2014 NASP Convention Activity

NEAT-PREPaRE Merger
Following the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1996, NASP formed the National Emergency Assistance Team (NEAT) to provide direct crisis response consultation to local schools. NEAT members have responded to requests for assistance at numerous crises around the country, providing experience in crisis management, preparation, and planning. The PREPaRE School Crisis Prevention and Intervention Training Curriculum was developed in order to grow local capacity to respond to these crises.

This year at the NASP convention in Washington DC the PREPaRE Workgroup and NEAT (National Emergency Assistance Team) agreed upon merging into one single group. This allows for more efficient and effective use of NASP resources, crisis expertise, and talents. These two groups have always had a shared vision so the merger will only continue to strengthen the professional development, outreach, and supports that NASP can provide regarding school crisis prevention and intervention efforts. The new group will have five different subcommittees that focus on: training/curriculum development, direct response, public resources and publications, evaluation and research, and promotion and advocacy. NASP’s Executive Council approved the merger to take effect July 1, 2014.

Inter-Organizational Outreach
As part of its commitment to improving school safety and in the aftermath of the shooting at Newton, CT, NASP has collaborated with a number of organizations in pursuit of goals as laid out in NASP’s “Framework for Safe and Successful Schools.” [http://www.nasponline.org/resources/handouts/Framework_for_Safe_and_Successful_School_Environments.pdf] At this year’s convention, PREPaRE Workgroup leaders met with representatives from several organizations in order to reach a better understanding of their respective roles and identify potential collaborative opportunities. Representatives from several organizations described below participated in PREPaRE Workshop 1 including Dave Muelle (ALICE), Michele Gay and Shari Nacson (Safe and Sound), and Mo Canaday (NASRO).

(Continued on page 2)
The National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) invited Melissa Reeves to attend their annual meeting of NASRO trainers in Alabama. The goal was for SROs to better understand the role of school psychologists and other school mental health professionals, and to provide an overview of the PREPaRE curriculum. The information was very well received and many SROs expressed appreciation they have for their school psychologists. They were also glad to know that many school psychologists have crisis training and are interested in working collaboratively. They see mental health as critical to their job and support both further collaboration with NASP and receiving additional PREPaRE training. To help with this goal, Melissa Reeves and Stephen Brock will be presenting on the PREPaRE curriculum at NASRO’s annual convention.

In the aftermath of the tragedy at Newton, NASP received numerous inquiries regarding the Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate (ALICE) training. Since then, NASP has actively pursued opportunities to learn more about ALICE and provide guidance in development of best practices for school safety. At this years convention, Dave Mueller of ALICE participated in PREPaRE Workshop 1 to better inform future discussion between the organizations. To learn more about ALICE, see Melissa Reeves discussion of the curriculum on page 3. A reminder that NASP developed the handout “Conducting Crisis Exercises and Drills: Guidelines for School” that can be found at http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/drills_guidance.pdf.

Also in attendance in DC was Shari Nacson and Michelle Gay of Safe and Sound Schools. Safe and Sound Schools is an organization founded by two mothers who lost their children in the Sandy Hook school shooting. They have asked NASP to help them develop NASP resources to share on their website. This organization is in its infancy but is already making a large impact in the field. Their website can be found at: www.safeandsoundschools.org

Sparks, NV—NEAT Response

NEAT members Cathy Paine and Ted Feinberg provided on-site support and consultation after the Sparks, Nevada school shooting incident on Oct. 31, 2013. Joan Bowman, a school psychologist and NASP leader who works for the district, along with the district superintendents, invited NEAT for a 3-day on scene intervention-related visit. Cathy and Ted supported the staff by conducting staff meetings and allowing staff to share their reactions and experiences to help them process the event and move forward. They also met with school board members, administrators, school psychologists, other mental health professionals, and other school staff. While many staff had received PREPaRE training, Cathy and Ted brought along PREPaRE materials to provide additional guidance on how to integrate and apply PREPaRE concepts. Cathy will continue to stay in touch with this district over the next year.

ALICE Program Discussion

Originally Posted on the NASP Community by Melissa Reeves, Ph.D., NCSP on January 25, 2014

As chair of the PREPaRE workgroup, I would like to share some of the work NASP has been doing with regard to the ALICE program and clarify that NASP does not have an official position with regard to ALICE or the similar Run, Hide, Fight model out of DOJ that is also being applied in some schools today. I apologize in advance for the length of this post but believe the information may be useful.
NASP has been actively engaged in learning as much as possible about ALICE in order to respond effectively to the many inquiries from our members, school districts, and the media. This includes opening up a dialogue with the ALICE leadership to get greater clarity on the training and share some of the concerns we hear and/or have had ourselves. We have also been in close conversations with the leadership of the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) and others in the school safety world. Chief among concerns under discussion are:

- The potential psychological consequences for some people (adults and students) required to participate in active shooter drills
- Developmental appropriateness of such drills for students
- Cost-benefit of the active shooter training given its limited and relatively unlikely focus when more comprehensive training may be warranted
- Lack of research to support the efficacy of the training

As part of this process, we (NASP, ALICE, NASRO) agreed to learn firsthand about each others' programs so that we could have more informed discussions, find common ground where possible, and hopefully be able to provide useful guidance to all of our various constituencies on the best way to make decisions regarding training for an active shooter situation. A colleague and I took the ALICE training earlier this month and representatives from NASRO and ALICE will be taking the PREPaRE workshops at the convention and summer conference this year.

The following are a few key points from my experience at the training and conversations we have had with the ALICE folks and others to date. In general I thought the training was well-done overall and believe the ALICE owners want to ensure the most effective training program possible in order to save lives.

ALICE addresses active shooter situations only and incorporates Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate. Their premise is that "lockdown", the current protocol in most schools, is not always an option or effective in an active shooter situation. Contrary to many media reports, they do NOT advocate for students and staff to fight an intruder. Nor should students and staff seek out contact with the intruder. However, staff and students should be empowered to make decisions if an intruder breaks the lockdown barricade and to use counter strategies as a last resort (e.g. run or throw objects to distract the shooter, or if age appropriate - taking down the intruder). I do not see a problem with giving staff this choice/guidance as long as it is done appropriately.

Encouragingly, the ALICE folks share some of the same concerns about how districts are implementing training. There appears to be a disconnect between the official training (which I received) and how the training and drills get implemented by some district administrators and/or police officers at the local level, as described in this community. ALICE actually recommends that training be developmentally appropriate; parents should be notified of what training entails and have the option of "opting out" their children; staff need to be able to opt-out also; and mandatory participation is not supported. (See http://www.alicetraining.com/alice-101/age-appropriate.aspx as to guidelines they have provided regarding age appropriate training.) They do not recommend using methods that would physically hurt people.

My observation is that ALICE provides general guidelines regarding active shooter exercises but trainers are not receiving clear enough direction as to the do's and don'ts of how to structure the
exercise to "do no harm." Protecting both physical and psychological safety is not being emphasized enough and I discussed this with the ALICE owners. They have asked NASP for our input and guidance, which we are providing. Ensuring efficacy of training is critical for a program like this and is something that we take very seriously in the PREPaRE training-of-trainer workshops.

There is no doubt that participating in the active shooter exercise is intense and is definitely not for everyone, nor should it be done with younger students, even when implemented well. ALICE argues that without the experiential piece you are more likely to freeze than react to protect yourself. However, I question if this degree of experiential training is necessary or necessarily effective. We do not fill the hallways with smoke to practice fire drills or intentionally cause a plane to lose altitude to practice airplane emergency procedures. I can see how this type of training could be useful, even desired, for some people but believe we can use other methods to teach most staff and students they have options and to make the best decision given the known variables at the time.

We will continue conversations with ALICE over these issues, not with the expectation that they will stop recommending drills per se but perhaps will provide more specific cautions/guidance and options for districts that choose to do a live exercise with staff and/or students. As mentioned earlier, NASRO is also an important part of the discussion because the SRO is often the individual to receive ALICE training and bring it back to the district. One possible outcome is to develop some shared guidelines. We will see how this goes.

A few brief suggestions if your district is considering ALICE or other active shooter drills:

- Get information off the official ALICE website www.alicetraining.com. There is a lot of old and misinformation floating around Internet. Download and share their recommendations regarding age appropriate training and conducting drills.
- Consider if there are other ways to integrate response choices in a more cost-effective way that do not expose staff and students to an intense sensorial experience.
- Suggest teaming with your SRO to take the initial ALICE training together so that you can pair your expertise regarding psychological safety with their physical security and policing expertise when bringing the training back to the district.
- Request to be on the team designing the training for your district in order to offer guidance on protecting psychological safety (e.g., opt-out/opt-in options, intensity of role play, identifying students and staff that may be at higher risk, etc.)
- Offer to develop an evaluation process for assessing the effectiveness of the training (positive and/or negative) in order to refine such training in the future if necessary. (As a note: ALICE acknowledges that further research is needed and something they value and would welcome feedback from districts conducting the active shooter trainings.)
- Make clear that comprehensive safety and crisis training is not interchangeable with ALICE training. The latter is a small, if currently high profile, piece of a much larger picture. ALICE themselves say that they only "deal with 7-8 minutes of situation". Districts should have the cost-benefit discussion if resources are tight.

School psychologists should definitely be at the table when the district is making decisions regarding crisis trainings. Our expertise in developmental considerations and the possible unintended consequences of an intense sensorial training experience is critical. We will continue to keep you posted on our progress.
In the Presence of Heartbreak:  
An Intern’s Personal Reflections on Crisis Response  
By Angela M. Aiello

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When my site supervisor called at 5:50 a.m. on a Thursday morning, I immediately knew something was wrong. My suspicions were confirmed: A student had died on campus after school and my supervisor asked me to come in and assist with crisis response. As I rushed to my site, I tried to brace myself for the challenges the day would surely bring, frantically trying to recall everything I had learned from my counseling courses at Chapman University and from my PREPaRE training. However, I would quickly discover that nothing could have prepared me for the sorrow I would encounter and the powerful effect it would have on me. The truth is, no matter how well we’ve been trained, nothing can quite prepare us for actual crisis counseling; experience is the ultimate teacher. However, having been part of a crisis response team, perhaps my own first-hand experience can offer interns a glimpse into what it is like to carry out large-scale grief counseling for the first time.

The Crisis
Walking into the school psychologist’s office, I was immediately thrust into an emotional minefield. Every available space was occupied with counselors and upset students. The air was thick with grief and the sound of children crying reverberated off the walls, sending an emotional shockwave straight through my heart. The details of the accident would slowly unfold as the morning went on. A group of students were playing handball after school, as they had on most other days, when Robert, a well-liked eighth grader hit his head on a set of parallel bars while coming up from retrieving the ball. He immediately collapsed and began to convulse. An older student attempted CPR while another student ran to the street to flag down an ambulance. Paramedics would unsuccessfully attempt to revive him.

Helping Students Cope With Heartbreak
As I listened to the sobbing students and looked into their confused, sad eyes while they tried to make sense of a senseless tragedy, I assured them that whatever they were feeling was okay. Having learned in my PREPaRE training that children need help recognizing their emotions and understanding that their reactions are normal after a crisis event, I knew this was essential to the healing process. For the students who were present at the time of the accident, we talked about what it was like seeing their friend die. One student, who sat behind Robert in second period, described how eerie it was seeing the empty chair in front of him that morning. We shared stories about their favorite memories of Robert: how he was always smiling and how he loved to play handball. They called him the Gentle Giant due to his height and extraordinarily sweet nature and they each had a story to tell about how he had shown them kindness. I agreed with the students when they said it wasn’t fair and that he didn’t deserve to die. I wondered with them if perhaps away to honor their friend’s short life would be to be a good friend themselves or to smile at a stranger, carrying on Robert’s memory in love and compassion for others.

Some students sobbed openly, others just sat and listened, their heads quietly bowed with silent tears escaping their downcast eyes as thoughts of Robert filled the empty space, the air heavy with pain. I often found myself at a loss as to what I should say or do, wanting to fill the silence with something profound and meaningful; something that would make everything okay. But then I remembered how a professor in one of my counseling courses described the essence of crisis counseling as being able to sit in the presence of heartbreak without flinching. With this thought in mind, I joined the students in their reflection and gathered whatever strength and love I could
find and wished it outward. Their pain was soft and aching, the kind only childhood innocence and despair can produce.

Caring for Yourself
As the day went on and the news spread, students kept pouring in, eventually flooding our office and overwhelming our resources. We had no time to eat or to escape what would begin to feel like an onslaught. By the end of the day, I was so exhausted, physically and mentally, I could hardly move. In the next few days, my own reaction would surprise me. I felt irritable. I cried—a lot. I found it difficult to separate myself from the pain I had absorbed. Because school psychologists by nature are sensitive, empathic, and intuitive, it is nearly impossible for us not to take on the pain of others even if we show the pain in a different way. I learned that in order to restore your well-being, you have to be able to recognize and separate your sadness from that of the people you have helped. Having patience and understanding that it will take some time to work through the emotions is important. In order to facilitate this process, remember to take time for yourself and to do the things that work for you in relieving stress. Get as much rest as you need, and don’t feel guilty about it because enduring heartbreak can feel more exhausting than physical exertion. Let out your emotions in a safe way, and remember that it is okay because these emotions need to come out. Call an understanding colleague and talk about what you’re feeling. After all, school psychologists need emotional support, too. Expressing gratitude for the people you love, and for yourself, is an important aspect of self-care in the wake of a crisis and has benefits that extend far beyond yourself. As reported by Reivich (2009), individuals who maintain a sense of gratitude are not only less likely to experience adverse emotional reactions, they are also better positioned to offer support and are described as more helpful by others.

Preparing for the Unexpected
Walking into a crisis environment where you will be called upon to withstand intense sadness, you ideally want to be well rested, fed, and as free as possible of personal issues and stress. However, the unexpected nature of crises does not always make this possible. As such, be sure to make allowances for the fact that you did not have time to prepare by being kind to yourself and by recognizing the difficult work you have done. In addition, not all crisis response teams will be adequately prepared or coordinated, and you would be surprised how quickly your emotional reserves are depleted when your most basic needs are not met. Due to this fact, be sure that food and water are easily accessible throughout the day, and whenever possible, give yourself a break from the situation. For me, this meant escaping to the bathroom to give myself a reprieve and take some deep breaths. Caregivers who do not take these precautions risk experiencing “psychological burnout” which impedes their ability to provide emotional support and to recover emotionally themselves (NASP, 2003).

Honoring the Experiences
In my first experience with crisis response, I learned that while nothing could have completely prepared me for what I would experience, the strong background I received from my graduate program in counseling techniques combined with my training in NASP’s PREPaRE curriculum gave me the foundation I needed in order to become a positive source of caring, support, and understanding for the students in their time of need. But perhaps the most important thing I learned was that in our multifaceted role as school psychologists, crisis response is one of the most vital services we can offer, giving us the opportunity to not only grow professionally, but also to make a profound difference in the lives of the students and families we serve. If this is to be accomplished effectively, we must be able to bear witness to heartbreak while also knowing when and how to excuse ourselves from its presence.
Angela M. Aiello graduated from Chapman University in May 2010. Her research and practice interests include home–school collaboration, response to intervention and its application to students with autism spectrum disorders, and emotional disturbance assessment.

References


Resources


Results of a Dissertation Survey Study of PREPaRE WS 2
By Brian R. Lazzaro, NCSP

This past spring I completed a dissertation titled: “A Survey Study of PREPaRE Workshop Participants’ Application of Knowledge, Confidence Levels, and Utilization of School Crisis Response and Recovery Training Curriculum.” This survey study investigated the effects of NASP’s PREPaRE Workshop 2 training on workshop participants. The study looked at the impact of the PREPaRE model and the training of school psychologists in terms of (a) can school psychologists apply the knowledge gained when responding to crisis situations as a result of the PREPaRE training? (b) what are school psychologists’ perceptions of their confidence in responding to an actual crisis situation? (c) and have school psychologists utilized PREPaRE response and recovery techniques in actual crisis situations? This survey study utilized a quasi-experimental ex post facto (or causative comparative) research design. Surveys were sent electronically to two groups of NASP members: a group that received the PREPaRE Workshop 2 training (N=36) and a second that had not received the training (N=35).

Results revealed those who completed PREPaRE Workshop 2 scored higher on questions posed to both groups that tested for specific school crisis content knowledge. In fact, the WS2 participants’ scores were found to be an average of twenty percent higher than those that did not complete PREPaRE. It was hypothesized that those who completed WS2 recently would retain more content knowledge and would score higher than those who completed the workshop several years ago. The results revealed the opposite was true. Participants that completed the WS2 several years prior were actually scoring higher. These results seem to indicate that a combination of acquiring the content knowledge by taking PREPaRE, combined with additional years of experience in the field, ultimately resulted in a greater retention and application of school crisis knowledge (even years after having completed the workshop).

Workshop 2 participants reported higher levels of confidence in being able to respond to a school crisis situation as compared to those who had not completed PREPaRE. A multiple regression
analysis was conducted to determine if there were other factors (besides just taking WS2) that influenced confidence levels. Results revealed that “hours of crisis training” and “education level” accounted for over 30% of the variance in self-reported levels of confidence. (*Note-Those that took PREPaRE workshops generally had more hours of crisis training as compared to those who received other “non-PREPaRE” training. The fact that PREPaRE training is three days of training is a significant and positive factor.)

The last research question was: “Do school psychologists utilize PREPaRE response and recovery techniques in actual crisis situations?” The results indicated that participants from both groups reported using school crisis training information in schools to the same degree. The self-report survey data demonstrated that approximately 1/3 of the PREPaRE participants reported working in school districts that have formally adopted the curriculum. Data indicates that PREPaRE is being used, however, not all schools have been using the curriculum to the degree possible and there are many schools in the nation that still need to adopt PREPaRE. This is an especially exciting time for PREPaRE instructors as the numbers of those trained continues to grow and develop into a strong national and international network.

Although I am well aware that I may be the only person to ever fully read my dissertation I welcome the possibility that there may be two or three other brave souls. It is available free on-line at http://ecommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1673&context=luc_diss. A big thank you to all those on the PREPaRE Workgroup that contributed time and effort to support me to complete this PREPaRE dissertation. I couldn’t have done it without you.

NIJ School Safety Grant

The National Institute of Justice has announced a new grant entitled "Developing Knowledge About What Works to Make Schools Safe," which provides $50 million in funding for the implementation or improvement of school safety initiatives.

The grant can be used to fund a range of safety initiatives and NASP has suggested a number of ideas ranging from bullying prevention programs and threat assessment training to expanding the role of the school psychologist related to mental health services. Importantly, PREPaRE is ideally suited to the grant, which is a viable new source of potential funding to implement the curriculum in your district. Not only could the grant cover all expenses associated with the workshops, but it would also encompass detailed evaluation of the curriculum's efficacy in equipping the school community to prevent and respond to crises.

Please see this document (http://www.nasponline.org/resources/documents/Suggestions_for_Districts_for_NIJ_Grants.pdf) for information on how to apply for grant funding as well as for other suggestions on eligible programs and initiatives. The deadline for applications is July 10, 2014. The PREPaRE workgroup and NASP are available for technical assistance to a certain extent. Don’t miss this crucial opportunity to bring PREPaRE to your district, improve school safety, and contribute to vital evaluation of the curriculum.
PREPaRE Trainer Reminders

Please remember - **Do Not Copy Scantron Forms!**

Scantron forms have to be actual forms that were sent to you from the NASP office and not copies which will not work. This results in a loss of potentially useful data for NASP researchers.

Please ensure database completion forms are done and sent in at the completion of a training. Accurate completion is essential for identifying those eligible for TOT’s.

When teaching a workshop, be sure to show the completed Scantron Sample form on the screen while walking participants through the directions for pre-posttests and workshop evaluation.

**Double check you have the most current Directions and Sample forms!** These are found on the Trainers only website at [http://www.nasponline.org/prepare/trainersarea/index.aspx](http://www.nasponline.org/prepare/trainersarea/index.aspx) (you will need to login to access)

Thank you for making a difference!