



Supporting Students Who Need Additional Assistance During 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 Focus on Students Who Need Additional Assistance?

Schools have a responsibility under federal law to consider the unique needs of students with disabilities in safety planning. For example, students with mobility challenges, communication, hearing or sight impairments, heightened sensory or distress reactions, or cognitive impairments may need additional support to fully participate in and benefit from drills. Similarly, students who are English Learners may need support to access instruction and contextual information related to the drill. Finally, active

The purpose of this resource is to support schools and districts in providing specific considerations for students who may need additional supports. Additional related guidance is available in the briefs:

- ▶ [Communicating with Families about School Safety Drills](#)⁵
- ▶ [Considerations for Decision Makers in Creating/Selecting Active Shooter Drill Processes](#)⁶



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.



shooter drills are associated with increased anxiety and physiological health problems and students with a history of exposure to trauma including gun violence in the home or community may be at increased risk for developing these symptoms. School teams can support student wellness and enhance the effectiveness of drills by proactively planning to deliver a continuum of supports for students who need additional assistance.

What Practices Are Most Effective for Students Who Need Additional Assistance?

Additional support practices should be selected and monitored by a team. This team should include individuals with expertise in supporting students with disabilities, English learners, and those with a known history of trauma exposure. Selecting effective practices should begin by using data to identify students who are likely to need additional support. The team should coordinate with members of IEP or 504 teams and other teams serving students who require additional assistance to create a list of students with mobility, communication, intellectual, language, sensory, or emotional regulation needs and their documented accommodations as well as recommended considerations related to the specific

context of active shooter drills from students' families or teachers. Additionally, teams should identify procedures for teaching safety procedures in an alternative format with alternative practice opportunities for any students who are opted out of participating in a safety drill.

Although some students will have documented needs connected to a disability, other assistance needs, such as previous exposure to trauma, may be unknown to staff. This makes it important to consider supports that are available for all students in addition to those delivered to identified students. District and school leadership teams can ensure supports are provided effectively and efficiently by organizing accommodations and supports in a multi-tiered system by identifying practices that will be provided to all students, those that will be made available to some students, and those that will be delivered individually. Implementation responsibilities must be clearly assigned to a specific staff member and at least one back up individual should also be identified. Table 1 provides considerations for implementing a continuum of effective support practices before, during, and after safety drills and provides an example of how a team may organize supports within a multi-tiered system.

Table 1. Considerations for Implementing a Continuum of Effective Support Practices

	Before the Drill	During the Drill	After the Drill
Supports for All	▶ Notify students in advance of drills, include the purpose of the drill in age and developmentally appropriate terms ▶ Teach drill procedures explicitly by modeling procedures and providing guided practice ▶ Directly teach emotional regulation skills students can use if they become worried such as breathing techniques	▶ Assign non-classroom staff to classrooms to support student wellbeing ▶ Guide students calmly through the drill procedures ▶ Remind students they can use the emotional regulation strategies if needed. ▶ Regularly remind students that this is a practice and there is no immediate danger ▶ Limit duration of drill	▶ Briefly debrief with students, including both praise for completing drill procedures appropriately, feedback on any areas to improve, and opportunities for students to ask questions or share their emotional experiences ▶ Monitor students for signs of distress following the drill
Supports for Some Students with Additional Support Needs	In addition to the above supports, ▶ Ensure notifications are communicated in a manner and language that students can understand ▶ Provide alternative or supplemental practice opportunities for students needing additional practice with either drill procedures or emotional regulation strategies. ▶ Immediately prior to the drill remind students of available supports	In addition to the above supports, ▶ Provide peer support or a buddy ▶ Ensure supplemental non classroom staff are known to students and familiar with student needs and support strategies ▶ Prioritize supplemental staffing for classrooms or areas of the school with greater student needs ▶ Model and provide guided practice with emotional regulation strategies during drill procedures ▶ Ensure all instructions or updates are communicated in a manner and language that students can understand ▶ Provide options to limit sensory experiences (e.g., headphones)	In addition to the above supports, ▶ Debrief with a preferred adult or mental health provider ▶ Ensure debrief is conducted in a manner and language that students can understand ▶ Provide check in opportunities for students needing follow up support following the drill
Supports for a Few Students with Intensive or Individualized Needs	In addition to the above supports, ▶ Develop individualized safety plans aligned to individualized plans (e.g., IEP or 504 plans) to address any mobility, communication, intellectual, language, sensory, or emotional regulation needs ▶ Ensure all notifications are communicated in a manner aligned to the student's individualized needs ▶ Ensure assigned staff member is known to the student and back up staff members are identified and trained on individualized plans	In addition to the above supports, ▶ Follow individualized plans including any relevant components listed above and those determined by the students individualized team ▶ Increase intensity of supports as needed to support student wellbeing throughout the drill ▶ Ensure all instructions or updates are communicated in a manner aligned to the student's individualized needs ▶ Monitor effectiveness of plan	In addition to the above supports, ▶ Debrief individually with student and provide planned follow up supports ▶ Adjust plan as needed to improved student wellbeing and document and communicate any plan changes to student, family, and all relevant staff

How Can We Improve the Implementation of These Practices?

The team can improve the implementation and delivery of practices by prioritizing adequate staff training and support for all aspects of the safety drill. This should include training related to the specific drill procedures including acceptable variations and reunification plans, delivery of identified accommodations and modifications for students who need additional supports, information on identifying trauma symptoms in students, and support for

facilitating effective conversations with students before and after the drill. Additionally, teams should include a detailed review of the implementation of identified support practices following the drill to facilitate continuous improvement and problem solving as needed. For more information on supporting the effective implementation of these practices see Implementing physical safety measures effectively in schools.

Where Can I Find Additional Resources?

► ***[Creating School Active Shooter/Intruder Drills⁷](#)***

National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Provides considerations for students with disabilities before during and after a drill.

► ***[Best Practice Considerations for Armed Assailant Drills in Schools⁸](#)***

National Association of School Psychologists

Provides guidance on considerations for planning and conducting drills, including hierarchy of education and training activities and developmental and mental health considerations.

► ***[Mitigating Psychological Effects of Lockdowns⁹](#)***

National Association of School Psychologists

Provides considerations for mitigating anxiety, stress, and traumatic symptoms related to lockdown drills.

► ***[School Safety Drills and Exercises for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Tips and Resources for Educators¹⁰](#)***

National Association of School Psychologists

Provides considerations for supporting students with autism spectrum disorders including students challenged by sensory disruption or changes in routine.

► ***[Physical Safety Measures: Classroom Safety Procedures¹¹](#)***

Center on PBIS

Provides considerations for ensuring classroom safety procedures are inclusive of students with disabilities.

► ***[Minimizing the Trauma of School Shooter Drills¹²](#)***

Everytown for Gun Safety

Provides considerations for supporting student wellbeing and minimizing trauma responses before during and after a drill.

► ***[Five Questions for School Staff to Ask When Preparing for an Active Shooter Drill¹³](#)***

National Alliance on Mental Illness

Supports educators in asking questions that support the planning and implementation of trauma-informed active shooter drill practices.

► ***[Integrating K-12 Students With Disabilities Into School Emergency Management Planning¹⁴](#)***

Readiness and Emergency Management Center

Provides guidance for school teams on including students with disabilities in emergency operations planning.

► ***[Integrating Neurodivergent K-12 Students and Staff Into School Emergency Management Planning¹⁵](#)***

Readiness and Emergency Management Center

Provides guidance and recommendations for effectively supporting Neurodivergent students in emergency operations plans.

► ***[Addressing Access and Functional Needs \(AFN\) in School and IHE Emergency Operations Plans¹⁶](#)***

Readiness and Emergency Management Center

Describes evidence-based policies, programs, and practices for supporting people with disabilities in emergency operations planning 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 — <http://www.pbis.org/resource/communicating-with-families-about-school-safety-drills>
- 6 — www.pbis.org/resource/considerations-for-decision-makers-in-creating-selecting-active-shooter-drill-processes
- 7 — https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/creating_school_active_shooter_intruder_drills.pdf
- 8 — <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/systems-level-prevention/best-practice-considerations-for-armed-assailant-drills-in-schools>
- 9 — <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/systems-level-prevention/mitigating-psychological-effects-of-lockdowns>
- 10 — [https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/school-violence-resources/school-safety-drills-and-exercises-for-students-with-autism-spectrum-disorder-\[asd\]-tips-and-resources-for-educators](https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/school-violence-resources/school-safety-drills-and-exercises-for-students-with-autism-spectrum-disorder-[asd]-tips-and-resources-for-educators)
- 11 — <https://www.pbis.org/resource/physical-safety-measures-classroom-safety-procedures>
- 12 — <https://everytownresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2024/01/Minimizing-the-Trauma-of-School-Shooter-Drills-.pdf>
- 13 — https://www.nami.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Five-Questions_Active-Shooter.pdf
- 14 — https://rems.ed.gov/docs/DisabilitiesFactSheet_508C.pdf
- 15 — https://rems.ed.gov/docs/Neurodivergent-Fact-Sheet_508c.pdf
- 16 — https://rems.ed.gov/docs/Resources/AFNWebinarResource-Guide_508C.pdf

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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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