



News from Secretary Duncan & the U.S. Department of Education

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Resources for Schools to Prepare for and Recover from Crisis

Dear Colleague,

All of us who work in education have broken hearts and are haunted by the tragedy visited on the educators, students, and families of the Newtown Public School District and Sandy Hook Elementary School. Whenever a school experiences violence and the lives of children and adults are lost, we struggle to find words to express our emotions and explain how this could have happened.

Schools are among the safest places for children and adolescents in our country, and, in fact, crime in schools has been trending downward for more than a decade. Nationwide statistics, however, provide little solace when 20 first-graders and six adults are senselessly gunned down in a small town's elementary school. Accounts from Sandy Hook indicate that the school's heroic principal and her staff had safety measures in place and had practiced their emergency procedures. As a result, children's lives were saved and an even greater tragedy was averted.

Not all tragedies can be prevented. But schools and districts need to be ready to handle crises, large and small, to keep our children and staff out of harm's way and ready to learn and teach, and to recover from such tragedies should they occur. As we reflect on what happened last week in Connecticut, I want to share some resources from the U.S. Department of Education's [Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center](#) that may be helpful to you and your team, now and in the future.

As hard as it is to talk among adults about such a tragedy, it can be even more difficult to talk with students and our own children. [Helping Youth and Children Recover from Traumatic Events](#) is a compilation of resources from the Department of Education, other federal agencies, and counseling experts. It is so important to give children the chance to talk, write, or draw to express their emotions. Please create the time and space for them to do that.

The Department also has several resources on [Creating and Updating School Emergency Management Plans](#). If you do not have a crisis plan in place, please take steps to develop one. Engage a variety of school personnel and community partners. Plans should be comprehensive, anticipate a variety of hazards, and focus on the four phases of emergency management: prevention-mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

If you do have an emergency plan in place, please review it, update it as necessary, and practice that plan regularly. Knowing what to do when faced with a crisis can be the difference between calm and chaos.

The Department of Education's first priority is to help the Newtown community cope in the aftermath of this horrific event. In the days and weeks ahead, we will work with state and local officials, as well as Congress,

to do everything in our power to help Newtown begin the long process of recovery.

As President Obama said, our country has suffered through mass shootings and gun deaths of young people too many times, in too many places. As a nation, we must find the courage and the conviction to take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies – now.

As you take steps to prevent and prepare for possible emergencies in your community, you have my full support and deepest gratitude for taking on this difficult yet necessary work. Thank you for the difference that you make in the lives of our country's children.

Sincerely,

Arne Duncan

US Secretary of Education