
Introduction to the Second Edition

Robert G. Stevenson

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
Henry de Bracton

To speak of an enemy gives him strength.
Ancient Folk Proverb

The first quote above reflects a basic premise that prompted the writing of this book, that efforts at prevention are better than later attempts at recovery. From the feedback of educators and parents, it would seem that for quite some time the work did not achieve its intended purpose. Although the readers praised the value of the work, their letters spoke of using the information only *after* a crisis had occurred. As we set out to produce this second edition, we wanted to find out why it took a crisis to occur before people were willing to look at the possibility of such an event. What we found can best be summed up by the second quote, one familiar to those of many cultures. There is fear that if we consider the possibility of a crisis and prepare to react when such an event occurs, we may actually increase the likelihood of such an event occurring. Further, the worry produced by realizing our own vulnerability may cause extra stress and only serve to increase our anxiety. However, there is a change now taking place in public attitudes toward crisis prevention. The fears about Y2K crises, including the threat of terrorism, and the successful efforts of many groups to prevent any major problems seem to have created a more positive attitude toward prevention. The impact of the tragic events that have taken place in schools and communities across the United States has caused many to ask, "What were educators doing to prevent this?" All too often, the answer was "nothing" because "we never dreamed this could occur."

Now we know better. We have seen schools torn apart by troubled, violent, murderous young people. We have been spectators as tiny tots were led single file out of their school to get them away from a real and deadly threat.

The first edition of What Will We Do? is now being used as a college text for future educators and counselors and in workshops for teachers, parents and community leaders. It has also been adopted by educators in the United States and abroad to create crisis response programs that meet the unique needs of their own schools and cultures. The book is being used in Australia, Greece, Britain, Japan, South Africa, and Canada to cite a few examples. In each case, communities have developed programs for their schools using the information in this work as a starting point. Perhaps prevention is an idea whose time has finally come.

A VIEW OF CHILDHOOD

Adults see childhood as a time of growth and learning which should be filled with love and joy. In an effort to maintain this ideal image of childhood, it has long been true that adults try to shield children from the emotional pain and turmoil that can intrude upon their lives at any time. In a utopian setting, where such protection might be possible, this task would be well worth the effort. However, the world in which we live today sees children, their families and, at times, their entire communities beset by almost daily crises. If we cannot shield children from the intrusion of such crises, with their accompanying emotional pain and confusion, it might be more effective if we directed our efforts instead at preparing for possible crises and developing resources to assist children to cope with them when they do occur.

Life can be a harsh taskmaster. The lessons our children will learn may be made easier if they can count on assistance from all of the caring adults in their lives. The “devil theory” of history shows us a pattern of reactive behavior in which one person or group is assigned the blame for some historical event or complex social issue. Critics who adhere to a modern “devil theory” in society are quick to assign “blame” to teachers, schools, or social minorities for most of the difficulties encountered by today’s students. Phyllis Schlafly and her Eagle Forum have come to represent just such a position. They identify many of the ills in society, often quite correctly, but then see those who try to assist young people to address these problems as the “cause” of the problems. Parents are warned to “investigate” what teachers are doing and these “critics” see the weakening of parental influence and the undermining of family

values as goals of educators. Such divisive tactics may appear to address problems, but often only serve as a way to avoid real issues that defy quick or easy solutions.

Should parents be aware of what goes on in a child's classroom? Absolutely! They should know this so that they can work with educators for their child's benefit. Columnist Clarence Page, in a column entitled "When Parents Fail To Do Their Job," (*The Record*, February, 1993) agrees with Ms. Schlafly that parents should be involved in their children's lives and does not believe that a school has the right to usurp parental authority. However, "the bigger problem is that some families do such an inadequate job that the community must step in for the sake of the child and the community on the whole. The appalling stream of child-abuse stories shows with grisly clarity that parents don't always know better than the community what's best for their kids. Sometimes parents need help."

There are those who label individuals and then base their reaction to ideas proposed by the individuals on those same labels. Using a label applied to its presenter, or one of that person's roles, as a way to judge the merit of an idea or a program happens far too frequently. This is a quick but often inaccurate way to determine the merit of an idea or program. Each of us plays many roles, as Shakespeare pointed out, and we can be described with any of a number of labels. Allow me to illustrate by using myself as an example. I am a teacher, a counselor, and a parent. As a teacher I see young people who believe they are never responsible for consequences of their actions and I resent enabling behavior on the part of counselors and administrators that encourages this personal irresponsibility on the part of students. As a counselor, I see young people who face major crises in their lives. At times, these must take priority over homework or other academic issues. They should and must be acknowledged by teachers. As a parent I want to know what is going in the lives of my children and I want only the *best* teachers and the *best* counselors to work with them. Each of these roles is different but they are *not*, as Ms. Schlafly and others would have us believe, adversarial. In each of these roles there is the underlying belief that it is the best interest of the child/student that must take priority and that all other issues are secondary. It would be easy to label me as a conservative or as a liberal. You could use any of the labels that accompany each of my various roles, those listed here or others. Such labeling can be seen regularly in the vicious "attack ads" that have, sadly, become a regular part of our electoral process. However, those who apply such labels fail to judge the ideas I present on their merits. The authors whose works are included in this volume have worked through personal losses, accidents and, in one case, major surgery to assemble the book you now hold. They

did so not for personal profit, but to present ideas and programs that they believe can help young people, their families, their schools, and their communities.

This book is offered as a guide to assist caring adults, both educators and parents, who wish to understand the impact of crises on our children. It also discusses programs that utilize prior planning, education, and identification of sources of support to assist the children who must face such crises. These programs have been shown to meet some of the needs of young people. Their methods are still evolving and can use involvement from all parts of the academic community: parents, teachers, counselors, coaches, administrators, and the students themselves. Sometimes it is not just parents, but all of us, that need help. When the goal is to help our children, people who would divide a community of caring adults do not do the children a service. When united, the members of a community can be strong assets in the lives of their children. In the past there may have been errors of judgment when actions were taken or not taken in response to a particular problem. The goal of this work is *not* to assess blame, it *is* to assist in solving the problem. In helping our schools assist children who face crises the authors of the chapters that follow would agree with Mr. Page's observation that, "the question is not *whether* the community should intervene, it is *when*." With the crises facing today's children, when is *now*.

In the opening chapter of this book, Robert Stevenson, Ed.D. presents an overview of the situation. Needs of the students and staff, effects of a crisis on a school and on its students, and the possible benefits of prior preparation are discussed. New to this edition is a discussion of the concept of "partner schools." Margaret Metzgar, M.A. discusses methods of preparing a school community for crises. She focuses on the role of the steering committee as the key group in establishing a carefully planned, effective district policy for coping with crises. David Meagher, Ph.D. also presents a plan for school preparation but focuses on the preparation of staff and, in particular, the Crisis (Response) Team. Eileen Stevenson, C.S.N., M.A. speaks about the specific role of the school nurse in preparing for crises by creating a "safe room" for students along the lines established for a different type of safe room by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. (NOTE: Across the country the title school nurse has been applied to many people from diverse backgrounds. Some have little or no formal medical training. New Jersey has requirement for school nurses to be certified with advanced study beyond their R.N. training. Eileen Stevenson is a certified school nurse.) Rabbi Daniel A. Roberts offers a model for religious schools. He presents a model developed in Jewish religious schools, but it

is clearly one that moves beyond possible sectarian boundaries. It is a model that can be appropriately modified and used in most religious schools.

Special issues also receive attention from the contributors. Diane Ryerson, A.C.S.W. and John Kalafat, Ph.D. speak to the crises related to the issue of suicide. They discuss the three aspects of prevention, intervention, and postvention in school-based programs. Patricia Zalaznik, M.A. discusses the modern health crises of HIV/AIDS and their impact on today's students and schools. William Lee, Jr. discusses the problems related to violence in schools and surrounding communities. He believes that any response by schools to this crisis must place violence in context, realizing that in violence there are many victims. He offers guidelines for schools that operate from this basic principle. Linda Reed Maxwell, M.Ed. has lived through the crisis that a military family endures in a time of national danger. Children of these families have special needs as do schools seeking to help these children and their families. The military is no longer mobilized only for defensive war. Our "peacekeepers" are in constant danger as they serve around the world in an ongoing effort to preserve the peace. Her chapter offers school guidelines for helping children during any time of military action.

Sandra Elder conducts a support group for bereaved teens. Her chapter offers guidelines for such support groups and discusses several active groups. Support is needed for all those effected by a crisis, including those who offer support. The Critical Incident Stress Debriefing model is presented in a form that can be utilized in the schools.

Rick Ritter has developed his method for using Critical Incident Stress Debriefing while working with Viet Nam veterans. When he contributed a chapter to the first edition of this book, a few people asked how a connection of school and battlefield was possible. Since that time, the increase of widely publicized violence in schools and the resulting trauma has made his chapter a most important contribution. It has been pointed out that adolescents, in times of crisis turn first to their peers for support. Robert Stevenson speaks of the importance of peer support and presents a method for giving it a formal place in a school's crisis plan.

The final section of the book offers answers to questions that have been asked about topics and themes in this book. The crisis section offers a quick, basic reference for use in emergencies when time is an issue and there may not have been sufficient preparation for an immediate crisis or emergency.

If there is one theme that appears in the work of every contributor to this book it is that the time for planning and for action is *now*. The issues discussed here impact schools regularly and a school that does not plan ahead for crises leaves its students and staff at risk while it seeks to react to crisis during or after the fact. It is toward this goal of prior planning that this book is dedicated.

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