



Overview of Emergency Drills for Parents/Guardians

Why do schools do drills?

When an emergency happens in a school, we want students and staff to be prepared by having practiced what to do before an incident occurs. **Schools in Colorado practice drills routinely to create muscle memory NOT because there is a known threat to the community.**

What are the procedures for different types of drills?

Most Colorado schools use the guidelines of the [I Love You Guys Foundation](#). These include:

Evacuation: Leaving the classroom to go to a safer location. A fire drill is an example of an evacuation drill.

Shelter-in-Place: Students are instructed to move to a safe place within the building. This procedure may be necessary during a weather emergency like a tornado.

Lockout/Secure: If there is a hazard or threat outside of the building, students and staff would be instructed to stay inside but continue their educational activities as usual. This may occur if there is possible criminal activity in the neighboring community.

Lockdown: This is called when there is a possible threat within the building. Staff bring students inside the classroom and lock the door. Students are trained to go to a safe space in their classroom and remain quiet until first responders give the “all clear.”

Hold All Classes: Students are trained to remain in their classrooms while staff and/or first responders attend to an emergency that will not impact the students in their classrooms. This might be used if an ambulance is called for staff or student illness.

How can schools prevent or lessen trauma for students when conducting drills?

First, it is important to understand the difference between drills and full-scale exercises. Drills are opportunities to test safety procedures and technology. (Walking children out of the building to practice in the event of fire, for example.) Full-scale exercises are for first responders to test their training and coordination with school



staff. Most schools rarely, if ever, engage in these type of exercises with children present. This document addresses drills.

The Office of School Safety and the [National Association of School Psychologists](#) recommend that drills be announced in advance with developmentally appropriate explanations for students. Staff and parents should communicate about any special circumstances that would require a student to have additional support doing or after a drill. Some [studies suggest](#) that students are more prepared for emergencies when their school conducts drills.

How can parents/guardians help?

When you are notified that a drill has occurred:

- Ask your child if they would like to talk about it and let their comments guide you. Some children would prefer not to talk about it, which is okay, too. Some children may simply want to spend some time together with you in a shared activity with few words.
- If they share that they felt okay about the drill, reinforce that the purpose of the drill is to keep them safe by knowing what to do.
- If they share that they felt scared, sad, or nervous, acknowledge the feeling while directing the student towards ways they can lessen those negative feelings.
- Some things that may help them feel safer might include knowing their teacher is there with them and knowing they have practiced responding in a way that will keep them safe.
- You may also share a time when you felt scared and what helped you get through it.
- Maintain routines. Following your typical home routines helps everyone feel calm and safe.
- Most children will feel better with the passage of time and returning to their familiar activities.

Remember, our children take their cues from us. If we talk about drills as a routine way to practice safety, they will feel better about them too.