

SCHOOL SAFETY DURING EMERGENCIES:

WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW



As a parent, feeling confident in the safety of your child or children at the school they attend is extremely important. Some of the questions parents have about school safety may be:

- *How are drills implemented?*
- *What plans are in place to help kids stay safe?*
- *How can I talk to my child or respond to their questions?*

What's the plan?

All schools have an organized, systematic emergency operations plan in place to reduce risks or prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from a crisis situation. The types of crises can vary from a death or accident affecting some members of the school community to a natural disaster or community crisis affecting a lot of individuals in the school. School faculty and staff are trained to assess the seriousness of incidents and respond according to the plan's established procedures and guidelines.

Terms to know:

- Shelter in Place: Used during severe weather or other environmental threats (e.g., Air contamination due to a local fire).
 - This is a precaution aimed to keep people safe while remaining indoors. Classroom activities continue as scheduled during this time.
- Lockdown: Used when there is a perceived danger inside the building.
 - A lockdown includes securing each occupied room by locking the door (s) and directing people to move away from windows and doors. Hallways are cleared of students and school staff. Typically, local law enforcement arrives to secure the site and arrange for evacuation or return to usual building activities. Students are kept in their classrooms or other secured areas until the lockdown has ended.
- Evacuation: Used to move students and staff out of the building.
 - With a simple evacuation, students and staff leave and move to a nearby pre-designated safe location and return to the school building right after the cause of the evacuation is resolved. Schools practice evacuations regularly during fire drills

Helpful Guidelines to Keep in Mind when Talking with Children about School Safety:

While the school staff has been trained and continue to receive guidance on how best to help students, the best advocate for your child is you! For some children, even participation in a drill may cause some emotional distress, especially if it reminds them of a prior crisis event or if they are feeling vulnerable or anxious. As a parent, you are in the best position to help your child cope. Any conversation with a child must be developmentally appropriate.

- **Young children** need brief simple information that should be balanced with reassurance. This includes informing children that their school and home are safe, and

that adults are available to protect them. Young children often gauge how threatening or serious an event is by adult reactions. This is why, for example, parents are encouraged not to get overly emotional when saying goodbye on the first day of school. Young children respond well to basic assurance by adults and simple examples of school safety, like reminding them exterior doors are locked.

- **Upper elementary and early middle school children** may be more vocal in asking questions about whether they are truly safe and what is being done at their school. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. Parents can share the information they have about the school's safety plan and other relevant communication to ease their children's concerns.

At the Beginning of the School Year, Parents can:

- Arrange for the school to have on hand back up/extra medication or other items to address the unique needs of your child so they have what they need if there is an emergency where they need to remain in the school building for a longer period or time.
- Provide the school and your child's teacher with an up-to-date contact information for family or friends who can help out if you are not available. Be sure to update this information as needed throughout the school year.