

Leading Through Crises

In the [third episode](#) of our three-episode series, “What It Means to Be a School Leader,” Dr. Linda Henderson-Smith, a licensed counselor and a consultant for trauma-informed, resilience-oriented care with the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, discusses leading through crises and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Learning Outcomes

- » Discuss how to prepare for crises and how to support the community afterward.
- » Understand how crises can impact a person or community on multiple levels.
- » Ensure staff personal and professional wellness before, during, and after a crisis.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Crises at any level (personal, community, national, etc.) can have a tremendous impact on the school environment, with reactionary behavior and outcomes.
- ✓ When someone’s anxiety is high, such as after a crisis, their brain is less able to respond, process, and learn. Leaders can help teach others how to find calm so that everyone can be in a better emotional state to hear, to learn, to respond, and to process.
- ✓ Successfully leading during a crisis means understanding that your staff may be experiencing difficulty dealing with their emotions and completing their tasks. Leaders must know how to address their community members’ stress and anxiety.
- ✓ Leaders must ensure their own protection in times of crisis by paying attention and tending to their emotional wellness, physical strength, mental focus, and spiritual well-being.
- ✓ It’s the leader’s role to communicate constantly from a place of resilience, growth, and learning, especially in crisis navigation.
- ✓ Leaders should encourage themselves and their staff to take breaks on a regular basis to allow room for calm and time for anxiety levels to lower.

Additional Resources

[Model School Crisis Management Plan](#) - A sample outline for crisis management plans.

[National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) - A collection of information on understanding and assisting students who have experienced trauma.

Questions for Discussion

- » Is there a crisis management plan in place at your school or crisis management training? If not, who should be involved in their development?
- » What wellness resources exist for staff at your school?

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