



Creating School Active Shooter/Intruder Drills

Keeping our school campuses safe from active shooters or intruders is one component of a school emergency plan. Part of being prepared is planning safety drills. The type of drills or exercises your school conducts should map on to your school emergency operations plan. This factsheet provides guidance on steps to consider when performing an active shooter/intruder drill.

Consider the following as you begin the preparation:

Determine your school's readiness and educational needs. There is a hierarchy of methods for conducting exercises and drills that [Safe and Sound Schools](#) and [National Association for School Psychologists \(NASP\)](#) outline.¹ Determine your school's readiness by reviewing the NASP [assessment tool](#) and [Safe and Sound Schools Hierarchy of Education & Training Activities](#) handout.

Safety drills need to incorporate a lockdown response but also an "option-based" approach. An option-based approach means that there are different actions educators and students can take if confronted by an active shooter/intruder (e.g., run away, keep out, and hide). The district needs to evaluate which approach is best and to adapt that approach to the developmental level of their students, including for students with disabilities, language barriers, and mobility needs.² Learn more by reviewing the [Safe and Sound Schools](#) handout, [Stay Safe Choices](#).

Safety drills should be announced. Announcing drills forewarns the school community and reduces the likelihood that people will become desensitized to unannounced drills and under-respond in an actual crisis situation when quick action is paramount.

BEFORE

Students

Use developmentally appropriate language to describe the drill and the actions for students to take during the drills. The [Safe and Sound Schools](#) handout, [Developmental Levels of Safety and Awareness](#) has sample language.

For students with disabilities, add modification requirements to their educational plans to enable them to successfully participate in these drills. Some of these students may have difficulties with changes to their daily routine, while others may have difficulty comprehending commands in stressful situations. Modifications may include the names of staff who understand how best to support this student and intervention techniques to help the student to cope (i.e., walking out with a "buddy" if he/she has impaired vision; using a breathing technique). Make sure that staff members named in students' Individual Education Plans or 504s know the students' accommodation needs during emergencies and are trained in coping strategies.

Identify students who have had a recent trauma and/or loss and determine if they need additional support during the drill. Teach these students coping strategies such as breathing techniques or identify buddy students to accompany them during the drill.

Identify any potential trauma and/or loss reminders that may trigger students and make adaptations to the plan accordingly. For example, if a school had a recent emergency during which the fire alarm was used, and if any students report that the fire alarm now creates distress for them, consider not using the fire alarm, at least for the next few drills.

Staff

Make sure all staff, including temporary staff, are trained on the school emergency plan at the beginning of each year. Provide additional training for any new staff, substitutes, or other personnel soon after hire.

Discuss the drill schedule at the beginning of the school year and remind staff a week before a drill.

Train on educator self-care near the beginning of the school year and consider ways to reinforce these skills, such as at staff meetings or in staff email updates.

Create classroom posters or other ways to remember simple self-care strategies. Create classroom posters or other visual aids to remember actions to take during the drill and simple self-care strategies. Place visuals near emergency kits as a quick reminder.

When discussing drills, have staff consider their trauma and loss histories and have them identify ways to cope with reactions to reminders. Provide handouts with a few techniques. For staff who recently experienced trauma and/or loss, make sure they have access to resources or appropriate services.

Identify staff whose role will be to observe student and staff reactions. Have additional staff available to provide immediate support for students and/or staff having strong emotional reactions during the drill.

Inform the local media of the drill, so they don't report that an emergency is occurring when they see students and staff exiting the building.



Parents

Inform parents of the drill schedule at the beginning of the school year. Identify the types of drills that will take place (e.g., fire, wind, active shooter, tornado) and the type of exercise (walkthrough, tabletop exercise, full-scale drill). Describe how and when the school will alert them of the drill (via email or robo-call a day before the drill). Also identify how the communication will start ("**This is a drill.**") so they know that the drill is starting.

Conduct informational meetings so parents can ask questions about emergency plans and drills. Allow plenty of time for discussion, engagement, clarification, and reassurance.

Encourage parents to inform teachers or other staff if their children have experienced a trauma and/or loss and may need extra support.

During a PTA meeting, discuss coping strategies parents can use for themselves and their families, so parents can practice and reinforce adaptive coping at home. Provide handouts that review these techniques.

DURING

Students

Remind students who appear anxious to use their coping strategies.

Connect students who have accommodations to assigned staff or make sure they receive the appropriate support they require.

Encourage anxious students to “buddy up” with students who are calm and focused.

For communities that experienced a recent traumatic event, have extra staff available along the exit routes to encourage, reassure, or assist as needed.

Praise students as they follow direction, and praise them again as they complete the drill. Name the specific ways they performed the drill well.

Staff

Send a reminder to staff the day of the event to use the calming techniques. Using/modeling the calming techniques can be beneficial to staff and students.

Activate staff whose role will be to observe student and staff reactions. Make sure it is clear how they can reach the additional staff who are available to provide immediate support for students and staff who are experiencing a strong emotional reaction.

Make sure posters or other visual aids are up to remind staff of actions to take during the drill and to use calming techniques.



Parents

Make sure that all alerts clearly highlight that **this is a drill**. Post alerts on official social media outlets and on websites as well as on school bulletin boards to make sure all parents understand that it is a drill.

For parents who may get anxious after receiving a drill notification, remind them to use coping strategies. PTAs or other parent organizations are a great way to contact and offer support to those parents who have had a recent family trauma and/or loss.

If there has been a recent traumatic event, ask a community organization to host a parent get-together at the time of the drill (such as a coffee hour at a local business or a discussion group at the library) so that parents can both support and distract one another.

AFTER

Students

Identify a staff member to check in with all students with known trauma and loss histories to assess whether the plan worked well or if adjustments are needed.

Praise students on specific actions they took to care for themselves and fellow students.

Encourage staff to inform guidance or administration of students who had difficulties during the drill and create a plan with them for future drills.

Remind these students to keep practicing calming/coping skills for a day or two after the drill as it takes time for our bodies to calm down.

Provide a mental health referral for students who are still struggling a week after the drill.

Review attendance to determine if any students did not come to school to avoid the drill. Make a plan for how they can participate next time.

Staff

Encourage staff to check in with each other after the drill. Remind them to practice calming skills for a day or two after the drill as it takes time for our bodies to calm down.

Administration should praise staff and acknowledge that the drill may have been challenging for some. Highlight the importance of self-care in the next staff email or staff meeting.

Point out that if their anxiety was elevated during the drill, that their sleep may be disrupted that evening. Encourage them to take extra time to prepare for sleep or to increase calming activities in the evening.

If staff are having difficulties after a week, encourage them to reach out to their EAP or to a mental health professional.

Parents

Have parents check in with their child after school and use calming strategies that evening. Suggest that parents might join their child, especially a young child, in practicing of the skills. Encourage parents to inform their teachers or administration if their child had difficulties calming or sleeping.

For parents who had stressful reactions, encourage them to contact the school or other community agencies that can provide support.

Recommend that parents use this time to discuss family emergency planning and highlight home evacuation plans and communication plans.

For students who reported difficulties, have their parents start the bedtime routine 15 to 30 minutes earlier and spend extra time doing calming activities with their children.

Remind parents to praise their children for participating in the drill and point out what they did well. Normalize for parents whose children felt anxious or worried that it is common to feel this way.

After every drill, be sure to debrief and create an after-action report that evaluates results, identifies gaps, and documents lessons learned and successes achieved. Make sure recommendations are incorporated into the next exercise!



References

¹NASP and NASRO. (2017). Best practice considerations for schools in active shooter and other armed assailant drills [Brief]. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists. Retrieved from <http://www.nasponline.org/armed-assailant-drills>

²U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students. (2013). Guide for developing high quality school emergency operations plans (K-12). Washington, DC. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oshs/rem-s-k-12- guide.pdf>

Resources for Educator Self-Care

Educator Self-Care Checklist

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/pfa-s-provider-self-care>

Self-Care for Educators

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/self-care-educators>

Understanding Educator Resilience & Developing a Self-Care Plan

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools

<https://rem.s.ed.gov/TrainingPackage.aspx>

Self-paced training package with handouts.

Resources for Parents and Educators

Helping Your Family Cope handout

https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//pfa_for_schools_helping_your_family_cope_for_parents.pdf

Tips for Relaxation handout

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/pfa-s-tips-relaxation>

When Terrible Things Happen: For Students handout

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/pfa-s-when-terrible-things-happen-students>

When Terrible Things Happen: For Adults handout

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/pfa-s-when-terrible-things-happen-adults>

Safe and Sound Schools

<https://www.safeandsoundschools.org/>

Resources on school safety, prevention, and recovery.

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