

# Introduction

**A**s a district crisis intervention team member for 18 years, I have had the opportunity to assist and support students and faculty members during times of crisis, including suicide, homicide, and accidental, natural, or man-made tragedies. From events that had a relatively small impact on a school population, such as a classmate's illness, to the school-wide reaction witnessed during the events of September 11, 2001, my opportunities to observe and attempt to stabilize school populations have always proven both challenging and rewarding.

I have written *Toward Successful School Crisis Intervention: 9 Key Issues* with the intention of addressing several specific topics that might occasionally cause school staff serving on crisis intervention teams—whom I'll refer to as *interventionists*—to question their methods, effectiveness, or overall direction. Optimally, the identification and examination of these issues, coupled with suggestions and alternative options, will result in a more comprehensive and effective crisis intervention effort.

*Toward Successful School Crisis Intervention* is not intended to be a compendium of crisis intervention research, a "cook-book" for intervening during crises, or simply my memoirs as a seasoned school crisis interventionist. Rather, it brings together relevant research with my own recommendations based on both the oversights and successes of school crisis intervention teams. In a head-on manner, this book identifies areas that have been traditionally overlooked, or existed as sensitive subject matter in the area of school crisis intervention.

## 2 TOWARD SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL CRISIS INTERVENTION

Each chapter—framed as an *issue* that is key to successful intervention—contains vignettes, helpful tips, and discussion questions that will allow you to gain a greater understanding of issues related to school crisis intervention efforts. Ideally used in study groups of crisis intervention team members, this book will encourage reflection and help teams organize and plan, as best they can, in advance of crises.

*Issue One: The Responsibility for School Crisis Intervention: Whose Job Is This, Anyway?* addresses the important question of which school personnel should actually carry out the task of crisis intervention. Possible reasons for hesitancy or refusal to become involved in crisis intervention efforts are also discussed.

*Issue Two: Necessary Attributes and Abilities for Team Members: What Does It Take?* focuses on the personal qualities and abilities that those who become members of the school crisis intervention team should possess in order to best serve the school populations that they are called on to assist.

*Issue Three: Training of School Crisis Intervention Team Members: Going to War Without a Weapon?* examines the effects of inadequate training for school crisis interventionists and their ramifications on students, fellow crisis interventionists, staff members, and the reputation of both school and community. The chapter also addresses the degree to which various professionals on intervention teams (e.g., counselors and psychologists) are trained in graduate school, and makes recommendations for ongoing, inservice professional development.

*Issue Four: Logistical School Crisis Response: The Overlooked Intervention,* or the physical movement of students and staff during a crisis, is often overlooked in lieu of psychological crisis intervention efforts. Specific personnel involved in logistical crisis response and issues involved in its implementation are also discussed.

*Issue Five: Determining the Impact of a Crisis: How Big Will the Bang Be?* allows the interventionist to consider several variables that might help determine the impact that a crisis might have on a school population. The benefits of assessing these variables are identified.

*Issue Six: Non-School-Based Crisis Intervention Teams: Districts and Schools Working Together* discusses the value of non-school-based support teams, widely held perceptions of these teams, and their relationships with existing school-based crisis intervention teams and these non-school-based teams.

*Issue Seven: Teachers: The Overlooked Interventionists* provides an opportunity to consider the role of the classroom teacher as crisis interventionist. The advantages of teacher support in the classroom setting are also detailed.

*Issue Eight: Did We Forget Anyone? Addressing the Needs of Every Staff Member* focuses on a variety of reasons why staff members occasionally fail to receive crisis intervention support, and how schools can ensure that everyone receives appropriate attention.

*Issue Nine: Primary Prevention: Preparing for Crises Before They Happen* offers a look at a unique type of crisis intervention that prepares students to deal with their emotions before a crisis takes place. Although considered unorthodox by some, it can be an effective means of support for school populations. The reactive tendency of most intervention efforts is examined, and the case is made for the timeliness and importance of engaging in primary prevention.

During an interview, a reporter once asked me if the rigors of crisis intervention ever “took a toll.” I explained that during times of misfortune, individuals can understandably descend to really low points in their lives, for some *the* lowest point. It is in assisting in their recovery that I find tremendous gratification. It’s not the toll that the situation exacts, but rather, the fulfillment that the intervention offers. I hope that *Toward Successful School Crisis Intervention* will help school crisis interventionists experience a higher degree of satisfaction as they provide their valuable service on our nation’s campuses.