

Brief Facts and Tips

1. An essential component of school crisis response is the reunification of students with their parents and legal guardians. This process is crucial as **schools are accountable for maintaining the chain of custody for every student** during and after a crisis, and reunification also helps with the reestablishment of social support systems.
2. Evacuation facilities often serve as **reunification sites**. These can be other nearby schools, churches, recreation centers, or other community buildings. The site must be large enough to accommodate the entire student body, school staff, and parents. Floor plans of the site should be included in the protocol and go-kit. At least one backup site should be identified in case the original site cannot be used.
3. A reunification site should be identified within walking distance of the school and also a site further away from the school. In case needed, the availability of buses or other means of transportation must be predetermined and transportation of students with special needs should be considered.
4. Having up-to-date, accurate contact information for parents and guardians is critical to the reunification process. Hard copies of **emergency contact cards** should be kept in binders, organized by class and/or grade level. If emergency information is kept in an online database, schools need to consider how to access that information in a crisis event to ensure security and confidentiality. In addition, if internet access is not available, hard copies must be available as backup.
5. Schools need to determine in advance how to notify parents that their children have been evacuated and need to be picked up at the reunification site. This **process of notification** varies depending on available resources (e.g., reverse 911/automated telephone, text notification, and/or social media such as the school's Twitter account). Only the most pertinent information should be included in the notification.
6. **Accurate rosters of students** present when a school is evacuated must be maintained. Taking attendance at the reunification site is the only way of accounting for all students. This will also minimize chaos and anxiety.
7. **Security** and/or law enforcement personnel should be at the reunification site to ensure a safe and orderly reunification process, and to facilitate a sense of safety and security for everyone.
8. An adequate number of **school-employed mental health staff members** trained in crisis intervention should be available at the reunification site to assist in meeting immediate mental health needs.
9. **Reunification go-kits** with essential resources and supplies should be assembled in advance and made available at the reunification site. These go-kits should include floor plans; copies of emergency contact cards; directional signs; flashlights; a bullhorn with extra batteries; pens, pencils, and paper; laptop computers with extension cords, etc.
10. **The release process** should include the use of reunification cards that are used to match students with their caregivers. Parents complete the cards, show identification and have custody rights verified at a check-in location. Students can then be retrieved from staging

areas and reunited with parents in a different area of the reunification site. Priority should be given to the reunification of younger students with caregivers. The release process should be rehearsed regularly.

References:

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