

Crisis Intervention

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The crisis intervention plan that I studied was that of Central Michigan University. Their “Crisis Response Plan” initially stood out to me because it was detailed, methodical, organized, and lengthy as compared to the plans of other colleges and universities. When I stumbled across their web page I could easily scroll through their information and I understood the general concepts behind their plan within minutes. Central Michigan begins their plan by clarifying and defining a crisis as “...a significant event that threatens the well-being of one or more individuals or the University as a whole.” Their definition goes on to state that this includes but is not limited to: natural disasters, violent crimes, health threats, civil disturbance, and sudden or unexplained death. By providing a definition at the beginning, the university is helping readers and campus constituents determine whether they are looking in the right place. Also, important portions of the definition are in bold font in order to help those skimming through the response plan quickly understand what they are reading.

Next Central Michigan outlines the plan’s goals in bullet point format. This technique, like the bold font in the definition, allows readers to easily grasp what they are reading. This clarity sets the tone for the rest of the document, allowing fast accessibility, an important aspect to have in a crisis intervention plan. Their plan also includes goals that address sensitivity and immediacy, two crucial aspects of a crisis plan. One of their goals is to “Respond quickly to immediate threats to the well-being of students, faculty, staff and visitors.” Another goal is to “Respond to the emotional as well as physical impacts of a crisis on survivors, family members, and the greater University community.” The latter goal is particularly a best practice because it is sensitive and widespread, seeking to holistically support the entire campus.

Central Michigan’s plan is headed by two teams, one is the Crisis Response Team and the other is the Crisis Core Group. This particular portion of the plan may be a strength or a

weakness. The Core Group, a small group, is the one in charge and they call upon certain members of the Response Team, a larger group, when necessary. Having the Core Group may be a strength because only the necessary university officials are called upon during a crisis, instead of the entirety of a large team. However, this can also be a weakness. There may be confusion about who will actually be involved when a crisis occurs on campus. Having only one consistent team would clear this up. One could argue though that the more minds involved the better. But having too many minds involved could hinder workflow, privacy, and other issues related to a crisis. It may ultimately be up to the university to assess whether their particular institution would benefit for a core team approach or one team approach. One could also consider a situational approach, however that may confuse many people.

Another weakness of Central Michigan's plan is the confusion as to who is actually the head of the operation, the person in charge. The plan states, "The Associate Vice President for Public Relations and Marketing is responsible for coordinating the institutional response..." However, under the Crisis Core Group the plan lists a CCG Chair as well as the AVP for Public Relations and Marketing. Are readers to assume that the CCG Chair is the AVP? Is this a rotating chair position? Is the chair the head of the operation or is the AVP? In order to refine their plan, Central Michigan should state more clearly who is in charge.

The AVP for Public Relations and Marketing was unable to be reached for comment concerning this specific issue as well as the plan as a whole. One question prepared to ask the AVP was, "Why are you responsible for coordinating the institutional response?" I am sure the AVP would have replied from a university standpoint about maintaining public relations throughout relief efforts. I am wondering, however, if a best practice for a crisis intervention plan would be to have the Director of the Counseling Center be the chair. It seems this

appointment would ensure the understanding of the student population and their particular needs during a crisis. Though one can see the need for a higher-ranking administrator to head up a crisis response. Having a public relations administrator has its benefits as well, especially in fielding any media attention.

The Crisis Response plan also outlines other pertinent information for readers. This includes a section on policies and procedures that mentions the crisis response plans in specific departments and the need to view them as a part of a bigger picture. Also, sections on assembling the response team and team responsibilities paints a picture of what is going on behind the scenes with the Crisis Response Team. Central Michigan's plan also address Residence Life and Student Life procedures. The strength that all of the aforementioned sections offer is transparency and clarity. Staff, faculty, and administration can understand the protocol, which person is responsible for what, and anticipate next steps. The use of transparency in a response team's work would be beneficial to all crisis intervention plans.

Lastly, the aspect of Central Michigan's Crisis Response Plan that makes it a best practice is their provision and use of a crisis checklist. Though they do not claim it to be the final say in what should be done during a crisis, they do offer it as general guidelines. This particular checklist is evidence that Central Michigan's plan is detailed, methodical, and organized. The outline of the checklist is as so: gather information, define issues, determine additional information needed, determine the need to assemble the CRT, define overall institutional response, identify affected groups and groups needing information, define response actions and assign responsibilities, other considerations, and debriefing and self-evaluation. Under each section there are examples suggesting what can or should be done during a crisis. The Crisis Response Plan states, "This list is intended to provide focus for discussion during a

highly pressurized situation and should not be considered a limit to potential responses.” Central Michigan’s organized Crisis Response Plan will also keep a crisis situation organized. The plan affects the practice. Having an outlined plan that focuses involved parties during a time of chaos ensures an immediate and caring response. That is why this is a best practice crisis intervention.