

Texting Loved Ones During an Emergency

During an emergency, such as a natural disaster, voice networks can become congested or overloaded with an influx of people trying to call each other. Unfortunately, this may result in people not being able to talk to people they need or want to talk to, such as friends and loved ones. In some rare instances, this also can result in emergency service personnel not being able to communicate with each other.

Additionally, experience in crisis management has shown us that regular school telephone systems become overloaded with calls in times of a crisis. While cell phones can be effectively used by school administrators and crisis team members as a crisis management resource tool, it is highly probable that hundreds (if not thousands) of students rushing to use their cell phones in a crisis would also overload the cell phone system and render it useless. Therefore the use of cell phones by students could conceivably decrease, not increase, school safety during a crisis.

The good news is that most wireless phones today are capable of sending text messages between mobile phones, other handheld devices such as iPads, and even landline telephones. Text messages use far less bandwidth than a normal voice call and are more reliable in trying to communicate with loved ones in emergency circumstances. So, even if a network is over congested with voice calls, your text message to your family and friends will have a much higher likelihood of getting through than a phone call. It also means that during an emergency, you are freeing up the voice lines for public safety officials to use.

However, cell phone use, even texting, by students during a crisis can also create parental flocking to the school at a time when school and public safety officials may need parents to be away from the school site due to evacuations, emergency response, and/or other tactical or safety reasons. This could also actually delay or otherwise hinder timely and efficient parent-student reunification. In extreme situations, it could put parents into a zone of potential harm.

Parents:

- Regardless of any message you receive from your child, do not come to the school unless directed by school officials.
- Keep the airways open. Text your child. Do not call them.

Students:

- Text to your parents the message your teacher gives you.
- Spreading false information may be considered a criminal act.