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School Safety & Prevention
with Rick J. Kaufman, APR:

Leading Through
Communication in
Times of Crisis

Webinar sponsored by **zift**

What we'll cover…

- Crisis Communication 101

- Communicating in a Crisis

- The Key Is Balance

- The Accountability Principle

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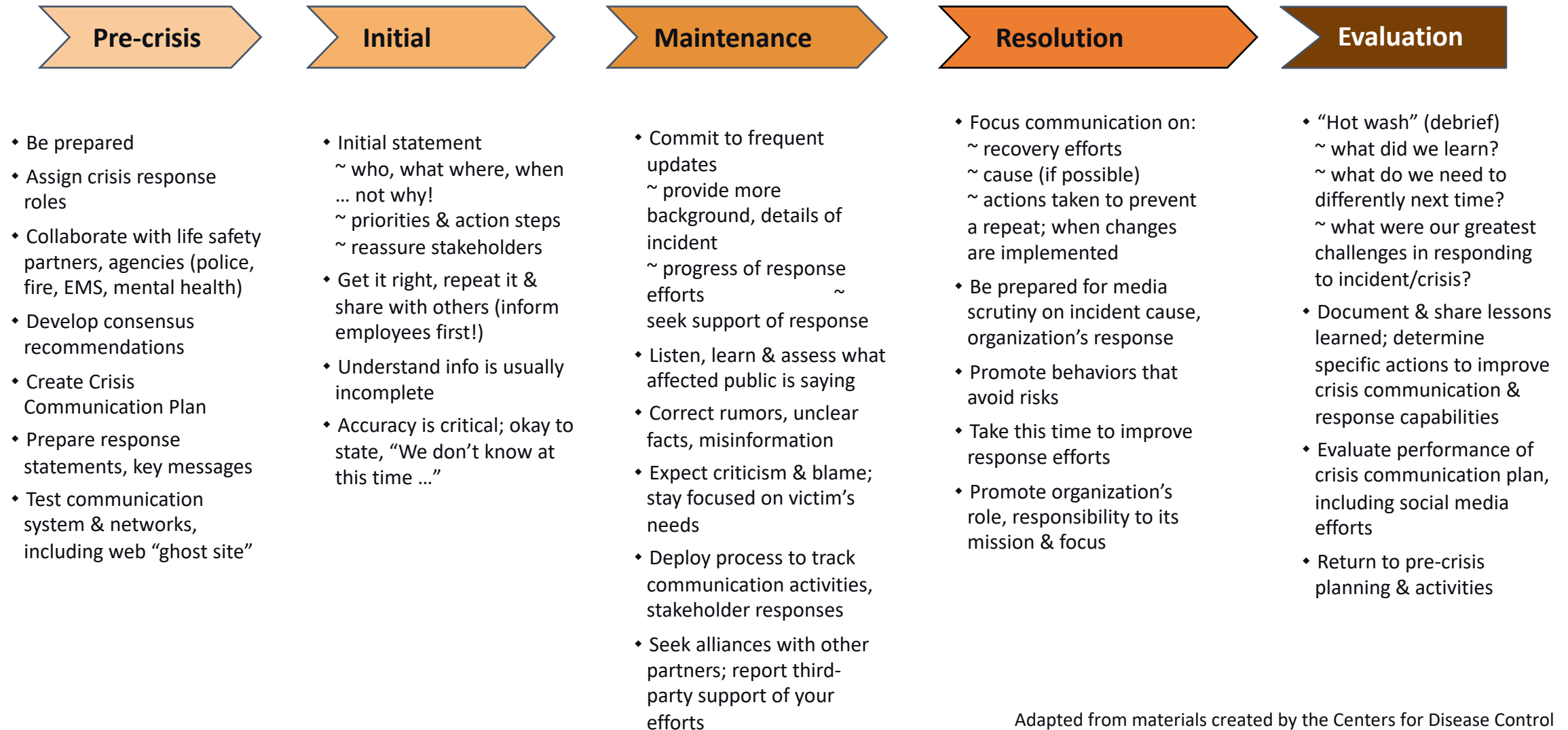
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Are you ready?

A crisis is…

- Unpredictable, but not unexpected

- Complex with many facets; requires adaptability to approach and response

- Rarely static, evolving over its duration, often spawning secondary incidents

Communication is the foundation of any crisis management planning, response and recovery effort.

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Crisis Communication Lifecycle

Pre-crisis	Initial	Maintenance	Resolution	Evaluation

Pre-crisis

- Be prepared
- Assign crisis response roles
- Collaborate with life safety partners, agencies (police, fire, EMS, mental health)
- Develop consensus recommendations
- Create Crisis Communication Plan
- Prepare response statements, key messages
- Test communication system & networks, including web "ghost site"

Initial

- Initial statement
  ~ who, what where, when … not why!
  ~ priorities & action steps
  ~ reassure stakeholders
- Get it right, repeat it & share with others (inform employees first!)
- Understand info is usually incomplete
- Accuracy is critical; okay to state, "We don't know at this time …"

Maintenance

- Commit to frequent updates
  ~ provide more background, details of incident
  ~ progress of response efforts   ~ seek support of response
- Listen, learn & assess what affected public is saying
- Correct rumors, unclear facts, misinformation
- Expect criticism & blame; stay focused on victim's needs
- Deploy process to track communication activities, stakeholder responses
- Seek alliances with other partners; report third-party support of your efforts

Resolution

- Focus communication on:
  ~ recovery efforts
  ~ cause (if possible)
  ~ actions taken to prevent a repeat; when changes are implemented
- Be prepared for media scrutiny on incident cause, organization's response
- Promote behaviors that avoid risks
- Take this time to improve response efforts
- Promote organization's role, responsibility to its mission & focus

Evaluation

- "Hot wash" (debrief)
  ~ what did we learn?
  ~ what do we need to differently next time?
  ~ what were our greatest challenges in responding to incident/crisis?
- Document & share lessons learned; determine specific actions to improve crisis communication & response capabilities
- Evaluate performance of crisis communication plan, including social media efforts
- Return to pre-crisis planning & activities

Adapted from materials created by the Centers for Disease Control

Crisis Communication Lifecycle

	Pre-Crisis	Initial	Monitoring	Resolution	Evaluation
Typical questions people will ask		• What happened? • Where and when? • Who's responsible? • Who's to blame? • Is my child/family safe? Hurt? Dead? • Who else is hurt/dead? • What's being done to respond? Protect or help people? • Who's in charge? • What's going to happen next?	• What's the risk to my other children/family members? • What can I do to help? • Why are you doing /not doing? • Why aren't you doing more? • Why aren't you telling us more? • What are you hiding? • Who should I listen to? Who's right?	• Why didn't the response go better? Differently? • Who's responsible for getting us back to normal? • Why is it taking so long? • What do I do (as a parent) to help my child(ren)? • I'm not seeing this on the news anymore. Should I still care?	
Organization's information goals	• Identify audiences • Develop generic messages, materials • Identify channels of communication • Exercise plan to ensure it works • Get buy-in & approvals from management, legal • Build relationships with stakeholders, media now • Identify, train spokesperson(s) • Make sure staff know what to do if approached by media	• Acknoledge the event with empathy • Explain & inform in simple terms about the risks • Establish your credibility • Provide appropriate courses of action, including where & how to get more info • Commit to stakeholders to provide frequent information as it becomes available	• Help stakeholders understand impact of situation & their risk (especially parents who want to go to the scene; have an alternative location) • Provide background info to those who need to know • Gain understanding of & support for response • Monitor what's being said by whom & correct misinformation • Explain emergency recommendations (if any)	• Improve future response by providing education about response • Honestly examine problems & mishaps • Reinforce what worked; focus on key messages • Persuade & build support for policy & resource allocation changes (if needed) • Promote the activities & capabilities of your school/district	• Debrief & evaluate how the plan worked • Document the response as part of an After Action Report • Take the opportunity to grow by developing an improvement plan to address training & exercise needs • Revise the Crisis Communication & Social Media plans based on lessons learned (including system failures)

Communication

- If the top priority in a crisis is public safety, then the primary objective for crisis communication should be to prevent harm to stakeholders

- The best time to let stakeholders know what to do is in an emergency is BEFORE it happens

- No longer just about communicating TO the public, but WITH your stakeholders

- Crisis creates an information void; the public abhors a vacuum

Lack of information +
Short decision time =

UNCERTAINTY

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Uncertainty

- Stakeholders seek info to gain a sense of personal control over a situation, especially parents

- Public is motivated to reduce uncertainty

- Uncertainty leads to increased information seeking

- Any information void is filled by someone, often usually ill informed, misinformed or motivated to harm the organization

Why is crisis communication so important

- People remember how a crisis was handled longer than the details of the incident.

- Long-term damage to an organization is done before and after a crisis more so than during it

- Trust and credibility may be quickly and permanently lost

- Proactive crisis communications helps minimize damage, improve morale and encourage healing

- News media helps set community, regional, national and world agendas

- News media has significant long-term impact on public perception and organizational reputation

The Accountability Principle

- Stakeholders want to be engaged when bad stuff happens

- They expect to be provided a thorough explanation of what happened, how was the incident handled, and assurances the causes do not contribute to a repeat

- They also expect to be a source of information during a crisis.

The Accountability Principle: two-way dialogue

- No organization can rely on any one source for sharing information or a forum for discussion about an incident

- One-way messaging doesn't work in a world where people crave dialogue (especially in a crisis)

- Public has a platform to discuss crisis. Organization must be part of this conversation (don't cede control)

Crisis communications: the first minutes

- Bad news spreads faster than ever before via social media

- Monitor all relevant consumer generated media, not just traditional media

- Media has an insatiable appetite; communication must be ongoing

- Create a streamlined approach; team in place

- Experience in social media a necessity

Communicating in a crisis

- ## Speed of communication
  - First impressions are lasting impressions
  - If you aren't first with the framing, others will tell your story

- ## Factual content of the message
  - Get it right, repeat it, share with others
  - Inform employees first

- ## Trust and credibility
  - Crucial to sustain support during and after the crisis

An essential element of crisis communication:

Perspective Taking

The ability to view the crisis from your stakeholders' point of view, especially those who are victims.

Parting thought...

Maintaining a robust crisis communication strategy demands the complete integration of social media (SM) into the organization's crisis management or communication plan.

We'll explore this more in both the December and January blogs and webinars.

Managing any crisis successfully is less about saying the right things and **more about doing the right things.**

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We'd like to hear from you!

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