



School Safety Tips

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by John Matthews, Community Safety Institute

The key to a successful school safety initiative is Planning, Preparation and Practice. Schools must employ all three of these in a proactive manner.

Schools must plan to be safe, utilizing trained Campus Safety Teams, who review policies and procedures, build partnerships, analyze programs and conduct physical security assessments.

Schools must be prepared by having updated Crisis Response Plans that have been individually tailored for each campus and the district as a whole.

Finally, school districts must practice all of the basic drills with staff and students such as lockdown, shelter-in-place, and evacuation both on-site and off-site.

Listed below are basic drills for Crisis Response that each school should be practicing on a regular basis.

- Shelter-in-place
- Lockdown
- Evacuation

These drills can be conducted in addition to your regular fire drills and weather related drills such as tornado, wildfire or hurricane depending on your geographic location and its weather patterns.

Shelter-in-place

A shelter-in-place procedure may be implemented when a situation occurs that may be a hazard to health or is life threatening. It can be used when it is safer to keep the students inside the building rather than expose them to possible harm by allowing them to leave the building. Tornado warnings, wildfires or hurricanes may all trigger a shelter in place at schools securing the students while keeping the buildings open for entry only. Once a shelter in place is called the school should remain in that condition until the "All Clear" is given.

A shelter in place may be called by school officials or other agencies such as emergency responders or local weather agencies. A shelter in place could also be called for by any principal or teacher or staff member with knowledge of an immediate danger.

Shelter-in-place and *lockdown* are not synonymous terms. While both contain the students and staff, a shelter-in-place will allow individuals into your building to seek shelter from potential hazards. A shelter-in-place can be called in the following situations:

- To contain the school while allowing others to seek shelter from potential hazards
- To control and manage students and staff
- To reduce potential victimization

Lockdown

Lockdown may also be implemented when a situation occurs that may be a hazard to health or is life threatening. It is intended to limit access and hazards by controlling and managing staff and students in order to increase safety and reduce possible victimization.

The building will have restricted access until the "All Clear" is given or individuals are directed by emergency personnel or staff. A lockdown may be called by school officials, law enforcement agencies or other emergency responders. A lockdown may be called for a variety of reasons including: weapons, intruders, police activity in or around the school, contamination or hazardous materials or terrorist events.

Lockdowns should be ordered in the following circumstances or when appropriately warranted by school officials:

- To contain the school and limit possible hazards
- To control and manage students and staff
- To limit access
- To reduce potential victimization

During a lockdown, staff should ensure that:

- All doors, windows, and classrooms will be locked
- Students and teachers will remain in their classrooms
- No one will be allowed to enter or leave the building
- Parents will not be allowed to pick up children from school
- Local authorities will provide assistance, if needed

Things to Avoid

When deciding to implement lockdown procedures as part of your crisis response plan, you should consider **not** using code words to order the lockdown, and not conducting a lockdown without first practicing the procedure and informing the students of their specific roles. Code words can be confusing to staff and especially to substitute teachers who move between campuses. Unrehearsed lockdowns can cause confusion and fear. A lockdown drill should be practiced just like a fire drill, with the appropriate prior training provided to all parties.

Lockdown - Final Notes

Finally, here are a couple of generalizations about lockdowns. Remember that a lockdown should be tailored to your specific school and therefore some of the following might not apply to your situation. Lockdowns can be called by school officials or other agencies. Some examples may include:

- Principal or teacher with knowledge of immediate danger
- Police based on activities in or around school that may pose a threat to the school
- FEMA based on information of a threat or weather emergency

Lockdowns can be called for a variety of reasons including weapons, site contamination, or weather.

Evacuation

There are two primary types of evacuations utilized by school districts. One is the typical on-site evacuation, where students are removed from school to a safe location on the premises or nearby property. The most common on-site evacuation is a fire drill where students are directed to leave the building and assemble at safe locations on or nearby the campus. On-site evacuations involve moving students to within walking distance and most often remaining on campus.

The second type is off-site evacuation, where staff and students must be transported to another location for their safety. In off-site evacuation, students are removed from the school to a remote safe location such as a primary evacuation site or directly to the reunion site. An off-site evacuation usually requires transportation.

Typically schools have at least two evacuation locations. The Primary Evacuation Site is a location used to secure individuals from potential harm. The primary evacuation site may also be the reunion site if students are transported to the location; however, at most schools a primary evacuation site is located within walking distance and utilized as a staging ground until students are transported to the designated reunion site.

The Secondary Evacuation Site is usually an alternate location used to secure individuals and minimize harm. This site can be on or off campus and may be used until students are transported to the designated reunion site.

Remember that students should never be released from an evacuation site which should be secured by law enforcement officials. Students should only be released from designated Reunion sites where proper accounting and out-processing can be conducted by school staff while not under the direct pressure of the incident.

Reunion Site

Reunion sites are the only places where parents can claim children after an off-site evacuation. The Reunion site should be well publicized and parents should be informed in advance of the procedures for being reunited with their children. Because of issues with non-custodial parents and concerns about student safety, specific paperwork concerning unscheduled releases should be completed and kept on file with the district. Reunion sites should be located in a secure facility with easy access to transportation and plenty of parking for buses and all parent and support cars (i.e.. civic centers, large churches, fair grounds). Once again, in addition to the physical environment of the reunion site each district should have a formal process for releasing students that includes verification of identification and written documentation of release.

These are some typical duties during a crisis or school incident that you may want to consider for your crisis response plan or training activities.

Principal Response

The Principal may:

- If possible, appoint someone to call 911 and stay on the line.
- Order lockdown over the PA system and/or by computer
- Notify administration
- Stay calm
- Provide as much information as possible on the suspect (s), location, injured, etc. to police dispatcher and officers when they arrive on the scene.

- Keep a cell phone available
- Keep radio channels clear.

Administrative Response

The Administration may:

- Make sure 911 has been notified
- Keep lines of communication open to school/principal
- Call all schools to notify them and especially the ones where students may be evacuated to.
- Order lockdown of all near-by schools and insure that areas are made available for students who will be evacuated to those facilities (clear gyms or parking lots to make room).
- Send a representative to the command post with the district safety box
- Notify transportation, and send the Public Information Officer (PIO) to the designated briefing site. ALL information should be distributed by the PIO only.
- Designate a number and staff "hotline" for parents

Important factors to remember:

- All school/district personnel should have ID cards that can be worn on their outermost clothing so they can be identified during an emergency.
- Administration must have radios to talk with all necessary schools to update information and keep communications open. Provide to responders and hospitals if necessary.
- School has the responsibility for handing out ID cards for those allowed in the perimeter or at the command site.

Teacher Response - Lockdown

During a lockdown the teacher may:

- Detain students in the classroom
- Check the halls and clear of students
- Keep students calm
- Keep an attendance log of all students in the room and update throughout the evacuation if necessary
- Keep students secure by locking windows and doors
- Not allow anyone in or out until "clear"

Crisis Response Team

The Crisis Response Team may:

- Report to all assigned common areas to secure students
- Insure that a 911 call has been made.
- Insure that teachers have been alerted, especially those who may have heard the announcement or seen the computer warning message.
- Secure the safety box.

Transportation Response

The Transportation Department may:

- Alert drivers and place on stand-by
- Prepare buses to perform evacuation if necessary
- Report to the staging area when requested
- Insure that materials are on board to log students on and off the bus.

Law Enforcement Response

Local law enforcement may:

- Provide quick intervention utilizing Active Shooter measures if necessary
- Take control of the situation
- Secure the scene and students
- Establish Command Center
- Order necessary support from school, fire, EMS, and traffic control personnel to secure other lockdown schools and all transportation and evacuation sites
- Need to obtain all necessary personnel and secure them in the command center to provide support and answer questions.
- Establish a secured area for media and all Public Information Officers (PIO's) and keep them advised of situation with regular briefings when appropriate.
- Need officers to secure the perimeter, Command Center, and Reunion site at all schools and in the media area.

School District Duties

In order to prepare for school safety incidents, the school district may:

- Establish one location in each school for the Safety Box and inform law enforcement of its location and contents. It will not move the Safety Box unless the police are notified.
- Establish a computer access code for emergencies to alert all portions of the school and administration.
- Develop an emergency checklist for all principals at all schools.
- Practice safety simulation sessions.

For more information on school safety and the training and technical services offered by the Community Safety Institute, call 972-576-8662, or see the Training section of this website.