

## STUDENT RELEASE

Student release is a crucial part of crisis planning. In all school/parish crisis planning, the safety of the students is the main priority. During a crisis, traditional student release procedures are frequently unsafe or otherwise inoperable. Accordingly, a comprehensive crisis plan needs to include certain procedures:

- **Update student rosters.** Rosters should be updated at a minimum of twice a year; some schools/parishes recommend updating rosters weekly/monthly.
- **Distribute updated rosters.** All teachers/catechists need updated rosters of all their classes. This information should be stored in their classroom so that a substitute teacher/catechist could easily find it. A copy of all rosters should also be placed in the crisis response box, as well as with the principal/DRE/Youth Minister and any other stakeholder as advisable. It is critical to know which students are present during a crisis.
- **Create student emergency cards.** At the beginning of the school/faith formation year, make sure the school/parish has an emergency card for each student containing contact information on parents/guardians, as well as several other adults who can be contacted if the parent or guardian is not available. The card should also indicate whether the student is permitted to leave campus with any of the adults listed on the card, if necessary. Some schools/faith formation programs recommend authorizing one or more parents of children at your child's school to pick up your child. The card should also include all pertinent medical information, such as allergies, medications, and doctor contact information. These cards should be stored in the front office, both in hard copy and electronically, if possible.
- **Create student release forms to be used in times of crisis and store them with crisis response materials.** Create a back-up plan if forms are not available.
- **Designate student release areas, as well as back-up options.** These areas should be predetermined and communicated to families. If necessary, changes should be communicated through the designated channels.
- **Assign roles for staff.** For example, a staff member is needed to take the emergency cards from the office to the release area, while several staff members are needed to deal with families and **sign out students**. These roles should be assigned before a crisis occurs. If roles change, the principal/DRE/Youth Minister or designated leader should assign new roles.
- **Create student release procedures.** These procedures should create a flexible, yet simple, system for the release of students. Families will want immediate access to their children; emotions will be running high. Create a system that considers this, and train staff to expect it. Procedures should require proof of identity; if necessary, wait until such proof can be ascertained. It is important not to release a student to a non-custodial guardian if custody is an issue for the family. **Do not release students to people not listed on student emergency cards.** A well-intentioned friend may offer to take a child home; however, school/parish staff must be certain that students are only released to the appropriate people so students' families will know where they are.
- **Arrange for transportation for students who are not taken home by a parent or guardian.** Also arrange for shelter and provisions, if necessary.
- **Use all communication outlets to keep families, the media, and community informed during and after the crisis.** Signal the end of the crisis as well.