

# Forum Feature

By Joanne M. Lozar Glenn



# Crisis in the Classroom: A Pound of Cure

When Rosario Pesce first began working in the field of crisis intervention, many school administrators didn't believe crises happened in schools. "Now, it's a matter of when, not if," he told attendees at his 2019 NBEA Convention session, "What Teachers Can and Should Do in a School-Related Crisis Response." The irony of later being interviewed about this topic on the same day and at the same time as the Saugus High School Shooting in Santa Clarita, California, wasn't lost on Pesce, coordinator of training-school psychology at Loyola University (Chicago) and a member of the National Association of School Psychologists' School Safety and Crisis Response Committee.

Today schools have crisis plans in place<sup>1</sup> for power failures, medical emergencies, weather disasters, and yes, active shooter events. They don't often have trauma-informed "after"-care plans. That's important, because stress from trauma can change brain architecture<sup>2</sup> that interfere with a students' ability to focus, learn, and function successfully.

Even overlooked common events such as the death of a teacher, a flood, or a fire can cause such crisis-related reactions in the school population, Pesce noted. In addition, many students—estimates hover at 50–60%—carry toxic stress from accumulated adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as abuse, neglect, and social and economic household challenges (CDC, 2019; Felti et al., 1998; Hickman & Higgins, 2019). A Pew Research Center study revealed that 70% of teens say stress is a major issue for them (Horowitz & Graf, 2019).

Chronic, toxic stress-caused brain changes can dysregulate a student's nervous system, potentially impacting thinking, decision-making, and emotional control. This makes "negative academic outcomes such as poor grades, an increased risk of suspensions, or dropping out of school all together" all the more likely (Hickman & Higgins, 2019).

Here, the *Forum* looks at what's needed to develop appropriate, useful, and meaningful crisis after-care interventions, including an introduction to trauma-informed teaching strategies: the ounce of prevention that could effect, metaphorically and practically speaking, a pound of cure.

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"About 80% of individuals can get through crises with proper social support and other universal interventions, and a crisis can even be an opportunity for growth. The other 20% need additional intervention."

—Rosario Pesce, Loyola University

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## Clarifying terms

So what qualifies as a crisis or trauma?

"Looking at the semantics of it, the words are arguably interchangeable," said Gabe Lomas, a professor of counseling at Western Connecticut State University (Danbury) and president of the New York Association for Play Therapy. "But the reality is they are different. A crisis overwhelms current functional abilities and resources in the moment. That's different for everybody.

"Trauma, on the other hand," he added, "is a clinical diagnosis: It's a crisis that has left a scar." Or, as Rice and Groves (2005) defined it, "an exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous events overwhelm a person's capacity to cope." Trauma, too, is idiosyncratic.

Lomas has spent his career working with schools to improve school safety. Since 2014 he's been organizing crisis prevention and intervention training in the western Connecticut towns clustered around the Danbury-Newtown area.

He knows crisis always leaves an impact whether or not it leads to trauma, and that crises can, and do, happen to everyone. "No one has a 'get-out-of-crisis/trauma-free card,'" he said.

Interventions, of course, vary by incident and by age level, based on emergency operations plans in place for each school community. After-care, when it happens, can be informed by any of several conceptual models (**Table 1, p. 22**).

**Table 1. How Teachers Can Respond: Models of crisis intervention**

PREPaRE Model (2016)	ABC Model (2014)	SAFER-R Model (2005)	10 Step Acute Stress & Trauma Management Protocol (2001) for Emergency Responders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Prevent</b> and <b>Prepare</b> for psychological trauma</li> <li>• <b>Reaffirm</b> physical health and perceptions of security and safety</li> <li>• <b>Evaluate</b> psychological trauma risk</li> <li>• <b>Provide</b> interventions and</li> <li>• <b>Respond</b> to psychological needs</li> <li>• <b>Examine</b> the effectiveness of crisis prevention and intervention</li> </ul>	<p><b>A)</b> Establishing and maintaining rapport</p> <p><b>B)</b> Identifying the problem</p> <p><b>C)</b> Coping</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Stabilize</b></li> <li>• <b>Acknowledge</b></li> <li>• <b>Facilitate</b> understanding</li> <li>• <b>Encourage</b> adaptive coping</li> <li>• <b>Restore</b> functioning</li> <li>• <b>Refer</b></li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Assess</b> for danger/safety of self and others.</li> <li>2. <b>Consider</b> the mechanism of injury.</li> <li>3. <b>Evaluate</b> the level of responsiveness.</li> <li>4. <b>Address</b> medical needs.</li> <li>5. <b>Observe</b> and identify.</li> <li>6. <b>Connect</b> with the individual.</li> <li>7. <b>Ground</b> the individual.</li> <li>8. <b>Provide</b> support.</li> <li>9. <b>Normalize</b> the response.</li> <li>10. <b>Prepare</b> for the future.</li> </ol>
<p>S. Brock, A. Nickerson, M. Louvar Reeves, C. Conolly, S. Jimerson, R. Pesce, and B. Lazzaro. (2016). <i>School Crisis The PREPaRE Model</i>, 2nd ed. Bethesda, Md: National Association of School Psychologists.</p>	<p>Kanel, K. (2014). <i>A Guide to Crisis Intervention</i>. Cengage Learning.</p>	<p>Often used with Roberts, A., &amp; Ottens, A. (2005). The seven-stage crisis intervention model: A road map to goal attainment, problem solving, and crisis resolution. Available at <a href="https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2005-14106-001">https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2005-14106-001</a></p> <p>Later refined into ACT model by Roberts (see <a href="https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2002-18668-001">https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2002-18668-001</a>)</p>	<p>Developed by Mark Lerner, president of The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress (ATSM), and Raymond Shelton director of emergency medical training at a police academy. Details at <a href="https://www.aaets.org/ten%20stages%20atmsm.pdf">https://www.aaets.org/ten%20stages%20atmsm.pdf</a></p>

## Acknowledge a shattered world view

In a school-wide crisis event, the first thing to do after ensuring students are safe and their needs are being met is “to recognize that the story they’ve told themselves about the world has been upended,” said Lisa Cooper Ellison, a Charlottesville, VA-based writer, instructor, and coach whose post-graduate education and expertise include clinical mental health counseling, working as a trauma counselor and special education teacher, and writing about trauma.

“Before a crisis occurs, most of us tend to see the world as a generally safe place where people have generally good intentions, or at the very least, as a place with rules we believe

we understand,” she said. “When we go through something terrible, that worldview changes. [We think] *I am not safe and perhaps everyone doesn’t have good intentions*. This shift in a person’s inner narrative can create feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness that compound external challenges such as danger in a shooting or displacement from a weather event.”

After listening to what they say—“[which is] one of the most important interventions you can offer survivors,” Ellison said—help them understand that the changes in their worldview are a normal response to an abnormal situation. “Helping them understand this new story, and then challenging it by engaging in restorative activities (for



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— Lisa Cooper Ellison, writing coach and former mental health counselor

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example, donating blood, gathering supplies for other victims, or providing words of comfort), promotes empowerment and resilience,” she said.

### Meet psychological needs

In addition to natural social support from family, friends, and teachers, what Pesce calls crisis psychoeducation is an important next step in building resilience through the PREPaRE model. “We can’t assume ‘You survived, you’re fine, now let’s move on,’” he said. “The most important thing is often not the event, but the interpretation of the event by the individual.”

For example, if students in a class have previously experienced a lot of trauma—something teachers and other staff might not know—another crisis can have a more severe impact. For that reason, psychoeducation is delivered in group settings and the facilitator assumes that everyone in the group, including educators, might have some risk of post-crisis trauma.

Typically a school-employed mental health professional is available after the crisis to provide training to school staff and student caregivers. Then the teacher holds an all-class meeting to explain the event and the consequences. Communication is crucial, because rumors fester if communication is lacking. “You want to avoid rumors, which can increase trauma,” Pesce said.

The teacher might say, for example, *Thinking about this event for a while is kind of normal, but meanwhile we want you to know what happened and answer questions. There are people here in school to assist you.*

“It’s all very scripted<sup>3</sup> so that content stays focused on the importance of learning how to deal with the students under your care,” Pesce said. “About 80% of individuals can get through crises with proper social support and other universal interventions, and a crisis can even be an opportunity for growth. The other 20% need additional intervention. Two or three weeks after, hopefully we’ve met needs through school interventions, but if not, then we have relationships with

outside facilitators who can work with students [who need more follow-up].” In such instances, he often recommends cognitive behavioral therapy.<sup>4</sup>

Having outside facilitators is useful, because talking about the crisis experience can be difficult, even for school leaders. “It’s common [for them] to ignore teacher or student deaths because they don’t know how to deal with it,” Lomas said. “One thing to be clear on, though: We should make time after the event for grieving,” he recommended. “After that, it’s most helpful to turn back to routine as soon as possible.”

A note of caution: Be cautious about assuming everyone is at the same point in the grieving process. “It’s a myth that once a loss happens you’re ready to grieve,” said Eric Wood, director of counseling and mental health at Texas Christian University (Fort Worth). [People may be numb or in shock.] Grief may be months down the road.”

Wood said he notices heightened hypervigilance after crisis events. “The brain can’t process what’s happened, so there is a fight, flight, or freeze reaction,” he said. “There might be confusion, or forgetfulness, or weird dreams. If we think [students] are in the numb phase, and are acting like everything’s fine, we go to them.” His staff might create a ritual such as a student vigil, for instance, or plant a tree at a later date to acknowledge the loss.

Crises can produce long-term effects regardless of whether you witness or endure the event, he cautions. “What people don’t think about,” he said, “is that triggers can create the same response.” For example, anniversary dates, or passing the physical place when an event occurred, can set off emotional reactions and open the door to delayed or further grieving.

To assist teachers, Wood provides annual “red folder” crisis training and preparation. Folders contain resources for how to approach and help students in distress. “Faculty are the gatekeepers,” Wood said. “Eighty-five percent of the students we see come to us because someone asked them to come. It’s rare for a student to visit a counseling center completely on their own.”

### Create trauma-informed classrooms

Clearly teachers play an important role in school-wide crisis after-care. Still, crisis or not, every one out of two students in the classroom likely has experienced some degree of ACEs.

Alex Shevrin Venet, in her interview during the podcast episode “A Crash Course in Trauma-Informed Teaching,” said this about students in personal crisis: “When you’re in survival brain you can’t learn and you can have a calm interaction that follows complete logic ... . Many teachers don’t realize how

## What Is Trauma-Informed Teaching? 7 key ideas

1. Is not a checklist but a mindset founded in brain science.
2. Assumes all students are trauma-affected and benefit from SEL (social-emotional learning) support.
3. Recognizes three key aspects to any crisis: Event, Experience, Effect.
4. Realizes “acting out” can appear “positive” as well as “negative.” For instance, hyperactivity can mask hypervigilance, a key symptom of post-traumatic stress.
5. Emphasizes relationships before content so that students feel safe, seen, and secure enough to access resources that will help refocus their brain on learning.
6. Flourishes with a partnership-based approach that includes counselors, teachers, parents, and other trusted adults.
7. Helps buffer the effects of secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma affecting teachers who bear witness to others’ trauma.

### Sources:

Venet, A.S. (2018, August 3). The how and why of trauma-informed teaching. *Edutopia*. Available at <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-and-why-trauma-informed-teaching>

Venet, A.S. (2019, September 13). The evolution of a trauma-informed school. *Edutopia*. Available at <https://www.edutopia.org/article/evolution-trauma-informed-school>

many of their students are in this place.” (Watson, n.d.)

At the very least, these stressors derail learning. In extreme cases, students act out and may face encounters with law enforcement.

“We need to be prepared to support kids who have experienced trauma even if we don’t know exactly who they are,” Venet said. “Sometimes the trauma manifests in really bold obvious ways and with seemingly obvious causes, but most of the time, kids who have experienced trauma will not really be aware of their trauma or even be able to name it. Many of them will be well into adulthood before they have labels for what they experienced and are able to understand and process how it’s impacted them.”

Supporting these students begins with creating a trauma-informed classroom environment [see sidebar above]. Rather than a set of prescribed strategies or “something you need to add to your plate,” it’s an effort to create a positive social climate by choosing to view students through a particular

philosophical lens and committing to building better relationships with them to prevent conflict and teach them more effectively (Watson, par. 2).

Educator and speaker Karen Gross, who served as senior policy advisor to the U.S. Department of Education and is an expert in trauma and disaster planning and relief, observes that educators are not just delivering content. “Trauma travels with students like a suitcase,” she said. “We know that the best solution for helping traumatized students is engagement with a positive caring adult. Educators can listen well and ask better, not harsher, questions of their students.”

For example, instead of wondering “What’s wrong with this student?” shift the lens to wondering “What happened to this student?” Instead of telling a student “You’re not allowed to do that” shift to a less directive, more curious approach. Ask, for example, “Can you share with me why you’re so upset?” Then listen to what they say.

“Be there for them in the moment,” Gross said. “This is not content learning but it will enable content learning.” There’s a growing consensus in the literature, she noted, that “we do better by allowing students to process what’s going on right there even if we have to call in a trained professional to help with the situation. It messages to the student, ‘I have to figure this out’ and demonstrates that the way to deal with problems is not to get kicked out of school but to work through whatever is troubling.”

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Though more people are becoming trauma-aware even if they don't have all the tools to be trauma-sensitive or trauma-responsive, Gross remarked, there's still a long way to go to solve the problem. She would like to see more training of educators in this area.

"Add trauma training to colleges of education so it's not just an add-on but the focus of a strong academic and practical set of insights into trauma's broad-ranging impact on students," she said. "Provide employment-based training for professional development once teachers and professors are in the workplace. We could ask, *why do this? What about all the other students?* The answer is if you create a trauma-responsive environment, it benefits all students. Like a rising tide, it lifts all boats."

Loyola's Pesce agrees with Gross on the importance of making trauma training part of teacher education. "When it comes to psychological and emotional safety, which we know is as important as physical safety, students will follow the lead that adults give them. [Educators] are the role models. They've got to respect that in themselves ... and do everything in their power to remain calm and to recognize that this is the most important thing they can do for their students."

### Take an ecological approach

Educators don't have to go it alone. "Teachers are the ones who see kids day in and day out," said Western Connecticut's Lomas. "But I'm a fan of the ecological approach: [Protecting students] is everyone's responsibility."

An ecological approach spreads the responsibility across expanding concentric circles: parents, employers, religious groups, government laws. "All have an impact ... in building resilience," Lomas said.

Retired police chief Kevin Craig, now a school safety consultant with Porzio Compliance Services (see "Business Spotlight," page 28) calls this kind of ecological approach "providing collaborative wrap-around services."

Pointing to the increase in incidents of mass violence, he said, "While there is never an excuse for violence, after-action reports indicate that perpetrators of mass violence in many cases have ACEs, which could be catalysts [for the actions they take]. It's important to look at safety and security holistically rather than focusing on target hardening. [Trauma-informed models] get ahead of crisis by focusing on prevention." ■

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>According to *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* (2013), national preparedness efforts are now informed by Presidential Policy Directive (PPD)-8, signed by President George W. Bush on March 30,

2011. Guidelines are aimed at keeping the nation "safe from harm and resilient when struck by hazards" (FEMA, 2018) and based on lessons learned from terrorist attacks, hurricanes, school incidents, and other crises. Guidance stresses broad and sweeping planning that is at the same time customized to the locale, assumption of the potential for crisis at "in all settings and at all times," and a collaborative planning process that involves the whole school community. Ideally planning addresses five aspects of crisis intervention—prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery—and schools must comply with applicable state and local requirements.

<sup>2</sup>Brain regions typically impacted by traumatic stress include the amygdala (fear regulation), the hippocampus (memory), and prefrontal cortex (executive function and decision-making) (Bremner, 2006).

<sup>3</sup>Business educators who would like a copy of the five-part lesson plan presented in *Student Psychoeducational Groups in School Crisis Intervention: The PREPaRE Model* can access it here: <https://apps.nasponline.org/search-results.aspx?q=Student+Psychoeducational+Groups+in+School+Crisis+Prevention>. Note that several resources are on this webpage; please click on title ("Student Psychoeducational Groups...") to access.

<sup>4</sup>Signs of students who might need additional follow-up include common reactions that linger (usually for more than two weeks), Pesce explained: "In a classroom meeting, for example, some students keep asking the same questions and don't seem at ease with the answers. Or they might still be having issues like not coming to school or acting in ways they normally don't—for example a quiet student who becomes hyperactive or extremely withdrawn." Such students might be referred for group crisis intervention for three to four hours during the school day to process emotions by sharing their crisis story and their crisis reactions, looking for commonalities, and normalizing some of the grief reactions they're experiencing and learning ways to address them.

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## Selected Resources

### Media

#### **10 Simple Steps for Reducing Toxic Stress in the Classroom**

<https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/11/15/10-simple-steps-for-reducing-toxic-stress.html>

A listicle that describes 10 techniques for delivering social-emotional learning to students to mitigate the impact of lived adverse childhood events (ACEs) and help them succeed with learning.

#### **A Crash Course on Trauma-Informed Teaching**

<https://thecornerstoneforteachers.com/truth-for-teachers-podcast/trauma-informed-teaching/>

A “Truth for Teachers” podcast that provides an overview of understanding trauma-informed teaching practices, with do’s and don’ts for navigating how to support students and oneself in trauma’s aftermath.

#### **Collective impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences**

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/index.html>

The Centers for Disease Control’s database of information on adverse events that can impact a student’s future health and success. The database includes reports and findings as well as prevention tools. A scorable test is available at <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/03/02/387007941/take-the-ace-quiz-and-learn-what-it-does-and-doesnt-mean>

#### **Educating for Trauma**

A book by former U.S. Department of Education senior advisor and trauma intervention and relief expert Karen Gross, forthcoming from Columbia University Press, that provides concrete strategies that educators and administrators can deploy to create trauma-responsive educational institutions across all educational levels.

#### **Guide for Developing High Quality School Emergency Operations Plans**

[https://rem.ed.gov/docs/REMS\\_K-12\\_Guide\\_508.pdf](https://rem.ed.gov/docs/REMS_K-12_Guide_508.pdf)

A report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education with input from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Federal Emergency Management Agency. Addresses

principles of school emergency management planning; processes for refining school emergency operation plans (EOPs) in partnership with community partners; form, function, and content of school EOPs; key topics that support school emergency planning, psychological first aid, and information sharing.

### **“The How and Why of Trauma-Informed Teaching”**

**<https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-and-why-trauma-informed-teaching>**

An Edutopia article that debriefs a Twitter chat among educators about building trauma-informed social and emotional learning (SEL) environments. Key concepts include need to assume that “all children are trauma-affected and need SEL support”; the importance of relationships first, concepts second; the recognition that some students’ undesirable behaviors emerge from unhealed and retriggered trauma; the need for a consistent team-based approach to deliver appropriate trauma-informed support; and the provision of a buffer for the secondary trauma that teachers experience “because of the stress of bearing witness to others’ trauma.”

### **SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach**

**<https://www.acesconnection.com/blog/three-e-s-and-4-r-s-samhsa-s-new-publication-on-trauma-informed-care>**

Information that simplifies complex concepts underlying trauma and trauma-informed care: (1) “The Three E’s of Trauma: Events, Experiences, and Effects” and (2) “The Four R’s: Key Assumptions in a Trauma Informed Approach—Realization, Recognize, Respond, Resist Re-Traumatization.”

## **Legislation**

### **The Handle with Care Act of 2018**

**<https://www.acesconnection.com/g/aces-in-education/blog/the-federal-handle-with-care-act-is-designed-to-connect-children-who-experience-trauma-to-trauma-informed-school-resources>**

A West Virginia-based initiative that became a national model for connecting schoolchildren who experience trauma at home, such as domestic

violence, drug raids, overdoses etc., with trauma-informed resources. The Act authorized \$10 million in federal funding to establish 5-year demonstration grants for states so that they could build or strengthen “Handle with Care” programs in their districts. The initiative was intended to boost coordination between law enforcement and school-level personnel to better support students affected by trauma-related events. How it works: If a student encounters the law enforcement system as a result of some home-based trauma, for example, law enforcement will send a “Handle with Care” alert to the child’s school so that the school can interact with the child in a method informed by their trauma training. The goal is to promote a safe school environment and ensure that every child thrives in school even if that child experiences trauma at home.

## **Organizations**

### **National Association of School Psychologists**

**[www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)**

Produced *Frameworks for Safe and Successful Schools*, guidance for creating positive school climates and for dealing with emergencies and their effects.

### **The National Child Traumatic Stress Networks**

**[www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)**

Offers resources for raising the standard of trauma-informed care and providing access to services for traumatized children, their families, and their communities in the U.S.

## **Professional Development**

### **Trauma-Informed Practice Certificate**

**<https://sww.umich.edu/offices/research/projects-grants/trauma-informed-practice-certificate-for-prospective-teachers-social-workers-and-nurses/13219>**

A professional development certificate training for current and prospective teachers in the knowledge and skills to provide inter-professional, cutting-edge responses to students’ trauma and traumatic stress and to sustain trauma-informed service delivery systems in schools.



## Porzio Compliance Services: Providing “Wrap Around” Trauma-Informed Consulting Services to Schools

Though 2018 was the worst year on record for gun violence in U.S. schools, data overall show that schools are the safest place, other than at home, for students to be (Blad, 2018; Lopez, 2018). Regarding the latter, *Education Week* noted that schools have significantly increased security measures, including the number of school safety officers in schools. In addition, recent legislation such as the 2018 “STOP School Violence Act,” which funds school security and measures like threat assessment, will help schools identify potential violence risks and provide violence prevention training for teachers and students.

The risks schools face and the funding available to mitigate those risks have created a need and an opportunity for the kind of security compliance and services Porzio Compliance Services provides. In addition to assessments, emergency planning, and investigations, the company provides training that goes beyond intervention. According to Porzio’s Assistant Vice President of Safety, Security, and Investigations Kevin Craig, the training instead offers a holistic prevention and guidance approach to establishing a culture of security focused on building trusting relationships between students, staff, and school safety officers.

### Trauma-informed prevention training

Craig has four children of his own. He understands the fear of losing those children to a preventable emergency. His background as a retired New Jersey police chief and his work on a state



governor-appointed task force involving school safety led him to his current position at Porzio, where he and his company are able to make an impact by providing training and services that are trauma-informed.

Here’s what that looks like: “School resource officers and security staff are being trained to identify not a specific trauma but the stress reactions that students who have been exposed to trauma or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) tend to exhibit,” Craig said. “But rather than react in kind—as in traditional law enforcement and security models—we emphasize taking a step back and [considering what might have happened to that child that may be contributing to their behavior].”

For example, in one school where Craig served as security director, some students were acting out when confronted on code-of-conduct issues. Rather than punitively sending them to the office, potentially intensifying resentment, frustration, and anger, he let them express their feelings so that the situation could be safely de-escalated. The trauma-informed intervention allowed the incident to move forward without further disturbing the school environment or resulting in additional consequences for the affected student.

“We don’t know if trauma is behind [these kinds of incidents], but reacting in kind is not going to solve the issue,” Craig said. “We are concerned with providing safety and security first so that we can move together toward a successful resolution.”

## Continuous case management

Regulations for schools employing resource officers vary across the nation. In New Jersey, where Porzio is located, schools sign a memorandum of agreement that identifies ground rules for incorporating resource officers into the school structure. For instance, officers are not expected to be involved in the discipline efforts of the school. Rather, they are considered adjunct staff members who have daily assignments, share information collaboratively, and function as liaisons between the school and the law enforcement agency.

Much like other law enforcement assignments like tactical teams and detectives, SRO's require specialized training and specific skills to be effective. These attributes include strong interpersonal and communications skills; problem-solving ability; effectiveness in working with school-aged children, parents, and school staff; and an understanding of youth development and psychology.

Vis-à-vis students, "in addition to their law enforcement role SRO's act as an informal counselor, mentor, or educator," Craig explained. In that role, SRO's might also provide information on how the criminal justice system works, what it means in teenage and adult life, and how behavior may impact a student's future. Porzio also provides schools with guidance on school security staffing including pre-employment investigations, collaborating with law enforcement, applicant selection, and training.

Echoing what is frequently a critique of emergency planning efforts, Craig noted that "emergency operations training is often limited to simply getting through emergency situations." In effect, then, only two of three emergency operations

## FAST FACTS: Porzio Compliance Services

**Headquarters:** Morristown, N.J.

**Business model:** A wholly-owned subsidiary of Porzio, Bromberg & Newman, P.C.

**Staff:** Five executive staff consisting of two lawyers and 3 C-Suite-level professionals with the full support of the Porzio family of businesses.

**Mission:** Assisting schools in all aspects of security and compliance from physical threat assessments to incident response plans, information compliance and security, employee training, and advocacy to help them create and maintain the most secure environment for students and staff

**Services:** Onsite assessments of emergency preparedness and security and technical vulnerability, compliance and operations reviews, investigations, and training

**Web:** <https://porziosafeschools.com>

plan components are ever addressed: the event and the experience (and not the effect). "The ideal situation," Craig said, "is to partner with mental health and social services so there is continuous case management."

The emphasis on relationships, trust, and multiple avenues for assistance is intended to wrap a safety net around the student. A recent situation bore out the effectiveness of this approach. In one school, Craig recalled, there was a student who was being pulled out of class regularly because of significant behavior issues.

"When confronted by administrators the student would become physically aggressive," Craig said. "We learned through conversation that the students' parents had substance abuse and incarceration issues."

Once that was determined through information sharing between and among safety officers and school staff, resources such as counseling were diverted to the student. After a while, the student became less confrontational. "Our approach had taken the student to a place where they could safely vent

and de-escalate, then discuss potential repercussions," Craig said. "The student was referred to counseling services, did well, and graduated successfully." ■

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