



Communicating With Families About School Safety Drills

Safety drills, including active shooter drills, are one part of a comprehensive multi-tiered system of prevention and preparation. Preventing school violence begins with creating a positive school climate and cultivating a sense of belonging for all students and staff. This positive school environment provides the foundation for recognizing warning signs and providing effective and timely supports. Comprehensive school safety plans should include relevant safety drills alongside other evidence-based practices for supporting student wellbeing and [implementing physical safety measures](#)¹ including [classroom safety procedures](#),² [communication systems](#),³ and [outdoor and entrance safety procedures](#).⁴

Why Is Family Communication About Safety Drills Important?

Partnership with families is a critical component of supporting student wellness before and after safety drills. Increasing family members understanding of school safety procedures and providing opportunities for input and clarification will help families to engage with school efforts more effectively. When informed and engaged, families can partner with schools by helping their child understand the purpose of a safety drill, process any emotional reactions and

The purpose of this resource is to support schools and districts in effectively communicating with families about school safety drills. Additional related guidance is available in the briefs:

- ▶ [Supporting Students Who Need Additional Assistance During Safety Drills](#)⁵
- ▶ [Considerations for Decision Makers in Creating/Selecting Active Shooter Drill Processes](#)⁷



This document was originally released in January of 2025 as part of a series of documents produced by PBIS, REMS, NCSSLE, and T4PA to provide resources to states, districts, and schools for Gun Violence — Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery.

provide reassurance, and monitor their child for signs of distress. Being separated from family members in a crisis increases risk for symptom development. Planning for effective and efficient reunification should be part of comprehensive emergency response plans. Safety drills are an opportunity to review and remind families of reunification procedures in the event of an incident.

What Practices Are Most Effective for Communicating With Families About Safety Drills?

Before

- ▶ Notify families prior to the drill including the purpose of the drill and the procedures students will be asked to follow, and resources for how families might discuss the drill with their child in age and developmentally appropriate ways
- ▶ Provide alternative options for families who choose to opt their student out of the schoolwide drill
- ▶ Provide opportunities for families to learn about drill procedures, ask questions, and provide feedback
- ▶ Inform families of the range of supports available and provide opportunities for families to request additional supports for their child
- ▶ Provide information about reunification procedures in the event they are needed
- ▶ Provide information describing how safety drills are part of a larger system of prevention and preparation
- ▶ Remind families on their role in violence prevention including accessing support, reporting concerns, and safe gun storage
- ▶ Ensure communications to families are offered in all relevant home languages and communicated in multiple formats (e.g., email, social media, website notifications)

During

- ▶ Provide guidance for family members or volunteers that may be in the building or arrive to the building during a drill

After

- ▶ Provide post drill communication to all families including the purpose of the drill and recognition of how the drill went
- ▶ Individualize post drill family communication for students with individualized safety plans
- ▶ Provide information on recognizing signs of distress and where to get additional support for their child if needed following a drill
- ▶ Provide reminders of reunification procedures in the case of an actual event
- ▶ Recruit family feedback on drill procedures and adjust plans as needed

How Can We Improve the Implementation of These Practices?

School and district teams can improve the implementation and delivery of family communications by prioritizing adequate resources and clarifying roles and responsibilities for who communicates what, when and to whom. Additionally, teams should include a detailed review of family communication efforts following a drill and recruit family feedback to facilitate continuous improvement and problem solving as needed. For more information on supporting the effective implementation of school safety practices see [*Implementing Physical Safety Measures Effectively in Schools*](#).⁵



Where Can I Find Additional Resources?

- ▶ [***Integrating Family Reunification Planning Before, During, and After an Emergency Into the School Emergency Operations Plans***⁸](#)

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center

Provides guidance on best practices for planning for family reunification .

- ▶ [***Talking to Your Child About School Shooting Drills***⁹](#)

Cleveland Clinic

Provides guidance for parents for talking about school shooting drills to children of various ages.

- ▶ [***Identifying Signs of Stress in Your Children and Teens***¹⁰](#)

American Psychological Association

Provides guidance for parents for identifying signs of stress in children and teens.

- ▶ [***Helping Your Children Manage Distress in the Aftermath of a Shooting***¹¹](#)

American Psychological Association

Provides guidance for families for supporting children's wellbeing following a shooting incident.

- ▶ [***Family Topic Page***¹²](#)

Center on PBIS

Provides general guidance on improving family engagement and communications.

- ▶ [***How Families Can Support Student Health and Emotional Wellbeing***¹³](#)

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Provides general guidance for families related to supporting children's emotional wellbeing.

- ▶ [***Safe and Supportive Schools: 20 Questions Every Parent Should Ask***¹⁴](#)

National PTA

Provides questions parents should ask about school safety.

- ▶ [***Resource for School Administrators on Importance of Safe Firearm Storage***¹⁵](#)

US Department of Education

Provides template for a district letter on the importance of safe gun storage for prevention.

Embedded Hyperlinks

- 1 – <https://www.pbis.org/resource/implementing-physical-safety-measures-effectively-at-schools>
- 2 – <https://www.pbis.org/resource/physical-safety-measures-classroom-safety-procedures>
- 3 – <https://www.pbis.org/resource/physical-safety-measures-communication-systems>
- 4 – <https://www.pbis.org/resource/physical-safety-measures-outdoor-and-entrance-safety-procedures>
- 5 – <https://www.pbis.org/resource/implementing-physical-safety-measures-effectively-at-schools>
- 6 – <http://www.pbis.org/resource/supporting-students-who-need-additional-assistance-during-safety-drills>
- 7 – www.pbis.org/resource/considerations-for-decision-makers-in-creating-selecting-active-shooter-drill-processes
- 8 – https://rems.ed.gov/docs/FamilyReunificationFactSheet_508C.pdf
- 9 – <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/what-to-do-if-school-active-shooter-drills-are-causing-your-child-anxiety>
- 10 – <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/children>
- 11 – <https://www.apa.org/topics/gun-violence-crime/shooting-aftermath>
- 12 – <https://www.pbis.org/topics/family>
- 13 – https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/families_tip_sheet.htm
- 14 – https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/programs/health/safe-schools_questions.pdf
- 15 – <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-issues-new-resource-school-administrators>

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These resources are provided to assist states, districts and schools in their gun violence prevention, preparation, response, and recovery to gun violence incidents. These resources are providing information based on published findings from past school incidents, experiences of state, local, and school-based personnel, families, and students, and emerging and promising practices.

This document contains resources that are provided for the user's convenience. The inclusion of these materials is not intended to reflect its importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials.

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