When Tragedy Strikes: from the Parent’s Perspective
What Program Directors Should Do...and Not Do!

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Know Before You Go
When the Unthinkable Happens!

Trauma Mitigation & Education Tools
EMOTIONAL TRAUMA

Something happens that is...

Unexpected, out of control

Beyond one’s capacity to respond

Could not be prevented
The Traumatic Aftermath

What are your processes and protocols for addressing the traumatic impact on students, parents, staff, responders (including YOU) in the aftermath of a critical incident?
Trust, Respect and Affection

The extent to which victims believe the program cares (Benevolence)

The extent to which victims believe the program is capable (Competence)

Three ingredients for your effectiveness

- Compassion builds Affection
- Competence builds Respect
- Commitment binds
  Compassion with
  Competence to produce Trust
Key Principle:
We cannot effectively discern for others the impact of their particular loss(es).
Prioritize traumatic response

- High Risk/Affinity
- Low Control/Loss
- High Relationship/Responsibility
- Low Risk/Affinity

- Clients in the organization
- Acquaintances of injured
- People watching news
- Friends of friends of friends
- Injured students
- Surviving students and staff families
- Injured staff
- Injured bystanders
Three ingredients for your effectiveness

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What Happened with Us?

• The Phone Call
• The Service 4 Days Later
• The Calls to Semester at Sea
• The Service at Georgetown
What Happened with Us?

- The Phone Call
Some Overriding Guidelines

1. There is No Best Way to Respond, Only 100s of Bad Ways
2. Make Initial Contact in Person Where Possible
3. Offer Only Information That is Accurate
4. Manage Your Organization’s Reception…24/7 Coverage
5. Identify 3 Questions Your Organization Would be Asked
Some Overriding Guidelines

5. Have a Media Plan, Including Press Release, Social Media & Blogs

6. Have Highest Level Administrator as Contact with Victims

7. Encourage Calls in Press Release…Allow Venting

8. Have a Risk Manager/Crisis Response Plan

9. Training, Training, Training!
Let’s Get to Work!
While on a semester abroad program to study public health in Costa Rica, a student is swept away while swimming at a beach well-known for rip tides. A faculty member took students to the beach and is sitting on the beach as the student disappears in the ocean. The inclination of the program director is to tell the parents that their son is missing and nothing more before until the student is found. The student’s body is found by a fishermen three days later.
You are working with a language immersion program in Italy. They have a home-stay coordinator who arranges all accommodations. He says that he personally knows each family and most have been with the program for years. A female student you oversee tells you she does not feel well. You take her to the hospital and they can find nothing wrong. She returns to her host family and takes a shower during which she collapses and dies from carbon monoxide.
Students Mauled by Bear

While on a survival skills segment of a program sponsored by your university, seven students take a hike in the wilderness of Alaska. Since they are entitled to one day a week of independence, no program administrator is with them. After five hours of walking, they happen upon a mother and her cub and they run…but are overtaken by the mother who seriously mauls four of the students. Two suffer “life-threatening injuries” while the other two have minor injuries. The group uses its satellite phone to alert the program and it takes four long hours to find them and helicopter them to medical care.
Your business school promotes a two-week trip to Italy to meet with many companies to learn how international business is conducted. One day into the program, one of the female students appears to have a seizure and you rush her to the hospital where she remains for a day and a night. In her interviews and in her application, no mention was made of this chronic condition and it takes you by surprise.
Your college’s Spanish department takes a group of 13 students to Guatemala to get greater depth in their Spanish communication skills. The leader pays little attention to the warning of bandits on the main road between San Jose and Guatemala City. While the chartered bus is heading toward San Jose, at 3:30PM a pickup truck with 4 men appears and stops the motorcoach by firing rifles in the air. The bandits get all students off the vehicle, take all their valuables and then force 5 females into the sugar cane fields to sexually assault each of them.
Discussion Questions

• What should the first steps be?
• Should the program notify the family immediately or wait for confirmation of the outcome?
• How would you address the parents to show Compassion? Competence? Commitment?
• What specific actions should your “trauma plan” include that would be helpful across other trauma situations?
• What persons other than the victim need to be addressed in this trauma? What specifically would you do/communicate with each group?
Sara and Aron’s Wish... DO EVERYTHING WITHIN YOUR POWER TO MAKE YOUR PROGRAM SAFE