

Guidelines for Crisis and Contingency Management

by G. Stephen Goode

Youth With A Mission has been drafting crisis guidelines since the early 1980's. The guidelines contained in this article are a summary of our latest revision and include sections on pre-crisis planning, death of workers, evacuation plans, terrorism, hostage survival, and the formation of crisis management teams. Other areas that are also essential to develop, though which are not dealt with in this article, include dealing with bomb threats, rape, and post-traumatic stress, along with improving personal security, analyzing risk areas, and debriefing following critical incidents.

As we in the missions community continue to focus upon unreached peoples, we will continue to be exposed to life-threatening, crisis situations. Differing political climates, local laws and customs, and a wide range of other variables make it impossible to apply a simple standard of security precautions internationally. It is thus essential that each agency and their respective national leadership teams develop and periodically review their own guidelines which are relevant for their own work settings. The following organizations were very helpful as we compiled these crisis and contingency management guidelines: Mennonite Central Committee, Catholic Relief Services, Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptists, International Assistance Mission, United States Embassy at Bangkok, World Vision, The United Nations, WEC, and Contingency Preparation Consultants.

Pre-Crisis Planing

A crisis is a current or impending situation which is, or has the immediate potential of, creating an unacceptable degree of danger to personnel, the functioning of the mission and its related overseas entities, and/or its essential purpose for being. Anticipating and preparing for crisis situations is an essential first step to dealing with them.

Documents. To begin, missionary couples should make a written list of important documents for all family members. Single missionaries should also do this for themselves. Place it in your local personnel file and keep a copy for yourself, to be carried with you when moving from one locale to another. Also leave a copy with a trusted colleague back home. Include the passport numbers and dates of issue and local visas; bank account numbers; credit card numbers; insurance policy numbers; car registration, serial and license numbers, drivers license number; social security numbers (if applicable); fingerprints, palm prints, and current photographs; current prescriptions, including eyeglasses; contents and location of safe repository; summary of assets and debts; names and addresses of business, personal, emergency contacts.

Locate a safe repository in your home country and put in it the original of your: will and power of attorney; birth, marriage, and adoption certificates; naturalization papers (certificate of naturalization may not be copied) and dual citizenships; deeds, mortgages, stocks/bonds (leave these with your broker in case you want to sell); insurance papers, for life, car, house, medical, household effects; current inventory of valuable possessions and their location; medical and dental records, school records, tax records. Take copies of the above with you and also consider leaving copies with a trusted contact. Be sure to keep your will and inventory of possessions updated.

Finances. As for finances, appoint a current power of attorney for each adult family member and have several copies made. Make several originals as well. These are needed to transact business on behalf of spouse or other adult. Establish credit that will be adequate for emergencies. Keep a listing of regular billing dates for all recurring expenses (e.g., insurance, mortgage, and taxes). Establish a joint checking account, or two joint checking accounts, enabling each spouse to work from either account in the event they are separated for a period of time. Have checks deposited in a local bank account rather than posted. Checks lost in the post can cause extraordinary difficulties. Obtain individual credit cards for spouses. Insure all property and update policies periodically. Place checkbooks, bankbooks, some travelers checks, and a small amount of cash in a safe, but easily accessible place.

Learn the current laws of your legal residence and place of domicile with regard to taxes and property. And gather together all employment history for adult family members including resumes and letters of reference. Keep duplicates in your home country.

Pre-Crisis Plans. Finally, discuss with your family what you will do in case of an emergency separation (evacuation, hostage-taking, illness or death). Have an emergency contact. Choose a location in which to go. Research the resources available in various locations. Develop a checklist of items to bring in case of rapid evacuation. Make sure there are financial provisions to cover evacuation and travel costs.

Death of a Frontier Worker

Incidents and local laws involving death vary and thus standard contingency plans will need adaptation. Personnel should have a current list of emergency contacts on their application forms.

Leadership Responsibilities. When death occurs, the leadership and staff at the site of the death must give their full attention and make themselves available to the family or team that is affected. Communicate as soon as possible to the missionary organization and regional leadership. Also the local leadership must be prepared to implement on short notice all actions that are required. Be sure to keep a detailed log of all communication and actions taken which includes the content of the communication, the date and time, and the name and phone/address of the person contacted.

When first contact is made from personnel on the field to the national or regional director, a determination should be made regarding what is the best communication channel to use (telephone, telex, fax, cable, ham radio, e-mail). Telephone is usually preferred. At the time of each communication, the two parties should set a schedule for the next communication. The national, regional or field director of the missionary agency should make initial contacts with the immediate family at home, potential support persons close to the family such as the home church, and team members.

Memorial and Funeral Services. Missionary organization leadership should urge local leadership at the site of death to thoroughly check into and then initiate all local legal requirements, such as a death certificate, embalming requirements, and requirements for moving the body out of the country if that is the decision. Some countries require burial within 24 hours; others require embalming before the return of the body. If a funeral director is available in the host country, get price quotes about embalming, basic services, handling charges, or the costs to return the body (some insurance companies may cover the latter).

Any accompanying family members on the field should be urged to consult with other family members at home before deciding how to dispose of the body. The immediate family should be urged to contact its local funeral director, pastor, or someone with experience for advice on how to handle the details, especially if they decide to return the body. If there are survivors on the field who will be returning to the home country, a decision should be made early whether someone from the organization should accompany them. If there is any doubt whether or not they should be accompanied, have someone go with them.

Local staff from the mission organization should be urged to arrange for memorial services at the place of work if at all possible. A representative from the organization should be present at the memorial services back in the home country.

Follow-Up Care. If any survivors terminate their service with the mission organization and return home, a determination should be made regarding the organization's obligations for short or long term support, including financial and counseling help. Survivors may need to go through debriefing and grief counseling. Remember too that the local staff are under great pressure at the time of death and deserve acknowledgment of that pressure and evidence of moral support from the mission organization, especially the international headquarters. As for follow up, a telephone call can be made to surviving

members on the second, sixth, and twelfth anniversary of the death. Let the survivors know that they are still remembered.

Finally, help field staff make immediate plans to cover the responsibilities of the family of the deceased as needed (such as access to the will, bank accounts, files). Notify the insurance carrier if appropriate. If death occurs during travel, remember that tickets purchased on a credit card may be covered by a \$100,000 to \$300,000 life insurance policy.

Evacuation Planning for War and Natural Disasters

The following evacuation guidelines are for expatriates working in potentially hostile or life-threatening areas. They do not consider any relief assistance from the outside which might be appropriate. Again, there is the need to anticipate and prepare for hostile and life-threatening situations.

When a dangerous situation occurs, such as increased localized violence (street fighting, mob action), stay in a safe area as long as necessary. For example, do not go to the work place, but rather stay home. One may not be able to leave the country by normal procedures due to wide-spread fighting or random rocketing for a prolonged period of time. When word is given, go to pre-arranged gathering points. In the case of fighting, it is difficult to predict how quickly the violence may escalate. Those who desire to leave at the initial stages are encouraged to do so without fear or disapproval.

Preparation and Precautions. Keep vehicles with their gas tanks at least half full. Each house should have a metal tank full of petrol kept in a cool place. Additional car batteries can be used for lighting and should be kept charged. Have a first-aid kit and some food/water kept in vehicles.

Drinking water should be kept on hand, ideally a one-week supply. Change it every week if possible. A two-week supply of food should be stored in each house, especially foods that do not need much preparation like dried fruit, nuts, canned food, and powdered milk. All households should have a medical kit and an up-to-date telephone list handy (police, emergency numbers, and so on).

Communication. At all times, staff must let house-mates or someone else in the mission organization know where they are going and the expected return time. Each house should have a contact person for passing on messages. A previously designated contact person within the country will notify local staff and the regional director with updates, give advice as to whether or not contact should be made with civil authorities, and notify families of an evacuation plan (in consultation with the mission agency).

Expatriates should carry their passports with them at all times. Various embassies operate a warden network and you should ensure that you are on that network. The embassies will be responsible to notify the rest of the expatriates when an evacuation order is received. Expatriates will be told to stay in their homes until pickup for departure.

If Hostilities Commence. Gather people inside your house. Go to the basement if you have one or if not select the safest place out of direct sight of all windows and doors. Draw the curtains to reduce the possibility of glass shattering and hitting people. Keep low, stay inside, and avoid exposure. Open several windows on all floors to reduce the possibility of concussion breakage. Fill all bathtubs, washtubs, and other containers with water (if your electricity is cut, your pumps will not work.) Advise your staff and children not to pick up bullets, shells, rockets, or other unusual objects found.

If armed persons come into your area, do not create the impression of hostility or resistance. Smile frequently, be friendly, and cooperate. If possible encourage them to leave as soon as possible because their presence might endanger your household. If an unarmed person seeks refuge with you, refuse politely but firmly, unless in your judgment, there is an imminent threat to his/her life.

Do not go near any bodies. The contending sides will presumably take care of their wounded. If you see unattended wounded, consult others on the scene. If there is a lull in the fighting, remain where you are

unless otherwise instructed. Do not tour the city. Do not take photographs. And if the authorities in charge impose a curfew or issue special military law decrees, obey them to the letter. Pack one suitcase and bring some blankets for your family and assemble enough food and water should you have to be moved to a collection point for evacuation.

If Caught Away From Home. In the case of street rioting, your car is a likely target. Leave your car and find shelter. If you are close to your place of work, go back to it, if not, find a shop where you can stay. Contact someone so that people know where you are. Know your way around the city. Try to remember different routes to and from different places.

Escape Routes. You will need to identify home, city, and country escape routes if you are in dangerous areas. In addition, you will need to call on your contingency fund to purchase travel tickets. A local staff representative may need access to this fund with clear steps about how to use it. Also have cash available and food in case an overland trip is needed. The local staff representative will notify the regional office of departure arrangements. If possible, the expatriates will be picked-up from their homes and driven to the airport or via an overland route to the pre-arranged place of destination.

Terrorism

Terrorism is the use of force, violence, or threats by a terrorist organization to attain political goals through fear, intimidation or coercion. International terrorism is described as calculated acts of terrorism inflicted against foreigners or occurring extra-nationally, which are usually designed to attract worldwide publicity and focus attention to the existence, ideological cause, political goals, and demands of a terrorist organization.

Terrorists organizations use illegal violence in a systematic campaign. This campaign is often aimed at the civilian populace. Acts of terrorism are almost always well-planned actions which are quickly and systematically executed. The net effect of terrorist acts is much greater than the simple physical violence involved. One incident, directed and conducted by a few skillful terrorists, can stir the fear and emotions of an entire nation.

A terrorist is an individual who is generally between 18-28 years of age, from an upper middle-class background with college education, and is politically-oriented. He or she usually works within a group which has a definite organizational structure and hierarchy, the first or command element usually consisting of the older and more experienced terrorists.

High Risk Areas. If you must travel in an area where there has been a history of terrorist attacks or kidnappings, make it a habit to discuss with your family what they would do in an emergency and make sure your affairs at home are in order. Register with embassy upon arrival. Remain friendly with people, but be cautious about discussion of personal matters, your itinerary, or program. Leave no personal or business papers in your housing/hotel.

Watch for people following you or "loiterers" observing your comings and goings. Check for loose wires or other suspicious activities pertaining to your vehicle. Refuse unexpected packages. Keep a mental note of safe havens, such as police stations, hotels, and hospitals. Let someone else know what your travel plans are. Keep them informed if you make any changes. Avoid predictable times and routes of travel, and report any suspicious activity to the local police or nearest embassy.

Formulate a plan of action for what you will do if a bomb explodes or there is gunfire nearby. If you are ever in a situation where somebody starts shooting, drop to the floor or get down as low as possible and do not move until you are sure the danger has passed. Do not attempt to help rescuers and do not pick up a weapon. If possible shield yourself behind or under a solid object. If you must move, crawl on your stomach.

Preventing Terrorist Attacks. Being unpredictable is without question one of the best ways to discourage an attack. A study of terrorist attacks on vehicles shows the following progression of events: the targeted individual is watched; based on that surveillance, an attack is planned; the attack team deploys the plan; the targeted individual enters the designated "kill zone"; and the attack takes place.

Each person must take the ultimate responsibility for his/her own security. When surveillance is detected and confirmed, the individual must make subtle changes in travel procedures that will discourage the terrorist from considering them as an attractive target. The next point at which an attack can be avoided is just prior to the individual entering the kill zone. Attack recognition must occur while it is still in the camouflage or disguised phase. One of the most important means of defeating the terrorist attack is to deny the terrorist the tactical advantage of surprise. Without surprise, the attack is basically ineffective.

Hostage Survival

The moment of capture is generally one of the most critical and dangerous stages of an abduction operation. Any sudden or unexpected movement, noise or cry for help is likely to provoke a violent response from the terrorists which could be fatal for the captive. If a barricade hostage situation results, tension will remain high until the terrorists feel sure they are in control.

Whether to resist capture or surrender to the terrorist must remain a personal decision. You should weigh the danger of resistance in the face of what may be overwhelming odds. If you decide not to resist, assure the terrorist of your intention to cooperate, especially during the abduction phase. Resistance is highly risky given the fact that the terrorists are already mentally prepared to meet this contingency and are acting under a great deal of tension during the first few minutes of the operation.

It is important to know that the terrorists want you alive. While they may use drugs, blindfolds, or gags at the time of abduction, you should not be alarmed or resist unduly. Struggling is likely to result in even more severe measures.

Be certain that you can explain everything you have on your person, including your addresses. Regain your composure as soon as possible. Take a few deep breaths, and attempt to organize your thoughts. Occupy your mind by noting--for later reference--sounds, direction of movement, passage of time, conversations of the terrorist, and other information or circumstances that might be useful. Pay close attention to instructions and try to comply as much as possible. Ask permission to communicate. Be prepared to be accused of being a member of foreign spy groups. Anticipate isolation and possible efforts to disorient you.

Adjusting to Captivity. Living conditions may vary greatly from incident to incident. In a barricade hostage situation, victims may be in familiar, less primitive surroundings. There may be a total lack of privacy. Conventional toilet facilities may be lacking. Maintaining one's dignity and self-respect under such conditions will be difficult, but this is very important. Composure could be the key to retaining your status as a human being and hence a life worth saving in the eyes of the terrorists.

Fear is the most important tool of terrorists. They use it to control, intimidate, and wear down the hostage and the negotiators as well as the larger national or international audience sympathetic to the victim's plight. Fear may be induced by the loading and unloading of weapons in the presence of the hostage, displaying excesses of temper, lying to you about the condition of your family and colleagues, resorting to physical abuse, and staging mock executions. Fear of dying is very real and it can become overwhelming, especially during the early stages of the captivity. Death certainly is a real possibility; however statistically, the odds favor a hostage being released alive.

Experience has shown that the more time that elapses, the better are the chances for the hostage being released or rescued alive. For this reason, while the passage of time without rescue or release can be depressing, this time lapse is actually to your advantage. Once settled in do not be afraid to ask for anything you need or want. The worst they can do is to deny the request.

To ward off boredom, develop and maintain a daily physical fitness program and engage in creative mental activity, such as reading, writing, or even daydreaming. Exercise may be difficult due to cramped space or physical restraints on arms and legs. If possible, however, start and maintain a regular program of running in place, push ups, and sit ups. Isometric exercises may be substituted to overcome space or physical restraints.

Mental stimulation can be achieved in various ways. Terrorists have been known to provide reading material, tape recorders, and even tapes. Depending upon what is available, the hostage should read and keep track of the passage of time; make games such as checkers, cards, or chess from scraps; pray and recall memorized scripture and poems; write a novel, compose music, or even design a new home.

Weight loss is a side effect of captivity for some hostages, even though meals may be adequate. Gastrointestinal upsets and or constipation may occur, and although not life-threatening, can be debilitating. You should not hesitate to complain and request medication since terrorists want to keep their hostages alive. In a number of cases, terrorists have provided medical care for hostages suffering from illness and or injury.

The more human a victim appears to his or her captors, the more difficulty the terrorists will encounter in carrying out threats of violence against the victim. A display of family photos or discussions of children and family matters have on occasion, been instrumental in saving the lives of hostages.

Rescue or Release. Most hostages who die are killed during rescue attempts. It is, therefore, crucial for you to be especially alert, cautious, and obedient to instructions should you or the terrorists suspect such an attempt is imminent or occurring. The captors, as well as the captives, are likely to feel threatened and even panic. The terrorists will be extremely nervous during any release phase, especially if the negotiations lasted over a long, drawn-out period. They will also be anxious to evade capture and punishment. As the central figure in the rescue attempt, you must avoid all sudden moves which might invite reactions from the rescue forces as well as from the terrorists. Acting upon the impulse to stand up and run must be avoided. The safest response is to drop to the floor immediately and lie as flat as possible.

As soon as possible after rescue or release, write down everything you can remember about the incident, the location and condition of the other hostages, location of guards, and the location and description of weapons and explosives. This and any other information might be useful to the authorities. Do not minimize or overlook your need for debriefing, rest, and supportive counseling care.

Establishment Of A Crisis Management Team (CMT)

A CMT within an agency would usually be involved in the following situations: hostage taking, natural disasters affecting the missionary organization's personnel/property, war, government action against agency personnel, coups, expulsion of a team from a country, assassination threat upon a worker, terrorist threats, multiple deaths, events that create international negative attention, kidnapping, or criminal action against a member.

The CMT should be composed of the fewest persons possible and located geographically close to the scene of crisis. It functions as a temporary task force and its members provide a variety of perspectives and strategies to resolve a crisis. To those outside, however, the CMT maintains a posture of unanimity and coordination. Members should be selected in advance and receive training. It is usually best that the CMT be the only part of the organization involved in resolving the crisis.

A CMT needs to include several types of members. There needs to be a Crisis Manager (CM), who is the decision-making person in the event of crisis and in the worst-case scenario, the final decision-maker if it comes down to a decision pertaining to life or death hostage situation. There is also a Crisis Coordinator (CC) who oversees many of the logistical aspects of the crisis, a Media Director (MD) that relates to the

press and handles any news releases, and a Mission Representative (MR) who communicates on behalf of the mission to all necessary parties. Also involved will be people like the National Director, advisors, and a recording secretary.

The CMT purposes to insulate the crisis from the day to day organizational operations, to reduce the number of personnel dealing with the crisis, and to provide structure and discipline to the organizational response to the crisis. Some of the duties of the CMT include: maintaining communication with the victim's family and providing "official" information releases to interested parties such as the victim's extended family and friends, the victim's home church and sponsoring organization, and any involved governments. Further, the CMT receives and evaluates all incoming crisis information and suggestions for crisis resolution, establishes all media policy and approves all media releases, conducts (via a negotiator) all negotiations with hostage-takers, advises the Crisis Manager and implements any decisions, and maintains a record of the organizational responses to the crisis.

If a negotiation team is formed, the designated negotiator should be the only person communicating with hostage takers. He or she should be trained and experienced and should not be in a decision-making role. Other members of the negotiation team would include a translator and a cultural advisor (if needed), and a team leader who makes the decisions regarding the negotiations and is a liaison to the Crisis Management Team.

The mission organization needs to establish a policy concerning the payment of ransom. Working with lawyers having international experience may also be needed, so developing relationships in advance with such people is important. The Crisis Coordinator should have a corporate charge card such as a visa or mastercard which has a line of credit capable of covering some of the major expenses related to an emergency situation. It is further suggested that each regional office establish a line of credit with their local bank, with a further plan toward raising finances specifically for a contingency fund. Finally, it is also recommended that the victim, their immediate family on the field, and organizational people directly associated with a crisis have access to a qualified, Christian mental health professional made available through missionary organization resources, and if necessary, undergo follow-up counseling.

Questions for Discussion--Five Hypothetical Scenarios

Scenario One. You are living in Africa, and an African couple with whom you work has a three-year old child who dies of a sudden illness. Though grieved, they believe it must be God's will. How could you help them with the grieving process and with the logistical tasks following their child's death?

Scenario Two. You are flying with a six-person, crisis intervention team to an area in Southeast Asia devastated by a recent typhoon. It is your job as a part of this multi-disciplinary team to evaluate the emotional needs of the victims and organize resources to meet these needs. How would you go about fulfilling your responsibilities?

Scenario Three. You are living in a country where being arrested because of your type of work is a possibility. You are married with three children and are part of a team consisting of two other couples. What precautions should you take and what preparation should you make?

Scenario Four. Two expatriate women on your team are very upset after having been inappropriately touched by men in the market place. This is the fifth time in one month that this has happened. They are ready to either leave the country or start using mace. As their team leader, how would you handle this situation?

Scenario Five. You have just been taken hostage by a terrorist group that insists that your presence is undermining the national culture and religion. Their plan is to keep you as a hostage until your sponsoring organization withdraws all of its members from the country. What will help you to maintain your health and sanity during this process? How should your organization proceed?

Suggested Readings

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