



# Mental Health Recovery



**U.S. Department of Education, Office  
of Safe and Healthy Students**

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# Overview of Recovery Session

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- Define
- Discuss how to prepare for mental health Recovery
- Explore issues related to traumatic stress
- Discuss Recovery scenario



# Phases of Emergency Management



# Learning Objectives for Recovery

- Realize the importance of pre-planning for Recovery in the first three phases of emergency management
- Understand the fourth key component of Recovery:
  - Physical/structural Recovery
  - Business Recovery
  - Restoration of academic learning
  - **Psychological/emotional Recovery**
- The type and breadth of Recovery activities needed will vary based on the size and scope of the crisis event
- Complete an interactive scenario



# What is the Recovery Phase?

- The Recovery phase is designed to:
  - assist students and staff, as needed, with healing and coping, and
  - restore educational operations in schools.
- When does the Recovery phase begin?
- When does it end?



# Goal of the Recovery Phase

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- Restore a safe and healthy learning environment
- Ensure that students and staff have emotional and/or mental health support



# Recovery: Four Key Components

- Physical/structural Recovery
- Business Recovery
- Restoration of academic learning
- **Psychological/emotional Recovery**



# How Do Traumatic Events Impact Teaching and Learning?

- Increase in student absenteeism due to fear:
  - “This heightened sense of fear has caused an alarming increase in school violence (notably fights in the hallways) and a precipitous drop in school attendance rates. Before the incident, the school averaged 60 absences (out of 1,500 students). Since the incident, the absence rate has soared to a consistent rate of 80-100 absences per day.” (student homicide)





# How Do Traumatic Events Impact Teaching and Learning?

- Increase in student absenteeism due to psychosomatic issues:
  - “Students became more aware of their own symptoms and as a result, internalizing behaviors (i.e., anxiety, depression, and somatic complaints) increased, causing a heightened need for emotional support.”  
(suicide cluster)



# How Do Traumatic Events Impact Teaching and Learning?

- Increase in student violent behavior and disciplinary problems:
  - After the incident, firearms incidents increased 58%, mainly due to fear and students feeling a need to protect themselves.” (school shooting)
  - “The Principal reported that in previous school years there were about 10 discipline referrals per month. Since the incident, the average has increased to about 15 discipline referrals per month. ” (school shooting)



# How Do Traumatic Events Impact Teaching and Learning?

- Decrease in academic performance:
  - “Teachers have noted that many students are having a difficult time focusing on their work in class and out of class, their attention span is affected, some students have taken an ‘I don’t care’ attitude about school work and the upcoming state tests. Other students are acting out in ways they never did before. Teachers are finding it much harder to motivate their students.” (suicide cluster)



# How Do Traumatic Events Impact Teaching and Learning?

- Increased student mental health needs:
  - “The emotional impact was strongest for eye-witnesses and exacerbated by being questioned at the police station and told that they may be asked to testify in court. For many students, this latest event overlays past trauma. Symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome were observed in some students.”  
(fatal stabbing at school)



# How Do Traumatic Events Impact Teaching and Learning?

- Family concerns about school safety:
  - “The middle school enrollment was only 66% of last year’s. The primary reason given by parents for transferring their students to other districts was fear for their safety and frustration at what was seen as a slow response to problems resulting from the incident.” (school shooting at the high school)



# What is Psychological/Emotional Recovery?

*Purpose:* Promote coping and support resiliency for students and staff following an emergency

*Key Steps to promoting Psychological/Emotional Recovery:*

- Recognize the factors that may impact Psychological/Emotional Recovery
- Address issues related to traumatic stress
- Short- and long-term interventions may be necessary
- Work with internal and external partners who can provide support services—pre-screening is critical
- Training of school and district-level mental health Recovery teams

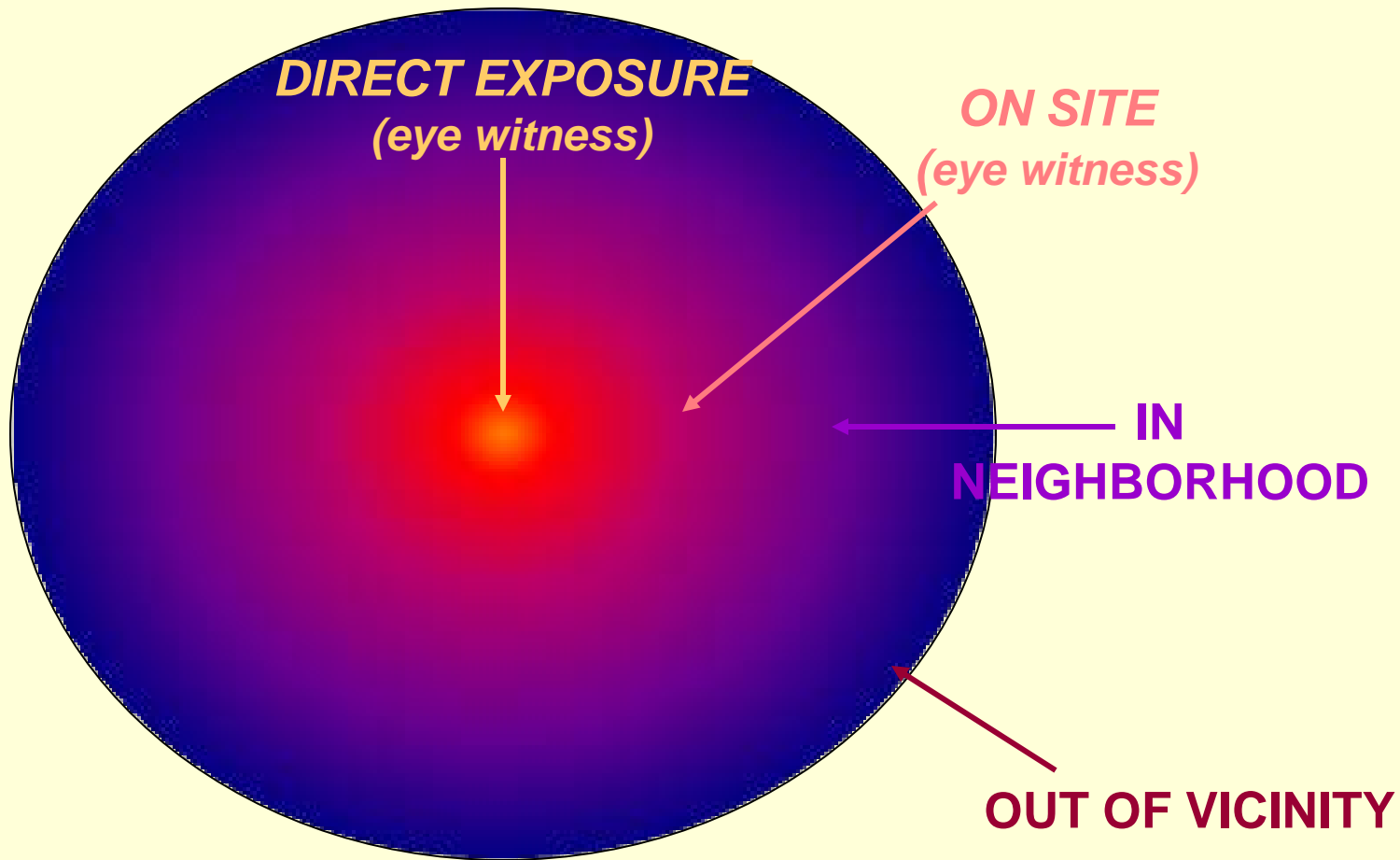


# What is Traumatic Stress?

- Traumatic stress is an acute distress response that is experienced after exposure to a catastrophic event
- Traumatic stress occurs because the event poses a serious, or perceived, threat to:
  - The individual's life or physical integrity
  - The life of a family member or close friend
  - One's surrounding environment



# Circles of Impact





# How Can Schools Support Psychological/Emotional Recovery in the Short-Term?

- Identify circles of impact and provide triage
  - Provide mental health resource materials for families, students, and staff
- Consider Psychological First Aid for Schools (PFA-S)
- Make individual and group crisis counseling available during the first week after an emergency
- Promote self-care among staff and utilize Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)
- Be aware of prior history of risk taking or trauma



# How Can Schools Support Psychological/Emotional Recovery in the Short-Term?

- Goals of Psychological First Aid for Schools (PFA-S)
  - Stabilize emotions and behaviors of students
  - Return students to an improved mental and emotional state after a crisis ready to attend and engage in learning



# How Can Schools Support Psychological/Emotional Recovery in the Short-Term?

- PFA-S follows a five-step response strategy designed to reduce initial distress:

1. Listen
2. Protect
3. Connect
4. Model
5. Teach

- Also referred to as LPC-Model & Teach

**Listen, Protect,  
Connect –  
Model & Teach**



# How Can Schools Support Psychological/Emotional Recovery in the Long-Term?

- Based on information gained in short-term intervention, refer students and staff to long-term interventions
- Trauma and grief focused school-based mental health programs
  - Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS)
  - Supports for Students Exposed to Trauma (SSET)

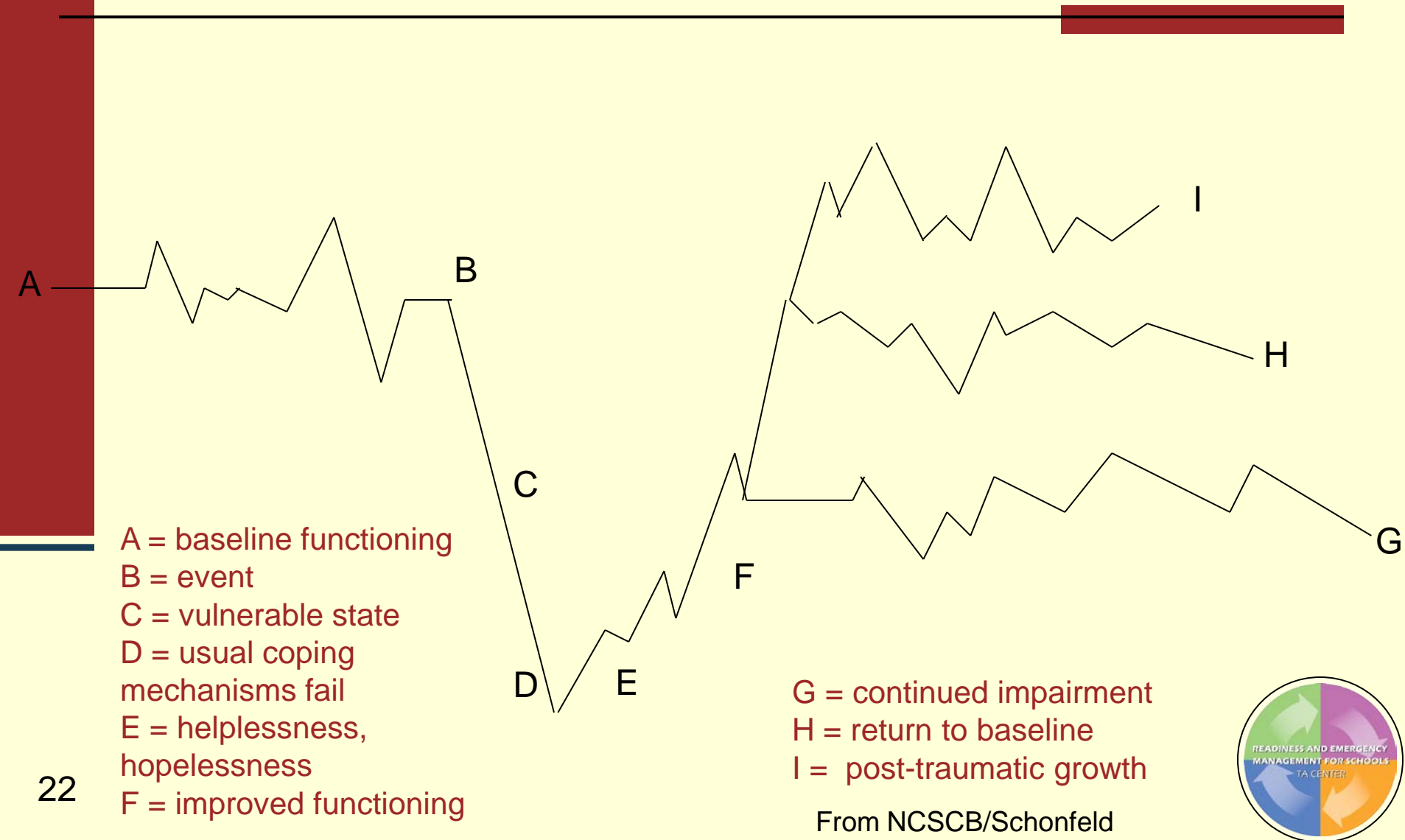


# How Can Schools Support Psychological/Emotional Recovery in the Long-Term?

- Conduct ongoing assessment/monitoring of mental health of students and staff
- Monitor attendance, grades, and counselor's visits
- Provide care for caregivers (compassion fatigue)
- Reinforce ongoing prevention programs
- Be aware of 'key dates,' such as trials, anniversaries, and holidays
- Modify lesson plans and/or testing plans, if needed



# Adjustment Over Time in Crisis



# How Can Schools Prepare for Psychological/ Emotional Recovery in Advance?

- Develop template letters (that can be tailored) for alerting parents, families, guardians, students, and staff to emergencies
- Outline strategies for dealing with “empty chairs”
- Consider a district policy for memorials
- Ensure a process is in place for parental consent for receipt of mental health services



# Key Issues for the Recovery Phase

*Issue #1:* Opening or closing schools after an emergency

## ■ Considerations:

- How long should the school be closed?
- How can parents/guardians weigh in on decisions about school closures?
- Who has the ultimate decision-making power regarding school closure?
- How will the community be notified?
- Ultimate question—Will the children be better off in school, or out of school?





# Key Issues for the Recovery Phase

*Issue #2:* Memorials after a student or staff death

■ Considerations:

- Memorials can be controversial
- Questions may arise about how/if policies should vary depending on the type of death
- Memorials in schools should not add to the suicide “contagion effect”
- A date for removing memorial items
- How memorials might reinforce ongoing prevention programming (i.e., scholarship funds, etc.)



# Key Issues for the Recovery Phase

## *Issue #3: Suicide Postvention*

### Considerations:

- Plan in advance for how suicides will be handled
- Verify information from a reliable source
- Provide staff with talking points to ensure consistent messaging
- Avoid public announcements, deliver information in small class settings
- Monitor memorial websites (i.e., Facebook, MySpace) and makeshift memorials



# Key Issues for the Recovery Phase

## *Issue #4:* How to handle key dates

### ■ Considerations:

- Be cognizant of anniversary dates but do not dramatize them
- Watch for reactions around holidays, anniversaries, and/or trial dates
- Prepare a constructive message for anniversaries
- Make sure educators watch for risk behaviors



# Summary

- Planning for Recovery develops from the first three phases of emergency management
- There are four key components of Recovery:
  - Physical/Structural Recovery
  - Business Recovery
  - Academic Recovery
  - **Psychological/Emotional Recovery**
- The type and breadth of Recovery activities needed will vary based on the size and scope of the crisis event



# Interactive Scenario



# Scenario

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- You are a member of the emergency management team at YOUR school.
- It's early morning.
- School has just begun for the day.
- One school bus is late arriving due to ice on the roads.



# Details of the Incident

- The bus has 26 students from the middle and high schools on board (ages 10–17).
- As the bus arrives, the driver is unable to stop the bus. The bus skids and then crashes through the wall of the music room. There are 25 students in the music room.
- Two students are killed and 19 students are injured—four of them severely.
- The bus driver was found to be intoxicated.



**What are the first  
three steps you  
would take as an  
emergency  
management team  
member?**





**Which students and staff are most in need of crisis counseling?**



# Additional Questions:

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- What will be your short term mental health recovery/psychological first aid plan?
- How will you respond to parents?



# Final Questions:

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- What will be your mid- to long-term mental health Recovery plans?
- If, in the days and weeks after this event students and parents want to construct a memorial – and the newspaper editors also share that view – what will be your decision?
- How should we plan for the anniversary?



# Resources

- REMS Helpful Hints: Psychological First Aid (PFA) for Students and Teachers: Listen, Protect, Connect – Model & Teach
  - [http://rems.ed.gov/views/documents/HH\\_Vol3Issue3.pdf](http://rems.ed.gov/views/documents/HH_Vol3Issue3.pdf)
- National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement
  - <http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/svc/alpha/s/school-crisis/>
- A Guide for Intermediate and Long-Term Mental Health Services After School-related Violent Events
  - <http://www.mentalhealth.org/publications/allpubs/NMH03-0151/page4.asp>
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network's (NCTSN) School Committee Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators
  - [http://www.nctsnet.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=ctr\\_ctte](http://www.nctsnet.org/nccts/nav.do?pid=ctr_ctte)
- Trauma Services Adaptation Center for Schools and Communities
  - <http://www.tsaforschools.org>



The REMS TA Center was established in October 2007 by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students.

The center supports schools and school districts in developing and implementing comprehensive emergency management plans by providing technical assistance via trainings, publications and individualized responses to requests.

For additional information about school emergency management topics, visit the REMS TA Center at <http://rems.ed.gov> or call 1-866-540-REMS (7367). For information about the REMS grant program, contact Tara Hill ([tara.hill@ed.gov](mailto:tara.hill@ed.gov)).

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