THE CONSORTIUM ON TRAUMA,
ILLNESS, AND GRIEF IN SCHOOLS

*The TIG Network is uniquely positioned to support coping and recovery.  The current context of the global pandemic is unprecedented, leading some of us to experience feeling a lack confidence in skills or knowledge to apply; being frozen or unsure of our actions.  This is uncharted territory, however, what we know about crisis response can be applied with thoughtful planning to meet needs in the current context.*

**Extending Best Practices**
**Guidance for TIG Leaders in Response to a Major Incident: Crisis Leadership**

Perception of Risk research tells us that when threats are familiar or known to science, we experience less anxiety and have lower risk for negative outcomes post-incident.  The unique factors of the pandemic challenge our feelings of personal familiarity and lack immediate scientific solutions.  This increases the likelihood that more of us than not feel personally threatened.  How we approach leadership in this moment can have a direct positive impact on increasing resilience and decreasing risk.

**What is Crisis Leadership: Similar and different?**  In typical times**,** effective leadership can look and feel different depending on personal style, professional dynamics, knowledge and attitudes.  Research has demonstrated that leadership in *times of crisis* requires a unique set of core competencies.  For some leaders, these fit easily within their typical style, for others it will necessitate actions to establish a new culture.  However, by applying these principles, we can support positive outcomes for our staff and by extension, our students.

**Seven competencies support effective leadership when crises occur**. (L. Wooten et. al)
1. Practice environmental scanning: ongoing scan for crises, the ability to detect and assess impact at many levels
2. Prevention and preparation: Actions to build agility and creativity in an ongoing way
3. Containment: Reduce impact spread through Quick and Ethical decision-making
4. Resilience promotion: This too shall pass.  Emphasize resilience and organizational recovery even within new environments
5. Engagement and learning: ongoing personal and collective vision of continued learning
6. Build community: promote self and community care; role model -walk the walk
7. Effectively manage info, data and technology

**Applying these Competencies from a TIG Perspective**

- **Environmental Scanning**
  An effective leader in times of crisis will work with their team to gain ongoing information about the status of risk.  What are the needs?  How are they changing over time?

  A crucial aspect is also assessing what are the specific assets and resources (internal and external to the school system) that emerge.  What assets can you bring to bear to meet which needs?  What needs are being met in other ways or by other sources?  Aligning assets with needs through this continual process will allow efficiency of resource allocation and assurance

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that you are effectively responding to gaps along the way.

- **Prevention and Preparation**
  In the Johns Hopkins Resilience Model, this competency correlates to the Resist Phase -actions that you take in an ongoing way to build infrastructure outside of an immediate crisis.  Have confidence that best practices in education and the support of TIG have laid a strong foundation.

  An opportunity in this time is to ensure that you have these Crisis Team standards of practice in place now.  They will reinforce your team's health in order to effectively respond to greater needs along the way:
  - Permission to address personal needs.  Be explicit and overt.  Role model through your own actions.
  - Normalization of reactions, even among crisis team members.  We are all impacted by these events to varying degrees.
  - Promote the conservation of energy.  This a marathon, not a sprint.  Encourage all members to take ease where they can in order to have energy stores when it is needed.
  - Self-care, Team-Care are critical.  Establish norms and routines around tagging in and tagging out during this response.  Practices may look and feel different during this time since all are affected by the events to varying degrees.  Planning with your team members around how to actively engage in self AND team care is essential to maintaining your ability to respond effectively.
  - Communication and trust.  Reinforce the norm that crisis team members are encouraged to voice their expertise, ask curious questions, and come to consensus.  It may also be important to allocate a portion of your time to dispelling myths and rumors by being a trusted source for accurate information.
  - Grounded in understanding goals of crisis intervention and that most students/staff will return ok.

- **Containment**
  As a crisis continues to unfold, effective leaders can reduce the level of impact and lower risk for negative outcomes. In the context of COVID-19 one aspect of this is to continue to support and promote recommended health guidelines.  Another aspect is to ensure that all staff are empowered with actions they can take at home to support their own well-being.  Similar to crisis team standards of practice, all Leaders can take these actions to support their staff:

  - Provide direct permission to address personal needs.  Staff are not "working from home".  Instead, recognize that "we are home during a crisis trying to work." Anticipate and respond to needs from this perspective.
  - Normalization of normal reactions to abnormal events.  TIG staff can provide support and guidance to leaders on empowering staff with knowledge that they may notice reactions in a variety of ways (cognitive, behavioral, emotional, spiritual, and physiological).  Recognition that reactions are normal is healing.  Additionally, resources and strategies can then be shared to reduce symptoms.
  - Conservation of energy is essential for all staff.  To be best prepared to meet needs upon return to school, all staff need to reduce output when possible, and bring their best when needed.

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- **Resilience Promotion | Building Community**
  When done effectively, Containment naturally promotes resilience.  The experience of connection and community provides the foundation.  Prior to re-entry to school, leaders can invest in helping their staff grow internal skills.  When we consider re-entry and its related shift to Response and Recovery, schools and districts will need to have large numbers of adult staff who are healthy and returned to their baseline functioning.  Prioritization of meeting adult needs now, will increase your ability to effectively respond and support student needs in the future.

    - Lead with empathy, compassion, and your humanity.  A hallmark difference between leadership and crisis leadership is a collective need on the part of staff to recognize in their leader their individual humanity.  Having all the answers is not required.  Demonstrating you are not impacted is not required.  Instead, normalize that there will be ups and downs for everyone, yourself included, but working through the experiences together will help all rise.
    - Teach, role model and provide tip sheets on self-care and stress management
    - Help staff create and maintain appropriate boundaries between work and personal time given the blurred nature of work-life balance in this time.
    - Maintain connections with staff in a variety of methods.  Provide some consistent more formal experiences such as team meetings or staff updates.  Supplement these with informal opportunities to connect 1:1, virtual coffee hours, check-ins can all be employed with great effect.  Find creative ways to have fun and continue to laugh together.
    - Offer hope with every communication
    - Recognize and respond to staff needs (these may include personal stress/anxiety, lack of comfort with ambiguity, experiences of grief/loss that may include missing their students, and more)
    - Provide clear expectations and offer flexibility.  Help all staff to have what they need to do the best they can within this time.  It is enough.
    - Many districts are familiar with the 7C's of Resilience Development: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Contribution, Character, Coping and Control.  You can grow staff resilience by exploring with your team aspects you can offer in some or all of these domains.

*Helpful Reminder: Lowering the risk for primary and secondary (vicarious) trauma is part of environmental scanning, containment, resilience promotion, and building community. However, it is unrealistic to predict we will avoid the experience of these events as trauma 100% -even amongst staff. By being mindful of indicators of trauma or vicarious trauma leaders can recognize and intervene early to reinforce positive coping.  Be especially aware of the over-productive staff…Are there staff currently working 23 out 24 hours a day?  Responding to needs at all hours and immediately?  We might be relying on these staff right now, however, we need to recognize that this may be an indicator of trauma.  Such staff may need external structures to lower their intensity in order to maintain their health over time.*

**Engagement and Learning**
Leaders can feel pressured to be superhuman in times of crisis.  The burden may feel extra heavy to

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carry.  At times, leaders can adopt more dictatorial or authoritarian practices in their efforts to achieve this standard, which is inherently unrealistic.

As discussed above, your humanity is your greatest strength in crisis leadership.  Now more than ever we can recognize that there are no established "experts" in How Schools Should Respond to a Global Pandemic.  We are *all* supporting one another to grow from what we know in prior experiences to apply best practices to this unprecedented experience.  Establishing your commitment to work together, to listen to feedback, to actively seek the best information to bring to bear, and to work to secure resources to effectively manage needs will promote trust, safety, and reinforce your credibility during this time.

**Effectively Managing Information, Data & Technology**
The rapidity of information, data and resources can be itself, overwhelming.  Leaders can work with their teams to identify a small number of credible data sources to regularly employ to support their strategic planning and can be transparent with staff about these sources.

Communication to staff can be titrated at regular intervals to help staff feel in control and avoid information overload. Providing reassurance to staff ahead of time about how resources and information will be shared can manage expectations and lower anxiety.  Resources, guidance, can be chunked into tip sheets or sound byte formats to make them more easily understood and applied.

Ensuring that all staff have the technology they need and the skills to use it is essential in digital learning.  Employing an effective loop with IT staff to help respond to immediate needs and providing ad hoc tutorials on different options for technology can help staff at all levels of tech proficiency feel more competent and confident in managing virtual learning.

***Helpful Reminder:*** *Take time to take care of yourself.  Maintain a connection with a trusted colleague, friend or family member that can objectively tell you when you need to take a break, eat lunch, go for a walk or otherwise turn everything off.  This is a marathon not a sprint and your health is vitally important to your well-being, and your ability to support others through this time.*

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