

Girls Incorporated of Westchester County Crisis Communications Plan



Girls Incorporated®
of Westchester County

This plan has been created to help directors, staff, board and others prepare and decisively manage their response in a crisis situation. When a disaster strikes, staff members are torn between the need to deal with member reactions while dealing with controlling their own reactions. This time often proves to be a time that they are least prepared to think quickly.

This plan should be reviewed every year during the regular course of business. It is imperative that all phone numbers and contact information be kept current. Internal contact info should be attached each year once updated. The following sheet is only applicable for the first year of the creation of the document.

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Planning Before a Crisis and Early Warning Signs

Planning Before a Crisis

In the event that a crisis does occur, it is essential to have a plan already in place to handle such a situation. Below are several steps that may be helpful before a crisis.

Communicate to Staff: It is important that they know that there are procedures set in place that are to be used in case of a crisis situation. Make sure all understand the plan, procedures, and codes, along with any other information that may be relevant.

What is communicated:

1. What defines a crisis situation
2. The individual crisis plans
3. How information will be communicated to staff and other individuals
4. Expectations of staff
5. Who to provide information, who to call, and when
6. How and if parents will be informed
7. Responses to media
8. When training is available
9. Outside sources available for assistance

Identify Key Staff Members who may be able to assist in various crisis situations. Know your staff's strengths and weaknesses.

Determine where crisis situations can be resolved once they have been removed from the crisis point and what would be an alternate location if removal from building is necessary.

Early Warning Signs: There are often times that some crisis situations may be prevented if staff are aware of what is going on with members and staff. Some behaviors displayed can let staff know that a member may be at risk of a crisis.

- Social withdrawal or isolation
- Feeling rejected or being picked on
- Being a victim of violence or emotional abuse
- Uncontrolled anger or expressions of violence in writings or drawings
- History of discipline problems, violent/aggressive behavior or chronic hitting/bullying
- Drug/alcohol use
- Family problems
- Court hearings

EMERGENCIES

Medical Emergencies:

Each year staff will be required to participate and be certified in First Aid and CPR Training.

Always notify a supervisor immediately concerning accidents or illness.

If a girl gets hurt, keep her still and calm. Staff should assist in clearing the area and administer appropriate First Aid as necessary.

Do not leave the child unattended, send someone else to report.

If a member becomes ill...

Take her to the office (at Girls Inc or in an associated school). Call their parents and assure them first that all is okay. Do not leave a message about their daughter, if possible, without saying that their daughter is okay.

Then, let them know of the 'situation' and that their daughter is resting in the office area until parent come. If fever, vomiting or contagious condition exists, she **MUST** go home and must be removed from other girls and staff in the area.

First Aid Basics:

- Staff should help each other clear the area and the injured girl from 'interested bystanders'.
- In case of **nosebleed**, do not have the child lie down or throw her head back. You might try pinching the nostrils for a few seconds, but an ice pack and towels probably work best.
- In case of a **minor burn**, immediately run cold water over it. Do not use butter and do not cover the burn.
- If a person is **choking** and is still able to cough, let her be, watch her closely until completely sure she is okay, otherwise administer appropriate First Aid.
- We do not administer any kind of **medication** to the girls unless a parent supplies the medication, with a note indicating how much is to be given and when. Not even aspirin can be given without parental permission. Staff must sign a medication log if administering. We can use antiseptic sprays for minor scrapes, burns, etc.

- Band-Aids, gauze, and other 1st Aid supplies are kept in the Staff storage room. DO NOT share your medicine with the girls.
- Your supervisor will call an Ambulance if necessary or make arrangements for the parent / child to meet staff to get the care necessary.
- If in doubt as to what to do, act in the best interest of the injured child.
- Any time a girl is injured or reports being sick, parents/guardians need to be notified. Document notification and response or action taken.
- Complete First Aid Kits should be maintained on the vans at all times with all necessary extras for field trips.
- Accident report forms are available in the front office file cabinet. They must be filled out after **each** incident. Supervisors will review each incident to ensure follow-up is appropriate and safety concerns have been resolved. Notify parents immediately if it is serious, otherwise a note or call will do. When describing the situation, to the parent do not use other children's names (if involved) or lay blame.
Follow up the next day with a call to see if there were any complications and to let the girls and family know we care and are thinking about them.
Injuries, when possible, should be photographed with witnesses present in/near the photo.

Fire Emergency

- If the fire alarm goes off, program facilitators should immediately lead all girls close to them out the nearest door and assemble in the parking lot across the street, away from the building.
- Remain calm. Everyone must walk to the exits.
- If smoke is coming under a door, do not open it. Always touch a door before you open it. If the door is hot, do not open it.
- Keep the girls together in the parking lot until we are sure everyone is out of the building or if in a school site their designated area. (Move girls to safety first.)
- If any staff member suspects an electrical short or fire, please notify a supervisor immediately, verbally and in writing.

- If meeting at a GIWC site, it will be up to the supervisor to check the building to be sure everyone is out. The supervisor will get the sign in sheets and join members and staff outside.
- No girls may leave to go home during a drill or real fire unless they have been signed out on the attendance pages and staff see guardian pick members up.
- Fire extinguishers are located throughout the building and need to be inspected annually. All staff will be familiarized with the use of a fire extinguisher.
- Fire / Emergency drills should be conducted on a monthly basis and are generally unannounced.
- For general precautionary measures, the kitchen area should be kept cleared out at all times.

Bomb Threat Handling Procedures

Receiving the threatening call:

Anyone who answers a threatening phone call should document the date and time of receipt. They should attempt to solicit as much information as possible from the caller in reference to the bomb: location, type of explosive used, the time it is set to go off, the type of timing device used, and why the caller is doing this. Listen for any background noises that may be identifiable.

<u>Call</u>	Type of Call	<u>Voice</u>	<u>Background Noises</u>
Date:	Hung up	Male	
	Threatening	Female	
Time:	Obscene	Young	
	Nuisance	Old	
		High	
		Low	
		Accent	
		Intoxicated	
		Nervous	
		Camouflaged	

Evacuation Procedure:

Every precaution should be taken in order to avoid panic. A signal should be used to designate (to staff only) the type of emergency (Bomb Threat Advisory). The children should be asked to proceed in an orderly manner to the designated area for emergencies. Gathering at the far end of the parking lot is the 'safe' location no matter what type of emergency requires the building evacuation. Staff should be posted strategically outside the facility in order to prevent re-entry

into the building. The onsite lead will notify the police. **The use of portable radios (walkie talkies) is prohibited during bomb threat emergencies.**

Contact Law Enforcement:

Law enforcement personnel should be dispatched as soon as possible to the scene. A designated staff member should accompany the search party. This member should be capable of pointing out any item that appears out of place or abnormal to the environment. He or she is not to touch anything during the search. If a device is located, this subject will be asked to leave the building immediately. No effort will be made to disarm or remove a device while the search party or civilian personnel are inside. Law Enforcement personnel will determine the need to request additional emergency services assistance (Fire Department, Ambulance, etc.). **The use of portable radios is prohibited during bomb threat emergencies.**

Signal to Return:

The Executive Director, staff or police in charge will verbally notify the girls when the building is cleared for re-entry.

Off Site/School Programming:

When providing program services to off-site/school partners, we must follow the procedures of the host site. We must ask the host site for a copy of all their emergency procedures. Most off-site programming locations will have a copy of emergency procedures in the room – make note for all emergencies.

Program Facilitators must immediately report to the Program Director. The Program Director will notify the Executive Director who will contact school officials and/or law enforcement (depends on the emergency/incident).

Active Shooter

When providing program services to off-site/school partners, we must follow the procedures of the host site. We must ask the host site for a copy of all their emergency procedures. Most off-site programming locations will have a copy of emergency procedures in the room – make note for all emergencies.

In the event of an incident and staff is in the office,

- o If there is considerable distance between you and the gunfire/armed person, quickly move away from the sound of the gunfire/armed person. If the gunfire/armed person is in your building and it is safe to do so, run out of the building and move far away until you are in a secure place to hide.
- o If the shooter is in close proximity and you cannot evacuate safely, hide in an area out of the armed person's view. Choose a hiding place with thicker walls and fewer windows, if possible. Lock doors and barricade with furniture, if possible.
- o Silence phones and turn off other electronics.
- o Call 911 when it is safe to do so. Do not assume that someone else has reported the incident. The information that you are able to provide law enforcement may be critical, e.g. number of shooters, physical description

and identification, number and type(s) of weapons, and location of the shooter.

Inclement Weather

Girls Inc of Westchester County ordinarily closes along with the city and county school systems due to inclement weather and/or large numbers of reported student illnesses. All regular full-time employees are scheduled to arrive one hour late in inclement weather. The Executive Director. is authorized to decide if employees are to report any later or not at all. In the case of inclement weather, employees should contact their immediate supervisors or call their work site to receive information. If employees are required to report to work, failure to do so will result in the loss of vacation days or other loss of pay. Staff are required to check in with immediate supervisor **each day**- failure to check in is considered absence without leave. Only if employees are not required to report to work will full compensation apply. Notification will be made to all girls in programming of any closures.

Flooding

In the event of prolonged rain, flood, or similar emergency, the following procedures should be followed:

- o Weather conditions will be monitored by the Executive Director and school's main office; they will keep staff informed on how to proceed, pending emergency.
- o When evacuation has become necessary, the Executive Director or school official will contact the Red Cross/Disaster Emergency Services for instruction to the nearest shelter and plans for transporting of staff and members. Everyone will be transported as advised.
- o Staff will account for all members and other staff until departure from the center is made.
- o Parents may be contacted to inform them of the whereabouts of the members.
- o Before departure, the center will be checked to make sure all have been evacuated and the building is secure.

Power Outage

- o Should power outage occur before sessions, staff should report to their site for further instructions and to be notified as to the anticipated time of restoration.
- o Everyone should proceed to a central part of the building that is safe until directions from the Executive Director, on some occasions outside may be best.
- o Parents of members will be notified, if possible, of power outage once the Executive Director has given instructions on how to proceed with any cancellation of sessions, closure of centers or alternate pick up plans.

Chemicals-Spills or other hazardous situations

- o The Executive Director will be informed by staff or the Executive Director will inform staff of any hazardous situations. Campus Managers will take immediate action to move other staff and members to a safe area.
- o Fire and Rescue will be notified of the situation and staff will await their instructions.
- o Pickup procedures will be acted upon if situations become too hazardous to keep staff and members within the immediate area.

Transportation Crisis

Every effort will be made to ensure the safety of both the staff and the members. Members' emergency contact information should be transported along with members on any field trip involving any transportation.

In the event of an accident/problem on bus:

- o Staff should remain calm and attempt to maintain calmness of the members
- o Emergency officials should be contacted
- o Staff should check for any injuries and administer first aid if possible. Remove other members from the bus and away from the injured person(s)
- o Contact Executive Director to inform of the situation and any injured person(s)
- o Parents will be notified of the situation and next steps.
- o Alternate transportation will be provided for those not injured
- o A designated staff shall remain with injured member to provide any medical information and keep member calm

Custodial Crisis

- o Primary guardian(s) should be notified of any issues.
- o Make sure that members/parents are aware of the proper sign in/out procedures
- o Staff should calmly inform parents/guardians of policies and send another staff to get the Executive Director to assist. Always make sure the girls are in a safe place.
- o Staff will be informed of any custody status or restrictions involving any members (should also be listed in member's file)
- o Do not try to physically intervene with the restricted person. Notify the Executive who will contact the police.
- o Send girls to safe space during conversation.
- o Make note of color, make, model of car as well as license plate and any other important information if possible
- o Be able to provide a description of the restricted person
- o Members should be debriefed and counseled if necessary. Members' behavior should be monitored for possible stress.

Missing Child

When a member is believed to be missing, staff must react quickly so that no time is lost in the recovery of the member.

- o Confirm that the member is actually missing; enlist the help of staff and other members. Check all rooms and areas that the member may visit

including outside premises. Do NOT alarm girls when searching. General questions may be asked calmly.

- o Once it is confirmed that the member is actually missing, notify the Executive Director and parents, police. Continue to check the property, vans, vehicles, and sign in sheets.
- o Keep all other members in the eye sight of staff and remember to remain calm.
- o On an outing make sure staff is with the rest of the members. Bring in others to help assist with the search. A staff member notifies the Executive Director.

Personal Threat/Violence with Participants:

- o Any threats or violence that has the potential to cause harm or disrupt the regular operations of the program should be addressed immediately.
- o All threats should be taken seriously. Noted by staff and reported to Executive Director
- o The individuals expressing the threats should be monitored closely and removed from others
- o Possible individual sessions may be held to determine what the issue is behind the threats and what can be done to resolve the issue before it escalates.
- o If the threats continue the member may be asked to leave the program. (This decision may be left up to the Executive Director).

Violence with Participant

- o The School Official and Program Director should be notified immediately and staff will be instructed on whether or not 911 needs to be contacted.
- o Staff should make every effort to keep the disturbance isolated to one area and the other members are removed so that more individuals are not involved.
- o The individuals involved should be put in an isolation room/ area under the supervision of a staff member AT ALL TIMES until the matter is resolved and the parent picks them up.
- o This incident should be discussed with involved parties to try to resolve the issue so that it will not occur again.
- o Staff will evaluate the situation to see if anything else could have been done and what could be done differently in the future.
- o The consequences for the individual will come from the School Official and/or Program Director.

Emergency Policies and Procedures

During the crisis...

- 1) Stay calm. Strive to be proactive rather than reactive. Take the time necessary to think through the situation thoroughly.

- 2) Immediately contact the supervisor and provide them with complete information. The Executive Director will always eventually be made aware of situations when they arise and will determine if the Board Chair should be made aware as well.
- 3) If the crisis has potential legal implications, consult with the appropriate counsel prior to any communications with the press. Statements made and recorded by the media become a matter of public record, and cannot be retracted. The Executive Director and Board Chair will jointly determine if legal counsel is needed.
- 4) In the event of a crisis, the Executive Director or designee is the official spokesperson for GIWC. To properly control the dissemination of information to the press, only one spokesperson will be active for any one major issue. In the absence of the Executive Director, the Board Chair will assume the responsibilities of spokesperson. No staff member other than the designated spokespersons may talk with the media about a crisis situation at any time.
- 5) The Executive Director, or her designee, should serve as an in-house reporter, compiling facts and information as the story progresses. Information compiled needs to be continually provided to the Executive Director (or designee) in writing. Assume nothing!
- 6) The Executive Director, or her designee, should prepare and continually update a question and answer document to serve as the basis for all other written or verbal communications with the media and other inquiring parties. This document should anticipate likely questions and present carefully crafted answers to those questions. It is better to have too much rather than too little content on this document.
- 7) It is best to make an initial statement, rather than wait for the press to come seeking the story.
- 8) Never release names of those involved since they are minors we are unable to release such information. The process can take some time, however, this policy is universal and the media will most likely be accepting when given the reason.
- 9) Don't forget to keep the staff, Board of Trustees, and other internal constituents informed. Any information being given to the press should be distributed internally, simultaneously. By keeping everyone informed, rumors will be kept to a minimum and all concerned can be reminded about media policies to which they must adhere.
- 10) Keep a comprehensive list of all media contacts including any information sent in the form of a press release, all telephone and email contacts, and any face-to-face conversations and interviews.

After the crisis...

Once the crisis situation has been resolved, it is now time to debrief the crisis situation and devise a plan to handle the situation to prevent another similar situation if one should occur. It is also wise to interview all of the individuals involved in the crisis situation.

Interview those involved separately so that you are able to get their story without any interruption.

Once each person's information has been taken and they have voiced what they felt was important, bring all parties together to see where the problem is and what can be done to resolve it.

The results of the debriefing/interview process should be taken to the Executive Director to discuss so that decisions can be made in reference to any changes that need to be made for future situations and to determine possible consequences.