

Crisis Management Guide



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Crisis Management

What begins as an “incident” or an emergency can quickly become a crisis. Once it becomes a crisis, it can threaten your business and its good name within the community. If your business does not manage a crisis properly, it can “bubble up” to affect others in your network, or even the industry.

Information follows to help you identify potential threats to your business, and to help you prevent, prepare for and manage a crisis.

A Crisis Plan

Having standards and best practices in place reduces risk and minimizes the likelihood of a crisis. Despite these measures, a crisis may still occur.

To ensure that everyone handles a crisis appropriately, it is important to develop and follow a crisis management plan.

A crisis management plan should allow you to do the following during a crisis:

- Protect your client
- Protect the client’s family
- Protect your brand and its reputation
- Share relevant information with key audiences
- Maintain normal business operations
- Adhere to all laws and regulations
- Communicate with your home office

Step One: Know Your Vulnerabilities

Crisis preparedness requires you to think ahead to what potential crises could happen to your business. Thinking about these in advance puts you in a better position to evaluate and respond to incidents as they occur.

Is it a Crisis?

To prepare for a crisis, you must know how to recognize one. Some incidents and emergencies start small and evolve into a crisis; while others never become a crisis, due to their nature or by handling them properly right after they occur. Some incidents can be crises as soon as they occur due to their nature.

The following terms help to define a crisis:

- An *emergency* is a serious incident that does not likely have a long-term impact on the safety of a client or on your business.
- A *crisis* is an unforeseen and possibly catastrophic event which harms or poses an imminent danger to people, property or to your brand.

The lists below provide examples of some emergencies (potential for crisis) and crises:

Emergencies

- Death of a client unrelated to your care (natural death)
- Physical injury/abuse of a client while not under your care (visitor, family member)
- Sexual abuse of a client while not under your care (visitor, family member)
- Routine news media inquiries concerning client death or injury unrelated to your care
- Minor theft from a client (can vary depending on perceived value and resources of a client)

Crises

- Death or injury to a client while under your care (medication error, fall/injury – whether through negligence, an accident, or on purpose)
- Physical injury/abuse of a client while under the care of your employee (incident that requires reporting or hospitalization)
- Sexual abuse of a client while under your care
- Incidents attracting news media attention (reporter interest of an incident of major proportion)
- Major theft from a client (can vary depending on perceived value and resources of a client)

You can also use a list of events to determine if an incident has become a crisis. When one or more of the following events occur, it is most likely a crisis:

- The incident is generating a large volume of calls to your office.
- Someone files a lawsuit.
- The incident is impacting your business.
- Media attention threatens to involve other businesses in your network.
- The incident is attracting multiple media outlets.
- The tone of the media attention begins to shift to hostile.

Use Past Incidents to Determine Your Vulnerabilities

You may have had incidents occur in the past. You can use past incidents to determine your current vulnerabilities. Make a list of any incidents you have had, then, categorize them as to whether they went no further or became crises.

Step Two: Reduce Your Risk

Actions that you take every day, such as screening applicants and training caregivers, go a long way in preventing a crisis. Incorporating additional measures into your daily operations can make you even less vulnerable.

Actions that Can Help Reduce Your Risk

There are multiple actions you can take to help reduce your risk for a crisis. Some relate to caregivers and some to clients.

Caregivers

Following are actions that relate to caregivers:

- Perform background checks on all potential hires.
- Train all caregivers.
- Look for unusual behavior in caregivers. Unusual behavior could include a sudden increase in spending with no explanation, mood swings, behavior changes, or other things that appear out of the ordinary, such as lack of empathy for a client.
- Be alert for issues that could potentially affect a caregiver's performance such as marital or family problems, financial stress, and poor personal relationships.
- Listen to talk among your caregivers who may suspect something.
- At caregiver meetings, reinforce your commitment to responsible and honest caregiver conduct, quality service and excellence in care.
- Do not allow caregivers to handle money, credit cards or perform financial transactions for clients.
- Prevent misunderstandings. Make sure that caregivers complete a gift form to establish a permanent record of any gifts.

Clients

Following are actions that relate to clients:

- Educate clients about keeping money and valuables hidden.
- Make regular quality assurance visits with each client.

- Discourage clients from providing caregivers with keys. Encourage clients to provide a lockbox that contains a key, or provide the lockbox for your clients. If a caregiver must have a key, make sure he or she completes a key form to formalize the transaction.

Step Three: Prepare for a Crisis

Preparing for a crisis puts you in the best position to respond if and when one occurs. Part of this step includes gathering and maintaining contact information so it is there when you need it. This step also involves creating a crisis management team and assigning roles to help manage a crisis.

Building Contact Lists

Ready access to names and telephone numbers can expedite communication in a crisis. We recommend that you maintain a list with 24-hour contact information for all your important audiences.

These lists should include contact information for the following:

- Primary family member or guardian for each client
- Each local regulatory, safety and law enforcement agency
- Primary contact for each caregiver/ office staff member
- News media
- Community leadership (mayor, etc.)
- Key supporting manager
- Communications director
- Your public relations firm
- Neighboring offices in your network (if applicable)

You already have information on many of these contacts, such as clients and employees. You may not have information on the media, community leaders and law enforcement, which requires you to do some research.

This document provides forms for you to use to gather your information. Consider organizing the information you gather in a binder so that it is accessible to everyone who needs it.

Be sure to update these lists on a regular basis to keep them current.

Assigning Roles and Responsibilities

If you have office staff, we recommend you use them to help develop your crisis management plan, and to carry out your plan should a crisis occur.

Some possible roles for a crisis team include Crisis Manager, External Liaison, Internal Liaison, and News Media Contact. As a business owner, your best role is

that of Crisis Manager. If you have a small staff, each member on the crisis team may play more than one role. If you have no staff, you play all the roles.

Each role carries responsibilities. Some responsibilities relate to preparation and others relate to a crisis. By predefining roles and responsibilities, everyone knows what to do before and during a crisis.

As the business owner, you need to revisit roles and responsibilities as employees leave your employ and you hire new staff.

Crisis Manager

Pre-crisis responsibilities for the Crisis Manager include the following:

- Participating in crisis management training
- Completing crisis management planning documents
- Reviewing and updating specific components of the plan
- Ensuring that each employee with client contact receives training for handling emergencies or crises in the home or on the scene

Your caregiver training program should provide training on what to do in case of emergency and your policy should require each caregiver to complete this program. Each office staff person with client contact should also complete this program. These two audiences should also receive training on any emergency procedures that are unique to your business.

Each employee should know how to do the following in an emergency:

Actions	Example
Provide for the immediate safety of the client	Caregiver witnesses a client beginning to fall – caregiver helps the client fall in the safest way possible
Contain the emergency	Caregiver makes the client comfortable – pillow under head, blanket if it is cold
Assess the problem	Caregiver asks the client if he/she is experiencing any pain
Control the situation	Client is unable to get up – caregiver determines that it is necessary to call 911
Know whom to contact and what to provide	Caregiver calls 911 and then your office – provides EMS personnel with client-specific information (i.e. client's medications and allergies)

External Liaison

Pre-crisis responsibilities for the External Liaison include the following:

- Maintaining contacts and relationships with key government, safety and law enforcement personnel
- Maintaining lists of neighboring businesses in your network
- Understanding, implementing and keeping abreast of rules and regulations that govern business operations

Internal Liaison

Pre-crisis responsibilities for the Internal Liaison include the following:

- Maintaining relationships with employees, clients and their families
- Maintaining current contact information for all employees, clients and family members

News Media Contact

Pre-crisis responsibilities for the News Media Contact include the following:

- Completing media training
Most public relations firms offer training for dealing with members of the news media, including techniques to use when you communicate with them.
- Maintaining a relationship with area news media and/or coordinating efforts with your business' public relations firm
- Maintaining contact information for key area media

Step Four: Managing a Crisis

If a crisis occurs, it is important that you react as soon as possible, but also use discretion whenever you communicate with the parties who have direct involvement, as well as with the media. Suggestions for roles and responsibilities during a crisis and for communicating effectively follow.

Roles and Responsibilities During a Crisis

During an active crisis, each member of the crisis team has additional responsibilities. Many of the responsibilities relate to communication. See “Communicating Effectively” later in this section for communication tips. Recommendations follow for each role during an active crisis.

Crisis Manager

Responsibilities for the Crisis Manager include the following:

- Determining if a crisis exists and declaring a crisis when you determine there is one

If you are unsure whether an incident is a crisis, contact your support manager or the communications director at your home office if appropriate.

- Notifying your supporting manager or the communications director at your home office

Prepare to provide the following:

- Description of the incident
- Date of the incident
- Name of client (if applicable)
- Name of caregiver (if applicable)
- Report of media interest and copies of coverage
- Actions taken to date
- Coordinating the crisis resolution, including managing caregivers involved in the crisis and determining whether to replace or remove them
- Coordinating and approving information to disclose to public agencies, employees and the news media
- Notifying legal counsel
- Notifying your bonding company

External Liaison

Responsibilities for the External Liaison include the following:

- Coordinating with officials to maintain the safety of clients and employees at the crisis scene
- Notifying appropriate agencies about the crisis, including law enforcement, where appropriate (This step can vary by crisis. For example, in the case of theft, it is appropriate for the family to contact authorities after you inform them of the theft; in the case of injury, abuse, neglect or death, it is appropriate for your office to contact the authorities immediately.)
- Maintaining a log of crisis proceedings

A sample Log Form is available at the back of this document for you to use to track the events that occur in the aftermath of a crisis.

Internal Liaison

Active crisis responsibilities for the Internal Liaison include the following:

- Contacting the client's family members
It is important to personally visit with the family whenever possible.
- Clearing information and messages with the business owner and supporting manager or the communications director before sharing
- Keeping the client's family up-to-date with significant information
- Serving as liaison between the family and your office and determining how your office can help
- Ensuring that employees who are not involved have the information they need about the crisis

News Media Contact

Active crisis responsibilities for the News Media Contact include the following:

- Contacting the communications director for assistance in developing a message to use with the media
- Clearing the message you develop with the business owner and the communications director before sharing the message with the media
- Coordinating local media efforts with your office's public relations firm
It may also be necessary to develop messages for national media unless you have a home office to handle media at the national level.
- Sharing information from outside sources with your office's crisis management team
- Coordinating, delivering, and distributing statements to the media

- Monitoring media coverage of the crisis and sharing the information with your office's crisis management team

Communicating Effectively

What and how you communicate has a very important impact on how a crisis develops. Effective communication can sometimes prevent an incident from becoming a crisis.

You need to base your communications on your audience. We recommend that you use message points to communicate. Message points are talking points that provide facts about the crisis situation to people with the right and the need to know.

Effective message points offer no more than three or four key pieces of information and answer the following questions:

- Who was involved?
- What happened?
- Where did the incident occur?
- When did it happen?

If you are confident that your crisis has no potential legal issues, your message points can also answer the following questions:

- Why did it happen?
- How did it happen?

We recommend that you write your message points down so that you can recall everything you intend to mention, and that you do not go beyond the points during your conversation. It is acceptable to refer to your notes, even during a television interview.

Crisis Communication Tips

Following are some reminders and suggestions for handling information in a crisis. Some of the tips pertain to all audiences, while others are more specific.

All Audiences

The following tips pertain to all audiences:

- Tell the truth.
- Prepare message points and stick to them. Do not elaborate. If someone questions you further, say "This is all the information I can provide right now."
- Be consistent when you deliver your message points. Do not provide more information to one audience than another.

- Think about how your message impacts other audiences such as other clients and their families, your employees and your business.
- Be careful not to say anything that has a negative impact on your business (from a legal or regulatory standpoint).
- Do not provide any information that concerns a client's medical condition.
- Do not speculate or provide information of which you are unsure; if you do not know an answer, say you do not know.
- Do not give personal opinions.

Family Members

The following tips are specific to family members:

- Be proactive. It is important that family members not receive their information from the news media, but directly from your office.
- Be aware that family members may repeat what you say to the news media, so be careful what you say.

News Media

The following tips are specific to the news media:

- Consider issuing a written statement. A written statement may be better than granting an interview in some instances. Contact your communications director or public relations firm if you are unsure which direction to take.
- Never answer questions "off the cuff" when a reporter calls. Be sure to get the reporter's name and find out what type of information he or she wants. Ask for the reporter's deadline and arrange a time for another call. Prepare your message points and yourself before the call.
- During the interview, do the following:
 - Answer questions using your message points.
 - Speak in short sentences.
 - Repeat your message points to be sure the reporter understands these are important facts.
- During the interview do *not*:
 - Stray from your key message points.
 - Argue with the reporter.
 - Provide information "off the record."
 - Tell the reporter "no comment."

Instead of saying "no comment", explain why you cannot answer the question.

Step Five: Evaluating a Crisis

Soon after a crisis is a good time to assess your crisis management plan and its execution.

Some items to consider as you evaluate your plan include the following:

- The crisis itself
What caused the crisis? Could additional training, or other precautions, prevent a similar crisis?
- Usefulness of the plan
Did you have any problems implementing the plan? If you did, why?
- Your office's response time
Did anything keep you or your staff from your responsibilities? Did some tasks take longer than expected?
- Ability to resolve the crisis
Should you have handled the situation differently?
- Ability to communicate with each audience
How did each audience respond to the crisis? Can you improve communication?
- Ability to operate normally during the crisis
Were you able to service all of your clients, network?
- Impact to your reputation/business
Did the crisis have an impact while it was occurring? After it was over?
Did rumors develop? If they did, were you able to manage them?

Crisis Scenarios

Following are some scenarios that could become crises. Each scenario provides actions to take should a crisis occur.

Caregiver Theft

Following are actions to take following accusation/suspicion of theft:

- Take immediate steps to protect the client and his/her assets.
- Get the facts and assess the situation. Ask what happened, when the theft occurred, who was involved, and how much was stolen.
- Remove the accused caregiver from the client's home, regardless of guilt and offer to replace him/her.
- Inform the client's primary family caregiver. Provide the basic facts as you know them. Explain the actions you have taken to protect the client.
- Advise the client and/or his or her family to contact the authorities.
- Contact your supporting manager or the communications director. These individuals can help you form your message points.
- Prepare for news media inquiries, being careful not to grant an interview the first time the media calls.
- Maintain a log. It should document what happened and the actions you have taken by date and by whom.
- Communicate with your office staff and your caregivers, explaining the facts as you know them.
- Maintain an open line of communication with your client and his or her family members.
- Cooperate with the authorities.
- Notify your bonding company.

Death or Injury of a Client Under your Care

Following are actions to take if death or injury to a client occurs under your care:

- If injury occurs, take immediate steps to protect the client. If death occurs, do everything you can to ensure the client's dignity.
- Take a statement from the caregiver.
- If the injury or death appears suspicious, immediately remove the caregiver from duty and make arrangements to care for the client, if necessary.
- Contact your supporting manager and share the details of the incident as you understand them.

- Contact law enforcement concerning the incident.
- Contact the family to express your concern/sympathy.
- Cooperate fully with the authorities.
- Contact your attorney, if appropriate.
- Inform other caregivers, if appropriate.
- Inform other clients, if appropriate.
- Work with your communications director to prepare your position for the media.
- Prepare message points. Ensure that the information in your message points for each audience is consistent.
- Maintain awareness of media coverage.
- Monitor and document the incident and its aftermath using a log.
- Notify your liability insurance company and complete an incident report.
- Keep channels of communication open with all of your audiences.

Physical Abuse

Following are actions to take if suspicion of physical abuse occurs under your care:

- Call 911 and follow the instructions you receive.
- Remove the caregiver from the situation and make appropriate arrangements to care for the client, if necessary.
- Obtain a statement from the caregiver about the incident.
- Gather as much factual information as possible.
- Follow up with law enforcement.
- Inform your supporting manager or the communications director. Provide the basic facts of the situation, as you know them.
- Cooperate fully with the authorities.
- Contact your attorney, if appropriate.
- Contact family members to express your concern. Be sure to heed the advice of your attorney on the details you can share.
- Inform other caregivers, if appropriate.
- Prepare message points. Ensure that the information in your message points for each audience is consistent. Do *not* affirm or deny guilt.
- Maintain awareness of media coverage.
- Notify your liability insurance company and complete an incident report.
- Keep channels of communication open with all of your audiences.

Neglect

Following are actions to take if neglect of a client occurs under your care:

- Call 911 and follow the instructions you receive.
- Remove caregiver from the situation and make appropriate arrangements to care for the client, if necessary.
- Contact Adult Protective Services, if appropriate.
- Obtain a full statement from the caregiver.
- Contact your supporting manager to share details about the situation.
- Contact family of client; show compassion and concern.
- Get statements from other parties, if involved.
- Try to get a statement from the client.
- Do not confirm or deny anything with family, social services or law enforcement.
- Maintain objectivity; do not try to come to any conclusions.
- Inform other caregivers, if appropriate.
- Inform other clients and their family members, if appropriate.
- Work with your communications director to prepare reactive/proactive media position.
- Prepare message points.
- Monitor media coverage.
- Contact your liability insurance provider.
- Cooperate fully with the authorities.
- Maintain open communication with your supporting manager.

Forms

Examples of forms that you can use for Crisis Management appear on the following pages.

Regulatory, Safety and Law Enforcement Contacts

	Name	Address	Phone	Fax	E-mail
Police Chief					
Fire Chief					
Hospital Emergency Room					

Office Crisis Team

	Name	Home Address/Phone	Cell Phone	Home E-mail
Team Leader				
Alternate				
Government/Employment/ Law Enforcement Liaison				
Alternate				
Client/Family Liaison				
Alternate				
News Media Contact/ Spokesperson				
Alternate				

Crisis Management Media Call Log Sheet

Date	Time	Name	Media Outlet	Nature of Call	Deadline	Action Taken