

## 9.08.05 Webinar Questions:

### **How are people arriving and entering schools?**

*In those communities that have Red Cross shelters, students will enter in large groups. Many communities have set up a process for bringing all social services and school registration staff to the shelter so people have the greatest support and information without having to deal with traveling somewhere for appointments.*

*But many districts are just beginning to receive students who are trickling in day by day, as their families fled the area independently. These families are not necessarily integrated into any social service support yet, and it will be helpful for the school to know the local groups that can provide these families support.*

*Most districts are waiving as much of the usual paper work and requirements for identification and past records, since most will have none of these and no access to these, at least for now.*

### **How should we be prepared for students with disabilities?**

*Students coming in should be able to receive all of the services they were receiving last year, and there won't be records to help you sort that out. We need to make conferences or parent meetings as easy for the parents as possible, both from the standpoint of their participation. They may need transportation or may need for school staff to go to the shelters. Much will depend on how your particular community is receiving displaced people. In those communities that have shelters, it will be very helpful if school staff can go to the shelters initially rather than expecting people to come to the school.*

*Because there will continue to be new families arriving over the next few weeks, it would be helpful for schools to get their child study teams together before students arrive (if you haven't had any yet) to look at how best to streamline the process and take the red tape out. Over time you'll be able to sort things out, but it is most important to focus on bringing these children in feeling supported. We're hearing lots of encouragement to deal with the paperwork and letter of the law regarding IEPs as you can, but provide students whatever services will accommodate their success in attending your school.*

**I would like to know if you can send me any information, examples or copies of the plays you mentioned that would help children to express their emotions and to teach the children about the effects of this experience? I would also like some more information on what outside communities can do to raise awareness and relief (monetary) for the victims?**

*The beauty of using drama as a means of students expressing and working through their trauma is that each one is original. The students in these cases created the story lines and decided how to act them out. The benefit they gain isn't terribly dependent on who is in the audience. Performing for other classrooms is helpful. Even better if parents and the larger school community can be invited. And better yet if local churches, synagogues, temples and mosques would organize times when these student groups could share their play with the community at large.*

*When adults write the plays, we often shy away from expressing some of the details that we think will strike too close to home for the students, but when we invite the students to create the play, we are often surprised at how directly they address painful issues. As always, if this is to be done through the school, someone needs to screen the content for appropriateness given the setting.*

**My school has recently accepted 3 displaced students from New Orleans. As a school community, the children will be conducting fund raising activities and organizing in other ways to help support the victims of the hurricane. In what way, if any, should the 3 students be encouraged to participate?**

*In New York, in a school in lower Manhattan, I was in a teachers' meeting just a couple of weeks after three schools had merged into one location after evacuating from very near the towers. We were still dealing with raw trauma for many staff members and students.*

*In the midst of the meeting (which was over lunch) one of the teachers excused herself because her students were going on a field trip. It was a beautiful, sunny day in Manhattan, and as I caught a cab a short time later, there she was, leading her class down the sidewalk, all of them singing a song about living in apartments in the city! And they were on their way to the Red Cross shelter for families. Now, my first thought was that it might be nice for these kids who had been through such a traumatic event to be able to go ride a carousel or something! But the class*

*had decided they wanted to have a fundraiser for the families who lost someone in the towers, so they'd had a bake sale and they were now walking to the shelter so they could see who was going to take their donation. They'd also made wonderful, huge posters for the space where fire and police went to rest between shifts of working the pile at Ground Zero.*

*Clearly, my thought that relief and reprieve was important was second to these children feeling a sense of empowerment and regaining some sense of control by seeing themselves as survivors who were able to give to those who were less fortunate.*

*Choice is key. If the students in your schools who were relocated because of the hurricane wish to participate in fundraising for the relief efforts, it may bring a sense of empowerment back into their lives. It may help them move from experiencing the event as victims to survivors if they haven't made that transition yet. And for some, participation may not be what they'll choose. Be open with them about what you're doing and give them a very open invitation to participate or not. We might be surprised at how many would say "yes!"*

**How would you assess (what assessment tools would be good to use) to find out whether a hurricane disaster support group worked or is working?**

*This is a longer issue than just one question.*

*Begin with, how do we decide what children need a support group and which don't, and then for those that do, what level of support does each one need?*

*There will be some students who will adjust to their new school experience with very little need for support from the school in terms of counseling. These will often be the students who have landed in your community because they have extended family there, so they're being welcomed into their new lives by loved ones who are providing immense support and connection outside of the school experience.*

*Others who adjust fairly smoothly may be those who are in shelters, and who subsequently are able to move into housing that allows them to keep their new connections with friends they've made in the shelters, or those who have been so*

*fortunate as to be able to go through this transition keeping connections with people from their own neighborhoods or schools.*

*Then, there will be many students who will need many basic supports for the transitional process, including finding a social group, a sense of belonging, learning about their new school and community, someone to help them get around and find their place. These students may not need a formal counseling group so much as the opportunity to participate in a buddy system and maybe some informal social group activities. Helping these students find social connections for lunch and free time socializing can be done a variety of ways, and may or may not include a structured time when the counselor might provide activities for connecting and belonging.*

*There will be students who are struggling with adjustment issues, either for their own challenges or because their families are having difficulties in finding housing or other challenges adjusting in the community. For these students, having a weekly group in which coping skills and problem-solving is addressed along side doing activities that help students express their reactions, issues and feelings will provide great insight for counselors in how best to support the students and perhaps what kinds of local supports might be available to help families deal with the issues students reveal.*

*Finally, there will be students who are clinically traumatized by the hurricane and the subsequent experiences in the shelters and transitions. Trauma sometimes reveals itself early on, and for some, there may be delayed reactions. Symptoms such as flashbacks (feeling like you are re-experiencing the trauma, actually "seeing" the event over and over, even though you are physically safe from the event) nightmares and persistent anxiety are indicators that these children are needing much more clinical help.*

*Most often, in school counseling certification programs, trauma may be addressed in general terms, but most do not have courses that specifically teach debriefing, defusing, or critical incident stress management. Too, many people who do learn these techniques learn from groups that base their knowledge on how this is done for emergency personnel. But the psychology for people in uniform is very different than those of us who might be victims, survivors or by-standers. It is important that, when we work with students, and when we're in a school setting, the clinical approach we use for students with active trauma symptoms be specifically designed to meet their needs.*

*It will be important to have an informal screening mechanism for determining what level of group or therapy a child needs. It will be important to remember that not all children will manifest symptoms right away. And it is important to be mindful of timing. Even though some students are manifesting many symptoms of trauma, it still may be much more important to help them feel safe in the school environment before moving into a directed therapeutic mode. Connectedness and a sense of trust will allow therapeutic measures to have much more effect.*

*Too, children who are suffering the after-effects of trauma will be very much influenced by how well their parents are doing, so it will help students do better if we can get clinical intervention to those parents who are most in need and are willing. Kids do as well as the adults around them, most often.*

**How soon after a Katrina survivor student is enrolled in your school should group/individual counseling begin? Should we let the students feel some consistency in their classes before the counselor begins counseling?**

*This question was integrated into the answer above.*

**I am a counselor in St. Tammany (a parish North of New Orleans) where many teachers/administrators/staff have experienced consequences of the storm. Could you address ways we can help them process and assimilate their own losses without negatively affecting their students?**

*This dilemma is true for many kinds of events. It has been true in the aftermath of the school shootings. Any time an event has equal impact on students and teachers, we benefit the students by being mindful of how we support the adults around them.*

*Students certainly know that, if you lost your home and perhaps family members or neighbors, you are struggling in much the same way that they are. There is much to be gained by students identifying with teachers and school staff in the sense that you all survived the same horrors, you all lost more than you can quantify, and you all had similar exposure to the trauma of the event.*

*But here is a particularly important consideration. Children are not necessarily traumatized specifically by the level of danger or terror they experienced because of the hurricane. They often are traumatized to the degree that they saw their*

*parents rendered helpless or powerless. Children rely on their parents, family members and caregivers for survival. If we appear to be in control of a situation, they will be likely to have confidence in their own survival. If we appear panicked and roiling in fear, this adds to their own terror.*

*That makes this question very valuable as we consider how to work with the students. Staff will need time together to share their own stories, fears, challenges, and successes. Although it is helpful for students to know a little about what you survived, when you are telling your story, be certain that you are not telling it from a place within you that is hoping for their support. They need to feel our support. So when adults need support, that needs to occur outside the classroom.*

*If communities and school boards can provide extra time for staff to gather it will be very helpful. Sometimes we think that we need debriefing in those meetings right away, or that this coming together is about clinical trauma. There will be groups that self-select and know that they need that support, but forcing some particular process on the whole group is often counter-productive. Less formal processes of gathering together just to process and find mutual support can be more important initially for many.*

*Following one of the school shootings, the staff had extra time together in a way that was also very effective for the students. There were extra assemblies that were inspirational, that were fun and were a diversion for students for that time, and other activities for the students during the school day that could be supervised by school staff other than teachers. This gave the teachers times to meet together, in a whole group or in departments, to look at how they were doing and find mutual support and planning time for addressing special needs.*

*About ten days after the shooting, over the weekend, the school board hosted all school staff for a barbecue, with the school board members doing all of the preparation and serving. It was just a nice gift to give the school staff and provided them an opportunity to have informal social time together away from the school setting. Their spouses were invited as well.*

*Every community is going to have different groups that step forward to provide support. Businesses and corporations have been amazing in offering all kinds of material support. Clergy and business associations could be very interested in*

*providing opportunities for school staff to have opportunity to address their own issues in these and other ways.*

**We are a small company in Cincinnati, Ohio that does educational related fundraising for a worthy school cause for the underprivileged students. We sponsored a book program for one school last season. Currently our focus is with Plan USA to rehab a school in Kenya. However due to Katrina, it is hard for our employees which is where the money is being collected from to continue focusing on Plan with a project so far from home.**

**We would like to help some way in which our employees can connect to the needs of students from a school affected by Katrina.**

**I am looking for direction on this as the chairperson for our company's efforts.**

*After some of these events, schools sometimes receive large donations that are difficult to deal with -- for instance, a tiny community that was nearly washed away in a flood received thousands of text books that were damaged and out of date. It became one more thing to try to dispose of, which just added to the burden. We really recommend that you start by collecting donations, but that you wait to decide what to spend them on or how to funnel the monies to a school until you have contact with a school in need.*

*We have contact with a national company that provides school services and materials in most areas of the country. Their reps may be able to help us connect with schools in need. Keep an eye to the web site for that link, should we be able to provide that for you. In order to keep that process orderly, we will likely post that we have schools in need and manage that off the web site in order that companies and groups are connected with one school that needs what they have to offer, but we'll let you know when we have connected with schools in need via the web site.*