SAFE Schools
NEWSLETTER

DoDEA

Phone Trees Offer a Communication Option

A reliable phone tree provides a valuable communication channel that helps administrators communicate with staff during a crisis event. Practice activating the phone tree occasionally to be certain it works.

DoDEA Regulation 4700.1: DoDEA Antiterrorism Program (Section 4.7.9) requires administrators to provide local Force Protection officials a list of "contact information for OCONUS DoDEA civilian employees residing off guarded installations" in certain countries. The regulation is available on the DoDEA Web site at www.dodea.edu/foia/iod/pdf/4700_1.pdf. ■

Inside This Issue

Full-Scale Exercises Provide Additional Security Training

DoDEA Regulation 4700.2: Internal Physical Security (Section 4.6.3) requires principals to: "Work cooperatively with host installation or community security officials, district or area administrators, school staff, and students to promote a security conscious attitude in all phases of the school's operation." Some administrators have succeeded in enhancing security awareness by participating in installation exercises.

At Edgren High School in Japan, Principal Mike Johnson recently reminisced about an exercise he participated in when he was an assistant principal at Perry High School. Emergency responders simulated chemical decontamination procedures with a group of teachers and student volunteers.

"We were evacuated to a chemical wash station, disinfected, dried (simulated), and medically processed," said Johnson. "I had a great time and I was very glad to help out." Johnson noted that the installation commander at the time, Col. Dave Darrah, USMC, "Recognized that a healthy number of his community were civilians and they would be equally affected in a chemical disaster or attack."

Col. Darrah added, "In a real crisis situation, you play the way you practice. We let everyone experience what it would be like to be decontaminated."

Typically, schools are invited to take part in a planned exercise but administrators can also initiate the communication and ask to be included. DoDEA Regulation 4700.2 is available at www.dodea.edu/foia/iod/pdf/4700_2.pdf. ■

Responders simulate decontamination procedures with DoDEA Administrator Mike Johnson.

Suicide Prevention and Awareness

Familiarizing students and staff with the warning signs of suicide can bolster prevention efforts. The U.S. Department of Education suggests that administrators ensure that teachers know the appropriate procedure for alerting school mental health professionals if a student asks for help or expresses concern about a friend. The information below provides background on the positive attributes that protect students from suicide as well as the warning signs that suggest students might be at risk of harming themselves.

Protective Factors

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identified several "protective factors" or characteristics that decrease the probability that youth will commit suicide. Some protective factors depend on the family, social, or cultural situations. Character education programs and positive school climate tend to reinforce other factors. Protective factors that suggest students are less likely to turn to suicide include:

- Strong connections to family and community.
- Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution and non-violent handling of disputes.
- Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions.
- Restricted access to highly lethal means of suicide.

Usually students who consider suicide already feel alone, hopeless, or rejected. The suicide attempt is typically prompted by an experience of loss, humiliation, or trauma (i.e., break-up with a boyfriend or girlfriend). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Admin-istration (SAMHSA) offers wallet cards with specific warning signs. The following mnemonic "**How am I sad?**" summarizes these suicide warning signs:

H **Hopelessness** – Expressing feelings of despair.

O **Out of the Ordinary** – Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person.

W **Withdrawal** – Withdrawing from friends, family, and society.

A **Angry** – Expressing rage, uncontrolled anger, or seeking revenge.

M **Means** – Looking for lethal means to commit suicide (i.e., firearms, pills).

I **Intent** – Talking about wanting to kill oneself or saying, "You'd be better off without me."

S **Sleep** – Unable to sleep or sleeping all the time.

A **Acting Reckless** – Engaging in risky activities as if the consequences do not matter.

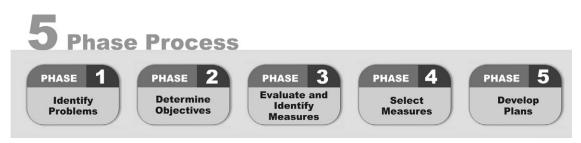**D** **Drugs** – Suddenly increasing alcohol or drug use.

Professional interventions can often prevent a suicide. Fortunately, abundant resources are available to help educate staff and students about suicide, including:

- Signs of Suicide (SOS) distributed to DoDEA by the Office of the Secretary of Defense during 2007. Information on SOS is available at www.mentalhealthscreening.org.
- The Jason Foundation suicide prevention kits distributed to all DoDEA middle and high schools. If you need a copy, please contact safeschools@csc.com.
- SAMHSA's wallet cards are available at http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/walletcard/engwalletcard.asp.
- The American Association of Suicidology provides resources for suicide prevention at www.suicidology.org. ◼

Connecting Security Measures to Objectives

One way to ensure that you have an effective Safe School Plan is to compare the security measures selected in Phase 4: Select Measures to the list of desired outcomes developed in Phase 2: Determine Objectives. In other words, ensure that the measures selected relate to the objectives which relate to the problems identified. The Measures Worksheet (Tool 10 in DoDEA's Safe Schools Handbook) is designed to help administrators compile the security measures in their plan and check that each measure supports a stated objective.

5 Phase Process

PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	PHASE 4	PHASE 5
Identify Problems	Determine Objectives	Evaluate and Identify Measures	Select Measures	Develop Plans

Tool 10: Measures Worksheet

OBJECTIVE: Reduce fighting in the parking lot

Policy Measures
1. Review and update student-parent handbook.
2. Publicize consequences of student fighting.

Program Measures
1. Improve conflict resolution program.
2. Peer mediation.

Physical Security Measures
1. Hire a security guard.
2. Fix three broken lights.

Why Connecting Measures to Objectives is Important

The original objectives were based on sound data: observable incidents or student, staff and parent surveys. Sometimes, it is easy to become sidetracked by measures that sound attractive at the time, but are not truly pertinent to the objectives or problems. Select measures that directly address the vulnerabilities identified.

How to Use Tool 10: Measures Worksheet

The Tool 10: Measures Worksheet is simple to use. At the top of the worksheet, write one of the security objectives established in Phase 2: Determine Objectives. Below each specific objective, note the policy, prevention program, and/or physical security measure that will help achieve the objective.

If administrators have included measures that do not logically support an objective, they should validate the rationale for that measure. Reviewing the measures selected using the Measures Worksheet disciplines the decision-making process to ensure a school achieves the most benefit from the resources available.

Detailed instructions for completing the worksheet appear on page 1-19 of DoDEA's Safe Schools Handbook. For additional information on specific physical security measures appropriate for DoDEA, see DoDEA Regulation 4700.2 "Internal Physical Security" available on the DoDEA Web site at www.dodea.edu/foia/iod/pdf/4700_2.pdf. Contact the safe schools team with questions at safeschools@csc.com. ■

Violent Video Games: First-Person Shooter Games

The December 2007 Safe Schools Newsletter summarized several studies that suggested video games exert a negative influence on students. For adults who do not play video games, it is often difficult to distinguish games that are merely noisy from games that celebrate violent behavior. Of all the video games now available, "first-person shooter" (FPS) games appear particularly violent and influential on young players.

The shooting incident at Columbine High School exposed a link between video games and real-world violence: Shooters Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris were both fans of *Doom*, a first-person shooter video game that in 2004 was rated the "greatest video game of all time" by gaming experts world-wide and multimedia news company Imagine Games Network (IGN). In FPS games, players take on the visual perspective and moral consciousness of characters as they pass through increasing levels of difficulty using weapons to accomplish various tasks.

In 1993, *Doom* pioneered many of the traits in today's FPS games including the wielding of multiple guns, the ability to store an arsenal of weapons, and the ability to customize three-dimensional levels. As characters accomplish more violent acts, they are rewarded by ascending to higher levels.

Columbine High School shooter Harris published his own levels for *Doom* on his Web site, which became infamously known as the "Harris Levels." Perpetrators in recent school shootings quoted excerpts from Harris' on-line journal in explanations for their behavior. Psychologist David Walsh, Ph.D., from the National Institute on Media and the Family noted that encouraging players to aspire to higher levels of violence desensitizes players to victims' suffering and reinforces antisocial behavior.

FPS games are played by students throughout the world. In September 2007, Microsoft's release of *Halo 3*, a FPS game that puts gamers in the position of a "super-soldier" battling enemy alien races, set the record for the highest grossing opening day in video game history: $170 million, according to sales figures. The Halo series also lets players battle each other in multi-player games which allow for customization of teams, battlefields, and weaponry. Players can also compete using Internet-based versions of the game that allow them to battle players in other countries. The Washington D.C. snipers quoted excerpts from the Halo video game in the notes they left at crime scenes.

Arguably the most gratuitous violence found in video games comes from the Grand Theft Auto (GTA) series, eight stand-alone games that debuted in 1998. GTA focuses on illegal activities; gamers play the role of a lowly individual who rises through the ranks of organized crime by committing increasingly violent acts. Players direct the character to commit various crimes including killing innocent bystanders. Characters in the game suffer only temporary consequences. Some critics believe that the game encourages players to emulate this behavior.

Ultimately, educators can only reinforce parental oversight. However, understanding that not all games are the same is a good first step for concerned educators attempting to help students develop judgment and empathy. For more information about the video game rating system, visit the non-profit Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) Web site at www.esrb.org. More information about the content in specific video games can be found on-line at www.parentpreviews.com/video_games.shtml. ■

DHS Encourages Families to Prepare for Emergencies

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has updated their Web site as part of a national emergency preparedness campaign that involves television and radio announcements. These announcements are not as easily available to military personnel stationed overseas, but fortunately, much of the information can be found on the DHS Web site, www.Ready.gov.

The Department of Homeland Security recommends taking some simple steps in advance "to minimize the impact of a crisis on you and your family." DHS emphasizes three principles:

Prepare a Kit: The Web site has helpful tips for gathering supplies that can be prepared in case of an emergency. Some items that are necessary for the "basics of survival," include food, water, a first-aid kit, pet supplies, important family documents, cash and/or checks, and medicines for life-threatening conditions (i.e., insulin, heart medication). Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) can be a simple and effective means of putting aside food for an emergency. (These are available in most commissaries.)

Make a Plan: DHS suggests thinking through how you will reunite with family members in an emergency. "Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to plan in advance: how you will contact one another; how you will get back together; and what you will do in different situations." Some strategies that can ease communication blunders include having a pre-designated out-of-town contact person, pre-paid phone cards, and a list of essential phone numbers.

Stay Informed: DHS suggests learning about potential emergencies and the emergency plans that have been established by local governments. There are important differences among potential crisis events that can impact the decisions you make and the actions you take. Parents and sponsors can enhance their family's response plan by learning more about the potential disasters that could happen where they live, and the appropriate way to respond to them. The DHS Web site includes a page that directs users to information about emergency management agencies for all U.S. territories.

Making a plan can reduce the impact of disasters by identifying specific actions to prevent property damage and protect lives. Being prepared reduces fear and anxiety. Including children in the planning reassures them that they know what to do during a critical event.

The Ready.gov Web site, also includes a page dedicated to preparedness in schools and the workplace at www.ready.gov/america/makeaplan/work_school.html. Ready.gov also provides information on all-hazards planning, including specific procedures for responding to biological and chemical incidents, extreme weather conditions, floods, fires, and pandemics. Users can download emergency supply lists, family emergency plans, and other information at www.ready.gov/america/publications/allpubs.html. Emergency supply lists for schools are available in *DoDEA's Safe Schools Handbook*. The DoDEA Crisis Management Guide, on-line at www.dodea.edu/instruction/crisis/resources/docs/DoDEA_Crisis_Manag_Guide_07.pdf, provides information about incident response planning for schools. ▪

Love in a Big World Comes to Wassom Middle School

Starting this month, students at Wassom Middle School at Fort Campbell will be singing and dancing their way to good character. The school counselor, Sunny Wells, recently implemented an innovative character education program called "Love In A Big World" which uses musical assemblies, morning announcements, and daily lessons to encourage and maintain positive behavior among students.

Wells said she was attracted to the program initially because Love In A Big World uses high quality literature in its curriculum. "I was specifically looking for something we could integrate into our Prime Time Advisory Program and this was a perfect fit because of the morning announcements" said Wells. Prime Time is a short period set aside at the start of each middle school day. During Prime Time, teachers address the emotional, social and developmental needs of students. Love in a Big World includes sample morning announcements that directly reinforce school efforts to promote character development and life skills.

Perhaps most importantly, for Wells, the appeal of Love In a Big World was the diversity of the presenters and the program content. "This program reflects the cultural diversity that is our school. It speaks to our school and to our students," said Wells.

Love In a Big World founder, Tamara Batarseh, has been leading the assemblies for 12 years and notes that the excitement among students for the program content is one of the principal factors behind its national success. "We're not Hannah Montana," she said, referring to the popular teen series on the Disney Channel, "but we might as well be. The kids get so excited – it means so much to them that we are there."

Batarseh and her team travel around the United States performing their interactive assemblies for middle school students. "They really get into the music – they're singing and giving high fives." The Love In a Big World team then uses this high level of energy to their advantage to talk to the students about the 24 character traits that they stress as part of their curriculum. "We have their attention when we start to talk to them about things like making good decisions and dealing with let-down" said Batarseh. "They really take it to heart and listen."

Love In A Big World and other such programs are currently part of the Social and Character Development (SACD) Research Program to determine the effectiveness of school-based programs designed to promote positive social and character development in school children. The U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, initiated the SACD research program in 2003. To learn more about the research and the social and character development programs that are being studied, go to www.sacdprojects.net. ▪