

# ***KINSMEN & KINETTE CLUBS OF CANADA***

Guidelines for the Establishment of Policy and Practices Related to Public Relations or Club Crisis Management for all Kinsmen, Kinette and Kin Clubs in Canada.

*Prepared by the Personal Leadership and Development Committee - 1999*

**Sincere respect and appreciation is given to the Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada for its support in the development of this information package.**

# CRISIS PLAN CHECKLIST

A quick do-it-yourself checklist to help you determine your club's state of preparedness if faced with a public relations crisis. (Remember, it's not the crisis we're talking about managing ~ we're suggesting that you already have policies, procedures, and training in place to deal with that. This checklist is about getting a reading on your club's ability to handle the reaction, the media attention, and the fallout.)

## How do you rate?

1. Your club has in place a formal system of assessing, monitoring, and minimizing the degree of risk to which your membership are exposed.

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

2. Your club has a crisis management team and plan that will be immediately activated. It will minimally be capable of fulfilling the "Four R's" of crisis management.

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

3. If the worst that could happen does, you're ready to deal with it.

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

4. Your club maintains ongoing/positive media relations, and in time of crisis you're confident they'll be on-side with you.

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

You may find reading *Start Before the Crisis Happens* helpful. It makes apparent the importance of an effective ongoing media relations program.

5. Your crisis plan includes a formal system to alert the crisis committee, the naming of a single spokesperson, and formal strategies to advise your membership and community supporters.

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

6. Only one person will be authorized to speak for your Kinsmen, Kinette or Kin Club.

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

7. Your spokesperson has prepared themselves for the "onslaught of the media" in the event of a crisis.

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

8. You have a plan in place that ensures your members and the National Executive Director will be among the first to be accurately and honestly apprised of the nature of the crisis.

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

9. Once the crisis is behind you, you have a plan in place to evaluate your handling of the event and learn from the experience.

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

10. You've rehearsed your response to "high risk" crisis possibilities and prepared draft press releases for such occasions.

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

## Recommended Action if you answered "No"

Develop a Risk Management Committee made up of members and professionals qualified to assess and reduce risk throughout your club. Ask other organizations in your area for models that work.

Read *Crisis Management and the Four R's* and initiate steps to ensure you can meet or exceed these principles and approaches.

Read the introduction to *Crisis Management* and some of the samples of what the worst could look like.

In *Develop a Crisis Plan ~ Now* you'll learn about one way to do it.

Read *Select a Single Spokesperson* and learn why only the most credible individual should be chosen.

They can start by reading *Some "Do's and Don't's" for the Spokesperson*.

In *Communicating with Other Audiences* you'll find out about ways to reach those who need and deserve more than a media response.

Read *The Aftermath*.

By reading *Sample Press Releases* you'll learn what some clubs have prepared in advance.

# CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND THE FOUR R's<sup>1</sup>

When a crisis strikes, it is time to rely on the "Four R's": **React, Respond, Retain** and **Return**. Never lose sight of these principles during and after the crisis. Endeavour to tackle them one at a time

## React

When the crisis hits, assign troops to the battle stations. Deploy your crisis plan. The faster you can react, the less damage will be done.

## Respond

Now it's your turn. Go on the offensive. Neutralize charges against you by honestly stating the strengths and history of safety and care that you have offered to your community. State your position.

## Retain

Do all that is necessary to retain the good name and reputation of your club. Make sure that any reporter you speak with understands what the club is about and what it has accomplished. Do all you can to ensure that your club is portrayed in an accurate and positive light.

## Return

Get back to normalcy as soon as possible. The sooner you can return to "business as usual," the sooner the crisis atmosphere will dissipate. Where necessary, bring in professional crisis response professionals to help your membership. They all need to know that everything is OK again. Do all you can to reassure people.

As you read the following material, some key points will become apparent, and it's essential they be understood and recognized.

- **First of all, no club is immune to crisis.**
- **No one crisis is likely to ruin an organization, but a poorly managed response can.**
- **A history of credible service and good media relations will help.**
- **Develop a crisis response plan. Be like Nike ~ Just do it!**
- **Select a single spokesperson.**
- **Don't put yourself at odds with the media.**
- **Never give "off the record" comments. There is no such thing!**
- **Resist the temptation to offer a "No comment" response.**
- **Show compassion for any who may suffer because of the situation.**
- **Assert your rights ~ you're not on trial, you're simply serving as a communicator and providing information.**

If the foregoing seems a likely fit for your Kinsmen, Kinette or Kin Club, it's time to move on and learn what to do when the worst that could happen ~ does!

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from "When a Crisis Hits ... Hit Back!" published by Boys and Girls Clubs of America in the Spring 1988 issue of Connections. Used with permission.

## **CRISIS MANAGEMENT: WHEN THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN ~ DOES!**

*Your worst nightmare as a service club has come true. You wake up one morning to learn that a person has died in a club sponsored event, a long-time member has embezzled local funds, or a member of your club has been arrested for child sexual abuse. Perhaps they've discovered a drug ring operating without your knowledge in your club house, or an overnight fire or flood has caused extensive damage to the building that houses all your history, regalia and a community service area to the community.*

You find that the media has been calling all morning ... and they want answers ~ NOW. Before you can even begin to collect your wits, the phones start ringing again. What do you do? Who do you call? How do you respond?

If you're like many of us, it's only now that you wish you hadn't made that decision "not to worry about problems until they happen." In today's world of instant communications, it's an attitude that can be dangerous. That's why it's important for Kinsmen & Kinette Clubs of Canada to recognize the critical need to prepare for a crisis, even if one never occurs.

You can start by accepting the premise that a crisis can hit any organization at any time. You can run the safest, most secure club in the country, but a lightning bolt or an automobile accident can land you face-to-face with a camera or a microphone. And while it's unlikely that any one crisis can ruin an organization, a poorly-managed response to a crisis can. The credibility and reputation of your club, which may have taken years to build, can be knocked down overnight. This reality is not a reason to panic, but it is reason to plan ahead and prepare for the crisis that, hopefully, will never occur.

### **Start Before the Crisis Happens**

If a crisis does happen, it is helpful if local media already know about your club, its work, and its accomplishments. If they do, they will probably be supportive, and they may even help to contain the crisis by reporting it as "an unfortunate incident in a long history of service to the community." If, however, they have never heard of the club before, you can be sure that they will want to start from the beginning: What is the club all about? What services does it provide to the community? How is it governed? How is it funded? Is there really a need for your services?

You can see it's important to have an ongoing media relations program in place. If you don't have one, Kinsmen & Kinette Clubs of Canada will provide you with information which offers a great beginning.

Having a media relations program is not a substitute for having a crisis plan, however, and the time to plan ahead and develop one is now ~ before the crisis.

### **Develop a Crisis Plan ~ Now**

The first step is to form a crisis committee, composed of key members (especially the club's president, and public relations committee or other experienced volunteers). Once the committee is formed, it should begin to develop a detailed written plan ~ a series of steps to be taken and carefully and quickly followed in the event of a crisis.

The best way to go about developing a crisis plan is to create an imaginary crisis and walk through the process step by step. Start at the beginning: What happened? Who should be notified? How should they be notified and how soon after the event? Should Kinsmen & Kinette Clubs of Canada or your district governors be notified? Should the club meet immediately? How should phone calls be screened?

As you do this, you will be forced to create contingency steps as you encounter obstacles. Eventually, you will be able to work out a plan that accounts for every foreseeable contingency. To make sure that the plan works in every instance, imagine a different crisis and follow the same plan. Does it work? Are there problems? If so, continue to fine-tune the plan so that, in the end, the result is viable and fail-safe.

When developing your crisis plan, make sure the follow items are included:

1. the crisis committee is alerted;
2. a spokesperson is briefed and a response is developed;
3. the national executive director and staff are briefed about the situation;
4. the national executive and district executive members are made aware of the situation;
5. members are reassured
6. major contributors, legal counsel, and insurers are informed.

Although the specifics of each club's plan may vary, these basic elements should be part of the total package. Once your plan is developed, place yourself in the position of all of the parties ~ members, club executive, the spokesperson, neighbors of the club, and the media. Are you satisfied with the actions and responses? If not, rework the plan.

## Select a Single Spokesperson

It is imperative during a crisis that one person, and only one person, speaks for the club. This creates a feeling of honesty and consistency. The committee should select a spokesperson to serve in this capacity. The individual should be knowledgeable about the club and its activities, a good speaker, and able to remain calm and credible under pressure. In short, you should select your most credible representative. The club president or the national executive director may be among the most logical choices.

All questions and requests for statements and interviews should possibly be directed to the spokesperson who should be in communication with the national executive director so that they can quickly be conveyed to the spokesperson for response. Clubs should make sure that this rule is understood by all volunteers who answer phones or may be approached for comment. No one other than the spokesperson should offer his or her personal thoughts or opinions. The club simply cannot control its message or manage the flow of information if various individuals are allowed to comment at will, especially in the early stages of a controversy, when the facts are being gathered and a measured response is being planned.

Your spokesperson should be more than a mere voice that relays the opinions or statements of the club or the crisis committee. He or she should be actively involved in the decision-making process that leads to the formulation of the club's proactive position. It is vital that this position be determined quickly ~ within hours, if at all possible ~ because the earliest stages of a crisis are when media and public interest will be greatest.

Once your club's position is approved, it needs to be shared with everyone involved in the operation of the club. Everyone who will have a role to play in the event of a real crisis will need to know in advance what that role is.

## Some "Do's and Don't's" for the Spokesperson

Picture, if you will ... it's the morning after the crisis ~ your phone is ringing and the media are waiting for a response. Assume for the moment that you are the spokesperson. You already have gathered as much information as you can and met with the crisis committee. You are now ready to face the media. Before you do, here are a few points to keep in mind.

The media are not out to "get you." Reporters have a job to do ~ to tell the story and report the news. If the story is important, they will get the facts, one way or another. Don't put yourself at odds with the media; work with them and do everything possible to present the club's position and explain the steps the club is taking. Try to co-operate and provide the media with the information they need.

You probably will not have all of the necessary information when a crisis first hits. However, tell what you do know, acknowledge what you don't know, and offer to provide additional information. This will create an image that the club is being responsive and responsible.

Start communicating with the media as soon as possible. Return phone calls, answer questions, and even advise the media of a crisis if they have not discovered it for themselves, because, in most cases, they soon will. The more open you are, the less they will push for information.

Resist the temptation to offer a "No comment" response ~ it suggests you are trying to hide something or are afraid of the question. Saying "No comment" to reporters is like waving a red flag in front of a bull, and it sounds terrible when you are quoted in the news. "I don't know" or "We don't wish to speculate until more facts are available" are much better answers.

If you can't provide answers, someone else will. Unfortunately, they may not be the answers you wish to be given. Therefore, it is important that you find the answers and fill in the blanks whenever you can. After all, the story is about your club. Isn't it better if you tell it?

Another phrase that should never be used is "off the record." If you say something, you can ~ and probably will ~ be quoted. A reporter is not a buddy with whom you can share private thoughts. If the information is not worth mentioning, don't mention it. If the information is important, state it as part of the story.

Positioning is important, and first impressions are the most lasting. The way you are first portrayed to the public will be the way you will be remembered. Will the club be viewed as cold and aloof or warm and involved? That depends largely on the image you create.

Convey the message that "We, too, are victims." Plant the thought that the club, its good name, and its excellent record of service are important to you. This helps to position the club as a victim of the incident.

Keep the problem in perspective. The club probably has been a vital part of the community for many years, and has made a positive difference in the lives of thousands of communities. Don't lose sight of this and don't let others lose sight of this either. Keeping things in perspective won't make the problem go away, but it will help overcome the situation as quickly as possible.

Show compassion for any who may suffer because of the situation. Express concern and describe your efforts to make amends. Your club was founded on the principle of concern for others. Don't lose sight of this now.

Be cautious about discussing legal issues. That's what lawyers are trained to do. If the situation has legal implications, know what they are, but avoid giving detailed legal answers. Also, don't try to play police officer, prosecutor, or judge. Don't talk about stiff jail sentences, heavy fines, or other penalties. The best you can do is to promise full co-operation with the proper agencies or authorities involved in a case.

Don't attempt to answer questions about other subjects that require technical training, such as science, chemistry, or engineering. Again, simply say, "I don't know. That's a question for an expert to answer."

Assert your rights. Keep in mind that you are not on trial. You are simply serving as a communicator and providing information. Your prime responsibility as a leader of the club is to operate in a safe and responsible fashion and to provide for the welfare of club members. Accommodate the media, but do not compromise the club's integrity or operation. For example, if a television reporter wants to interview you in the library during a current event, feel free to say that this would be distracting. Offer an alternate location.

## **Working with the Media**

It is important to understand and anticipate the media's needs. Prepare a news release (see accompanying samples) containing your statement and a fact sheet with additional information when you encounter a group of reporters or have an announcement to make. These are valuable resources for reporters and will keep you from having to repeat the same information over and over. Also, respect the competition for stories among reporters. Send your materials to all news organizations, or invite them all to your news conference, but don't play favorites.

## **Dealing with Hostile Reporters**

In the process of dealing with the media, you may encounter hostile reporters. Unfortunately, you cannot ignore these people; if you do, you do so at your club's peril. Following are some tips on how to make the experience more positive.

The "machine gunner" will fire a series of questions at you. The best way to handle a situation like this is to choose to answer only one question, preferably the one that helps you to make your point. Don't feel obligated to answer more than one question at a time. If the question is important, the reporter will repeat it.

The "paraphraser" will (incorrectly) restate your views, placing them in a context that shows your position in an unfavorable light. Deal with this by patiently correcting the person and restating your case. Never let your views go stated incorrectly. Once they appear in print or on the air, it's too late.

The "interrupter" will never let you complete a thought and will try to stop you in the middle of a productive statement. Don't let it happen. There are two ways to deal with this problem. You can stop and patiently listen to the new question and say you will address that after you have made your initial point. A better way is to pause, completely ignore the question, complete your thought, and then say, "You brought up another point. What was it?"

The "hypothetical questioner" is one who is constantly creating hypothetical situations that are designed to leave you with no way out. You are under no obligation to play this game. Simply say, "That's a hypothetical question, and I am unable to answer it."

These types of reporters are the exception to the rule. Most are trained professionals, without a personal interest in the story, who are there to do a job. Work enthusiastically with the good ones, and make the best of it when you encounter the others.

## **Communicating with Other Audiences**

If you have done your job well, the media will report your story in a fair and balanced manner. But you have other audiences that need to be reached and handled in a special way: your members of the club and other levels of Kin government. All of them need to be alerted when the story breaks and reassured throughout and after the crisis.

### *Club Executive*

Some key executive members, as part of the crisis committee, will learn about a crisis immediately. However, the entire club should be alerted, provided with information as soon as possible, and periodically kept informed until the situation is resolved. Bear in mind that these are people who have volunteered to be responsible for the leadership of your club. They need to be well-informed, especially when their club is suddenly in the spotlight.

This can be done in many ways, such as emergency meetings, meetings of the executive committee, phone calls, or letters. The method you choose will depend on the size of your club and the nature of the crisis.

### *National Staff*

Obviously, our national staff need to know about a crisis situation. They have a vital role to play because they communicate with members, sponsors and people in global community. Staff will have many questions regarding safety, responsibility, and the

future status of the club within the Association.

Fill the vacuum before rumours do by calling a meeting and giving the national executive director as much information as possible. Take time to keep him or her informed, and be sensitive to his or her fears and uncertainties. Make everyone feel like a member of the crisis team ~ informed, involved, and responsible. If necessary, request outside assistance from professionals or organizations that specialize in debriefing critical incidents.

### Members

The nature of the crisis will determine the form and severity of the detrimental effect it will have on your members and their families. Leave no stone unturned to assure them of your interest, support, and availability. If there have been circumstances where children or families have been traumatized, help them find appropriate professional assistance and counselling. Consider the value of bringing in independent, qualified critical incident debriefing professionals to your club. Your first and foremost reason for being is to assist those who need help and encouragement in the face of adversity. Don't fail them.

### Community Members

Communities today are bombarded with statistics on the risks facing services within our communities. You'll find they will have two basic concerns: (1) Are citizens in any danger? and (2) Will the club continue to operate? It is very important that you reassure them quickly on these two issues. It is better that they learn about the situation from you, and not from a neighbor or from the newspaper or television.

You should be as open, responsive, and responsible to the community partners as you are to the media. They may be upset or fearful, so be sensitive. They will have questions, so be patient. They will want assurances, so give them. If you have been doing a good job all along and running a good club, the community will trust you, believe your answers, and eventually reward you with their support.

## **The Aftermath**

After a crisis is over, sit back and evaluate how effectively the club responded to the situation. One way to do this is to ask the following questions:

- How was the crisis handled?
- Were steps taken to keep the problem from happening again?
- Do you continue to enjoy the support of the club members, the loyalty of the Kin government, and the faith of the Association?
- Was the club's position reported fairly in the media?

Just as tragedy cannot be avoided in our personal lives, neither can problems or emergencies be avoided over time by any organization. But, through advance planning and sensitive handling, a crisis can help a club to grow even stronger in the long run, with little or no lasting harm to the Association.

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## **SAMPLE PRESS RELEASES**

When a crisis occurs, you may be called upon to develop press releases designed to represent your club's position accurately and consistently to the media and to serve as a basis for your spokesperson's public pronouncements.

Though some of us function best "under fire," many Kinsmen, Kinette or Kin clubs have found it useful to anticipate issues with potential to become high profile and prepare outlines of media releases that could be revised by their crisis management committee and approved for use as required.

For example, allegations of sexual misconduct against volunteers have become increasingly prevalent in a wide range of services whose purpose is to serve children and teens. On the following pages you'll find examples of real documents used in the past by other service clubs. They have been assessed by them to be suitable for completion and use in times of crisis. You'll note that each is designed for a specific purpose and each intended for final clearance by the crisis management team prior to distribution to the media.

**Purpose:** *To be used to notify members of arising police investigations that are likely to result in media attention.*

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Members, Kinsmen or Kinette or Kin Club of \_\_\_\_\_

**FROM:** \_\_\_\_\_, Club President

I have been advised today by the \_\_\_\_\_ police service that they are conducting investigations into allegations of embezzlement which allegedly occurred in the course of \_\_\_\_\_ Club activities between 19\_\_ and 19\_\_.

Investigating officers have indicated that the allegations centre around the conduct of (a) former member(s) and they anticipate charges will be laid. They are currently asking former members to come forward if they have information that may be pertinent to the investigation.

We are in the process of formalizing a plan to deal with anticipated public reaction. In general, it's been agreed that inquiries from members or the public at large will be handled:

1. by a named spokesperson through whom all information will be channelled;
2. by acknowledging the \_\_\_\_\_ Club's awareness of the investigation and determination to co-operate with investigating officials as required;
3. by providing assurances that our Club has policies, procedures, and police screening in place designed to protect as much as possible the members of the community, including children who place their trust in us.

I will keep you informed of any further development. Please feel free to refer any media or public inquiries to me directly.

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**Purpose:** *To be completed and released to media in response to their requests for information following laying of charges.*

## PRESS RELEASE

\_\_\_\_\_, President of the \_\_\_\_\_ Club of \_\_\_\_\_, confirmed today that it is his understanding a former volunteer of the Association has been recently charged following police investigation of sexual abuse allegations.

\_\_\_\_\_ stated that his / her club has co-operated fully with the police throughout the investigation process, indicating that inasmuch as the matter is now before the courts, no further comment about the case can be made.

\_\_\_\_\_ emphasized that his/her club completes police screens of all potential volunteers who work with young people. As well, the club has in place policies and procedures designed to protect children and youth from all forms of abuse.



**Purpose:** *To be released when charges against a full-time employee of our national office or district foundations have been made public and the media requests information pertaining to the individual's relationship with our Association.*

## **PRESS RELEASE**

\_\_\_\_\_ was employed by Kinsmen & Kinette Clubs of Canada / District \_\_\_\_ Foundation from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ came to our Association from a similar position in \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ (a) is temporarily suspended with no formal involvement with the Association or its members.

(b) resigned his position with the Association in \_\_\_\_\_ of 19\_\_\_\_.

(c) was released from Association service in \_\_\_\_\_ of 19\_\_\_\_.

Positions which \_\_\_\_\_ held during the course of employment with Kinsmen & Kinette Clubs of Canada / District \_\_\_\_ Foundation were as follows:

\_\_\_\_\_ Director, 19\_\_\_\_ to 19\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Manager, 19\_\_\_\_ to 19\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Supervisor, 19\_\_\_\_ to 19\_\_\_\_