

ALL PRINCIPALS/APs: Crisis Response Information: Haiti Earthquake
Category: For Your Information

Audience: All Principals/APs, All Teachers , Student Services

Due Date: n/a

Meeting Date: n/a

Attachment(s): [HELPING & ASSISTING STUDENTS AFFECTED BY NATURAL DISASTERS.doc](#)
[helping-children-and-adolescents-cope-with-violence-and-disasters-what-parents-can-do.pdf](#)
[CRISIS REACTIONS.doc](#)

To provide all employees with information and resources to assist students and families who may be experiencing emotional distress related to the earthquake crisis in Haiti.

At approximately 4:33 p.m. Tuesday, January 12, 2010 a powerful 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck the island nation of Haiti. This devastating earthquake resulted in the severing of communications both within the country and with the outside world. According to the International Federation of the Red Cross, up to 3 million people were affected by this earthquake. Countless homes and buildings, including the historic National Palace, were destroyed.

In M-DCPS, many of our students and staff have family and friends residing in Haiti. Some children and families have not been able to communicate at all with their loved ones since this tragedy occurred. This has caused an increase in anxiety and worry for many who have not been given the reassurance about the condition of their loved ones. Understandably, our students and staff may exhibit symptoms of anxiety today and in the coming days related to this.

Students may be displaying increased feelings of: anxiety, agitation, stress responses, helplessness, may have difficulty concentrating, may exhibit difficulty sleeping, and/or loss or increase of appetite. Young children may report somatic symptoms such as stomachaches, headaches, etc.

We strongly urge school staff to be available to provide supportive counseling to these impacted students, school site staff, and/or families. Individual assessment of the needs of each student should guide the interventions of the counseling professionals. Please be aware that if a student's current coping mechanisms were challenged due to any multitude of other loss-related issues, this current event may escalate the crisis response.

The following suggestions may be helpful for school sites to implement:

- Develop a system in coordination with counseling services providers (School Psychologists, Guidance Counselors, TRUST Specialists, SPED Counselors, etc.) available **today** regarding how to provide counseling services: designate counseling locations (individual and group availability or even just a quiet place where students who need just a time out can go); how students will be referred for counseling; etc.
- Alert teachers through e-mail regarding the earthquake and about some expected stress responses students may display (be aware teachers may be impacted, as well). Ask teachers to refer students displaying the aforementioned symptoms to a counseling professional in the school.

- Be flexible with cell phone use today to facilitate students in receiving the latest news about relatives by their parents/guardians.
- Allow impacted students to text if this facilitates necessary communication today.
- Provide staff with the phone number for the Employee Assistance Program.
- An attachment for parents has also been provided as a resource.

As Miami-Dade County Public Schools has a very large Haitian population, we are committed to working together to support one another as a community and a school family. If consultation is needed, please contact the M-DCPS Crisis Hotline at 305-995-CARE.

For any questions or further information, please contact Ms. Suzy Berrios, Director, Mental Health and Crisis Management Services at (305)995-7315/ sberrios@dadeschools.net or Ms. Isabel Rodriguez-Duncan, Chairperson of Mental Health and Crisis Management Services at (305)995-1736/ IZRodriguez@dadeschools.net.

Contact: Ms. Suzy Berrios, Director, Mental Health and Crisis Management (305-995-7315)
Department: Division of Psychosocial Clinical Support Services