The School Counselor and Safe Schools and Crisis Response

(Adopted 2000; revised 2007, 2013, 2019)

American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position
School counselors serves as leaders (ASCA, 2016; Oliver, Fleck, & Money-Brady, 2016) in safe-school initiatives. ASCA seeks to promote safe schools as can be noted in its many position statements, including Gun Safety, Promotion of Safe Schools through Conflict Resolution and Bullying/Harassment Prevention, Safe Schools and Crisis Response, and School Safety and the Use of Technology. Positive perceptions, school climate and overall school health are increased with schoolwide safety programming (Goodman-Scott & Grothaus, 2018).

The Rationale
All students need a safe, violence-free environment for learning. School counselors present themselves as a familiar, approachable resource to students, families and staff as they lead in schools, and they bridge communication between parties (Bray, 2016). Lapan, Wells, Petersen and McCann (2014) confirmed that the most positive protection for youth, both in and out of schools, is a connected school environment with responsive counseling services. Lapan et al. (2014) noted that this also helps to negate adverse effects of situations that could lead to risks. In their research of secondary students, Lapan et al. (2014) reported that those who felt their school counselor personally knew and responded to their concerns reported feeling safer and more connected in school.

The School Counselor's Role
School counselors are vital resources in preventing violent incidents, intervening when concerns arise about potential violence and responding when violence occurs (Jonson, 2017). Through the implementation of a school counseling program, school counselors promote school safety, avail themselves for disclosure of threats, redirect students engaging in unhealthy or unsafe behaviors and make mental health referrals as needed (Duplechian & Morris, 2014; Nijs, Bun, Tempelaar, de Wit, Burger, Plevier & Boks, 2014; Kingston, Mattson, Dymnicki, Spier, Fitzgerald, Shipman & Elliott, 2018). School counselors are familiar with the school community and knowledgeable about the roles of community mental health providers and first responders such as law enforcement officials and emergency medical responders (Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen & Pollitt, 2013).

Safe school and crisis response literature (Garran & Rasmussen, 2014; Rajan & Branas, 2018; Swartz, Osborne, Dawson-Edwards & Higgins, 2016) suggests several important crisis prevention and response preparedness practices in which school counselors should engage, including:
- providing individual and group counseling
- advocating for student safety by recommending school personnel put consistent procedures, communication and policies in place
- providing interventions for students at risk of dropping out or harming self or others
- offering peer mediation training, conflict resolution programs and anti-bullying programs
- supporting student-initiated programs such as Students Against Violence Everywhere
- providing family, faculty and staff education programs
- facilitating open communication between students and caring adults
- defusing critical incidents and providing related stress debriefing
- participating in district and school response team planning and practices and helping ensure students and staff are able to process/understand crisis response drills
- promoting trauma-informed practices
- advocating for restorative justice programs
- partnering with community resources

School counselors engage in roles congruent with their training. When school counselors are screening students for mental health conditions as part of a student support services team, they should use caution as noted in the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors in the section discussing risk assessments (A.9.b.). School counselors should avoid engaging in roles during drills that are incompatible with the school counseling role, such as acting as the school shooter/invader and trying to get into locked rooms to test that teachers/students are following protocol.

Summary
School counselors are leaders in safe school initiatives and actively engage themselves in fostering safety and in responding to critical response situations in schools. School counselors are a vital resource in preventing, intervening, and responding to crisis situations.

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