

## The importance of caring for the caregivers

District administrators need to make sure caregivers are mentally prepared for the stress and unusual situations they may face in a crisis such as returning to teaching amid COVID-19

By: Ted Uczen | August 5, 2020



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School shootings, suicides, Covid-19 — these are just a few of the recent incidents on the rise that impact school communities and weigh heavily on the staff who suddenly become the caregivers. The lasting impact of these events is huge, and we need to do more to ensure the well-being of our school personnel — those who are entrusted to educate, lead and maintain the safety of the children while in their care. Their jobs become even more difficult and challenging during a crisis, especially if they're asked to manage scenarios that are well out of the norm while remaining calm and leading others. It's imperative that we care for and support these folks before, during, and after a crisis.

This type of care is often referred to as "care for the caregiver." We want to make sure those who are caring for others are prepared for a multitude of difficult situations and understand what is expected of them. This goes beyond lockdowns, physical actions, and disaster plans, which are very important. District administrators need to make sure caregivers are mentally prepared for the stress and unusual situations they may face in a crisis, know that your staff is ready and able to act in case of an event and ensure staff members will be supported during an event and cared for after an event.

Likewise, your first responders need to know their own families' will be taken care of and supported while they respond to a crisis. In a large-



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scale disaster like a school shooting, while your internal crisis team is focused on managing the crisis, who's focused on their families? Your team will perform better if they're assured of their own families' well-being. Therefore, it may be beneficial for your district to establish a family support program that will:

- Establish communication with the caregivers' families
- Account for all family members
- Provide for the family members' safety and security
- Provide for the families' basic living needs, including transportation to a secure location if appropriate
- Provide information on the crisis event
- Connect family members and their extended families
- Provide stress, crisis and grief counseling as necessary

## **Utilize outside resources**

Educators who serve as first responders receive training on how to respond to emergencies and help those in need. Ensuring the safety of others should be second nature, but how do they guarantee their own safety? It is essential for responders to recognize their own limitations. It can be hard to remember to do this in the midst of a crisis, but understanding limits will build resilience and enable the team to bounce back and take the next crisis head-on.

Preparing responders for the worst helps ready them for a variety of situations, but the chaos of being in the thick of a crisis can be a different story. When responders throw themselves into saving lives, they may forget about taking care of themselves and their families. That's where Employee Assistance Programs, or EAPs, can help. Utilizing this type of third-party service will add a calming buffer and support responders and their families by creating a recovery plan for all involved. It ensures responders are supported on both the front line and at home and can send a crisis counselor to meet one-on-one with first responders in the aftermath of a challenging response. This helps build a more resilient staff when rebuilding efforts begin.

## **Develop resiliency**

We speak often of resilience in and for our children and rarely speak of resilience in terms of teachers, administrators, and other school support staff. Both are equally important, and both need to be supported and developed. Resilience is not a one-time thing you do to bounce back after an event. Resilience is like a muscle that is built, nurtured, and developed over time. The more you work it and build it, the more it helps you and strengthens you.

Let's make sure these "caregivers" have what they need to be successful and resilient before, during, and after a crisis. As district leaders, it's important to recognize the work teachers, administrators, and support staff do every day to protect and support your school families. A "thank you" will go a long way to getting things started. Then commit to building and strengthening resilience in your schools once the doors open.

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