

5 Experts Share Their Tips on School Emergency & Disaster Planning

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With the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, the ongoing threat of terrorism, and the ever-present risk of random emergencies occurring, disaster planning is not something school leaders and management can afford to overlook.

From the school board and head to teachers, IT specialists and caretakers, there are a range of skills needed for an effective plan and emergency response team, and pupils themselves also play an important role if and when disaster strikes.

To provide guidance on this underreported topic, [Brother UK](#) asked five experts to share their top emergency and disaster planning tips for schools.

Suzanne Sibole is School Safety Consultant at [Youth Risk Prevention Specialists](#). She suggested breaking down a school safety plan as follows:

1. Assess physical security and hazards unique to our sites and make improvements to eliminate gaps.
2. Create an easy-to-follow emergency response plan to enable staff members to respond quickly and uniformly in a crisis. Each staff member should have access to response protocols via a mobile app or hard copy flip-chart, while administrators should have a full plan binder that also contains staff

contact information, protocols for continuity of operations and recovery, and templates for communication/letters to staff and parents for all possible types of crises.

3. Provide all-staff safety training for custodians, teaching staff, substitutes, food service staff, etc. At a minimum, the following topics should be covered:
 - Reducing risk through prevention
 - Physical hazards
 - The critical role of school climate
 - Why students fail to report concerns
 - Drills and why we need to practice
 - Medical emergencies
 - Observable warning signs
 - Reporting procedures

Former BBC TV News team veteran Brian Sterling-Vete, now an author and international expert on Strategic Crisis Media Management for MajorVision.com, shares his advice:

“Advanced planning for potential crisis scenarios often only goes as far as preparing for the immediate humanitarian, physical and collateral aspects of a crisis, which is naturally essential. Many completely forget about advanced preparation coaching in how to meet and handle the media barrage they can expect in the event of a crisis striking their organisation.

“Several individuals in the education sector in both the USA and the UK have lost their jobs as a result of simply being so ‘busy’ that they’ve put-off their advanced training about this, and suddenly a crisis has struck.

“Many also fall foul in the misguided use of video portals like YouTube, instead of secure video systems such as Eduvision.tv, which can also host pre-prepared generic holding statements and associated documents to help to take the pressure off when a crisis strikes.”

Expert in Safeguarding and Duty of Care Training, Keir McDonald MBE, founder and CEO of EduCare, suggests:

“Planning ahead for potential emergencies and disasters is essential in a learning environment. Ensuring that staff have been through the correct training is crucial for ensuring that when the time comes, help is immediately on hand to offer calm reassurance and expert assistance.

“Disaster planning starts with learning the skills required to handle a situation. This all comes from training. When choosing training for staff, look out for three things: accreditation from the correct governing body or organisation, the most up-to-date, relevant information, and something easy to engage with and understand.

“Once staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge, it’s important to be aware of how they work in the context of any situation. Prepare for all eventualities and your staff will have the knowledge and confidence to handle any situation. Of course, also make sure the things needed in an emergency can be accessed easily to assist your staff as well.”

Pete McAllister runs Educators.co.uk, which helps parents researching private schools. He said:

“Independent schools are largely inspected and regulated by the ISI rather than Ofsted which governs state schools. Therefore, the requirements and criteria schools need to meet in terms of health and safety are different (some would argue more lenient for ISI inspections).

“You would expect to see differences in the planning and strategy between state and independent schools for various emergency situations. However, independent schools will have a much higher focus on asset management and protection. Many of these schools have historic grounds, listed buildings and irreplaceable assets which need to be considered when it comes to disaster planning”

Karen Kalil-Brown works with clients including universities on emergency preparedness. This is her number one tip:

“Have contact information for all constituencies prepared prior to an emergency – including co-workers’ information. This is a time-consuming task that can take up valuable time when in a crisis. Also, one should keep emergency contact information (online and hard copy in case there’s a power outage) in the office and at home. Crises don’t always happen during business hours.”

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Hopefully, this article has encouraged you to review your approach to disaster and emergency planning. You can also put your existing knowledge of accident and disaster preparation to the test by taking Brother’s sci-fi themed, tongue-in-cheek quiz for school leaders and IT managers, entitled ‘[Is Your School Ready for an Alien Invasion?](#)’