



MINIMIZING THE TRAUMA OF SCHOOL SHOOTER DRILLS

A Resource for Educators and School Staff

America's schools are among the safest places for children to be, but for the last 20 years, school communities have lived with rare yet devastating school shootings. A strong body of research affirms the value of [preventive school safety measures](#) in stemming the growing number of school shootings. The most effective way to combat gun violence in schools is by creating a supportive and trusting school environment, which encourages students, teachers, and other school administrators to recognize the warning signs of potential violence and follow up with action. Schools should integrate other evidence-based measures, including nonpunitive crisis intervention programs, access and lock upgrades, trauma-informed emergency planning, and access to mental health professionals and social support.

School shooter drills involving children, which have become a near-universal practice in American schools, have not proven effective in preventing school gun violence or protecting the school community when shootings do occur. In fact, studies have found overwhelming evidence that school shooter [drills may cause psychological harm](#) to students. Further, conducting drills means that preparedness procedures are shared with potential perpetrators: three-fourths of school shootings are carried out by current or former students. Despite these findings, many schools continue to conduct these drills regularly. If school shooter drills with students must be conducted at your school, we have provided some helpful tips and resources to mitigate the harm that such drills can cause.

BEFORE THE SCHOOL SHOOTER DRILL

Provide advanced notice of planned drills to parents and educators and allow parents to opt their children out of the drill.

- Schools should plan for alternative related programming to accommodate students who choose not to participate.
→ For a comprehensive guide of best practices, [click here](#)

Lead an age-appropriate, trauma-informed conversation with students prior to the drill.

- A school psychologist, counselor, or social worker should facilitate the conversation, detailing what will happen during the drill and coping skills to use if students become dysregulated.
→ For guidance on how to talk to children about violence, [click here](#)

Brief teachers and other school staff on how to identify common signs of trauma before the drill.

- Students who have experienced previous traumas, such as domestic violence or prior exposure to gun violence, may be particularly vulnerable to intense feelings and reactions.
→ For an overview of common signs of trauma, [click here](#)

DURING THE SCHOOL SHOOTER DRILL

Do not simulate actual violence or injuries.

- Research shows that drills that mimic real events are especially traumatic for students, parents, and educators.
→ For information on the harm that these kinds of drills cause, [click here](#)

Remind students and staff through an announcement at the beginning of the drill that there is not an active shooter threat.

- Surprise drills are distressing and may desensitize students to the threat of violence, which can prompt them to under-respond in the event of an actual active shooter situation.
→ For a comprehensive guide on what to consider when planning a drill, [click here](#)

Remove students who are showing symptoms of trauma during the drill.

- Teachers and other school staff should identify students exhibiting symptoms of trauma and give them the opportunity to speak with on-site school mental health staff or other trained staff members.
→ For strategies on how to help calm students, [click here](#)

AFTER THE SCHOOL SHOOTER DRILL

Allow all students and school staff to connect with on-site school mental health staff following the drill.

- It is common for students and staff to have heightened anxiety or other emotions amplified after a school shooter drill.
→ For guidance in the spectrum of reactions and signs that a child may need more support, [click here](#)

Create a report to evaluate results, successes achieved, and learning opportunities; track data over time.

- To learn more, [click here](#)

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