINTS - BULLYING / STUDENT TO STUDENT VIOLENCE

- 1. CREC is committed to the safety and security of every CREC student.**
 - a. CREC has never had an incidence of violence between students inside a school.
 - b. CREC is committed to creating and maintaining an educational environment that is physically, emotionally and intellectually safe and thus free from bullying, harassment or discrimination.
- 2. CREC takes bullying extremely seriously.**
 - a. CREC expressly prohibits any form of bullying on school grounds, at a school sponsored function or activity or program, whether on or off school grounds including a bus or via any electronic media.
 - b. CREC prohibits any form of bullying outside of school if it creates a hostile environment at school for the student, if it infringes on the rights of students or if it substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.
 - c. Students who engage in bullying are subject to school disciplines including a recommendation for suspension or expulsion.

Note:

Before responding, have as much information on hand as possible. Do not share information in statement as it may open the door for more questions. But have it available in the event you are asked. For example:

1. How often do you see incidents of school violence?
2. Does CREC conduct its own internal investigation?
3. What are the possible remedies/punishments? Suspension? Expulsion?
4. How does CREC inform parents?
5. If a student requires medical attention, is there a medical professional available on campus? School nurse? How often is the nurse on campus?

SPOKESPERSON DO'S AND DON'TS

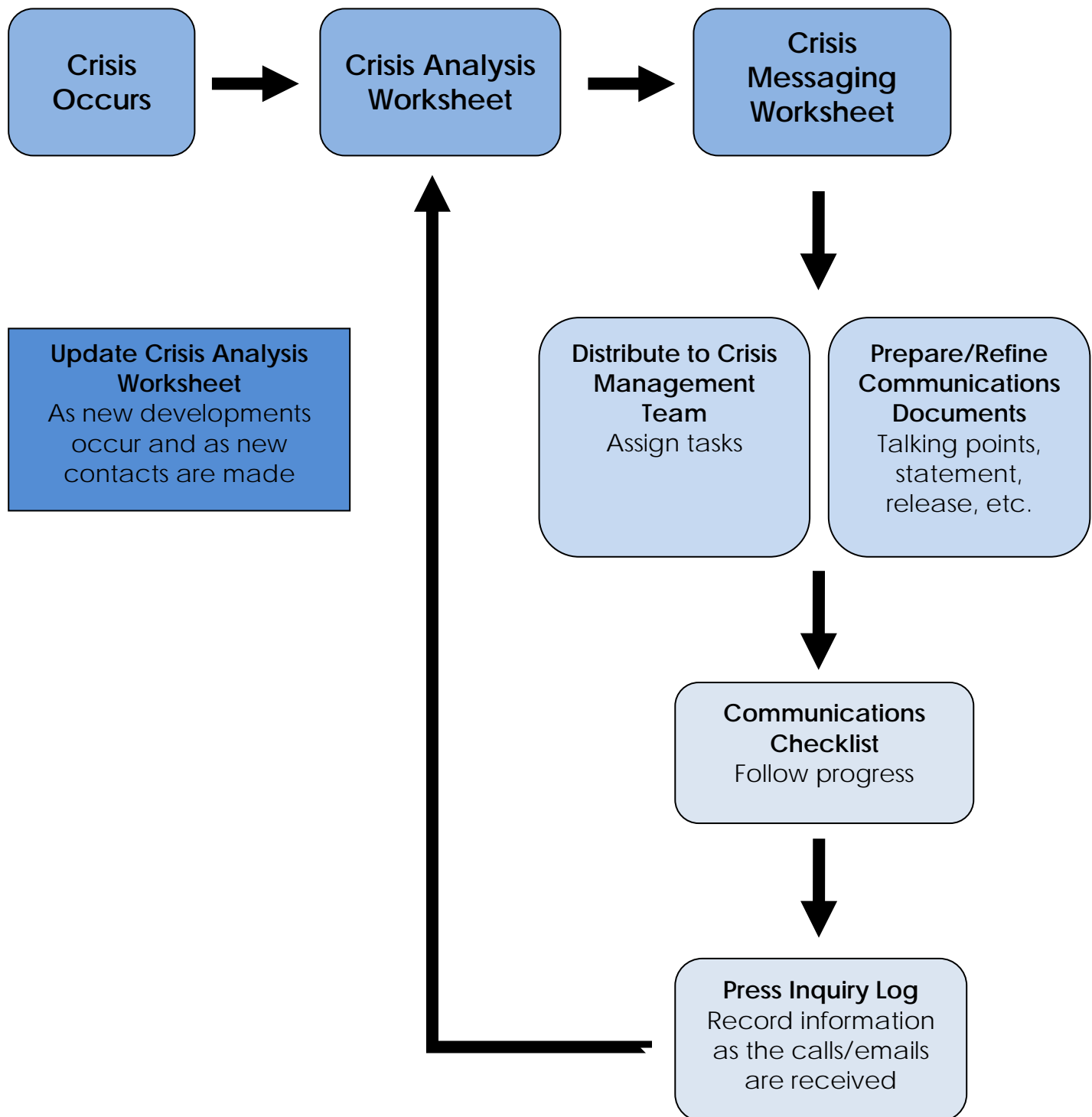
DO:

- Every interview/speaking engagement is an opportunity to state your message(s). Stay on message!
- If you think you're being too repetitive, you're doing it right.
- Think of your core message as an island. Reporters will try to push you off – your job is to tactfully stay on your island.
- Anticipate questions and formulate answers.
- Preparation is key – know your topic, know what you want to say.
- If time allows, research the reporter(s) you'll be speaking with. Try to ascertain or anticipate their "angle". By the time a reporter calls, they usually have an existing framework already developed (need filler, need help connecting the dots, etc.).
- Have prepared remarks in front of you, but try not to read verbatim.
- Watch your tone and demeanor. Make eye contact with your audience, if in person.
- Mistakes happen: calmly correct yourself and move on, don't worry about it.
- Visualize how you would ideally like the article and its headline to read or be seen tomorrow and work backward from there.
- Help your interviewer prepare. Provide background info, charts, statistics, etc. that support /illustrate your point(s).
- It is okay to pause to collect your thoughts, don't feel the need to start speaking as soon as the question is asked. Beware of the "pause".
- Remember your audience – use layman's terms.
- Speak in complete sentences. Use short sentences, not one-word answers.
- Open with your message...expand on it...then close with it, too.
- Respect deadlines.
- Correct inaccuracies.

DON'T:

- Lie to a reporter.
- Sound or look defensive...don't be fake, but don't gear up for a fight
- Talk to a reporter when he/she has caught you off guard.
- Be afraid to say, "*I don't know – I'll have to get back to you,*" or "*I haven't had a chance to see it yet – let me get my hands on it and I'll call you back.*"
- If you're not expecting the call, find out what they're calling about before you start the interview. Don't talk if you're not prepared: "*I have to attend to a student issue, can I call you back when I'm done with here?*"
- Never feel compelled to do an interview on the spot.
- Cut off the questioner. Don't speak with your hands or get fidgety.

EXAMPLE CRISIS RESPONSE PROCEDURES



EXAMPLE CRISIS ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

How did we learn of the crisis?

Briefly describe the crisis:

In addition to members of the Crisis Management Team, are there other personnel who can provide vital information when preparing a response? Provide their names and contact information:

Does the crisis involve a specific school? If so, where and how?

Are there specific stakeholders who can provide secondary messaging in this crisis? Who will contact them?

Does the crisis involve any public officials? Legislators, department of education staff, etc.? Are there particular sensitivities in this area that we need to consider in our messaging?

EXAMPLE CRISIS MESSAGING WORKSHEET

Organization Objectives:

Communications Objectives:

Audiences:		
Key Messaging		
Backup/Data		

EXAMPLE COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST

- ☐ Alert/Brief Crisis Management Team
- ☐ Assemble Crisis Management Team, complete Crisis Analysis Worksheet
- ☐ Complete Crisis Messaging Worksheet
- ☐ Alert affected offices
- ☐ Activate press inquiry log
- ☐ Develop and continually update worksheets, talking points, and Q&A
- ☐ Begin communications with key stakeholders, providing specific messaging
- ☐ Communicate key messages frequently – invite media and others to raise questions/concerns during each communication
- ☐ Monitor media and stakeholder responses – address any inaccuracies or inconsistencies immediately
- ☐ Continually update analysis worksheet, messaging worksheet and statements during the crisis
- ☐ Anticipate possible scenarios during the crisis and prepare responses

EXAMPLE PRESS INQUIRY LOG

What is your name?

What media organization do you represent?

What is your contact information/the best way to reach you?

What story are you working on?

Are there specific questions you have? Are there particular answers I can get for you?

How familiar are you with our district? Can I provide you with background?

What is your deadline?

END YOUR CONVERSATION WITH “I WILL CALL YOU BACK” AND FOLLOW THROUGH