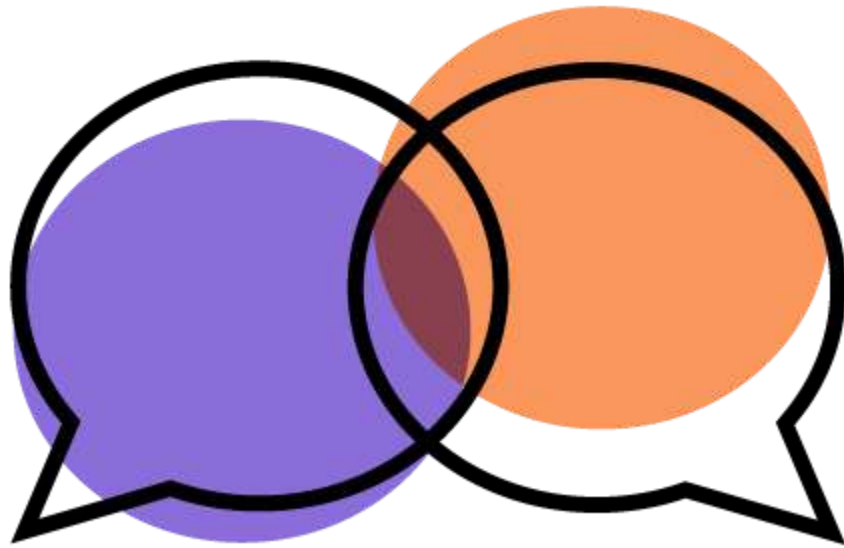


Start the Conversation: Emergency Drill Support
Educator Guide
PreK-6th Grade



Start the Conversation: Emergency Drill Support Educator Guide

PreK-6th Grade

Are you ready to start a conversation about emergency preparedness, fire drills and lockdown/active shooter drills with your students?

Start the Conversation (STC) is here to support you! The **STC: Emergency Drill Support Educator Guide** will help you take your students through each step of an emergency drill: before, during and after. The script outlines key trauma-informed steps as well as tips and modifications that can be applied to meet you and your student's specific needs. Each step can be tailored to your procedure, schedule and facilitation style.

Note: This document may also be useful for caregivers and parents looking to begin a conversation about emergency drills and school shootings with their child.

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Educator Guide: PreK - 1st Grade

Before the Drill

TIP: This may be some students' first time ever practicing an emergency drill. It is important to clearly outline that this is a practice that will happen multiple times every year. There is a difference between pre-k/K who are experiencing drills for the first time, and older students who have been doing this for years. They need different things in terms of scaffolding and support.

1. Frame the Conversation,

- Let students know what you will be talking about today.
- Ex: Today we are going to talk about safety. Safety is...
 - Different things we do to protect ourselves and the people around us.
 - Something we do to keep our brains, bodies and hearts happy and healthy.

TIP: This conversation can also be an opportunity to brainstorm with students and co-create definitions of the big topics you are exploring.

2. Discuss Existing Safety Practices

- Brainstorm with students safety practices that they already implement in their everyday lives and the importance/significance of these practices
 - Wearing a seat belt (why do we do this?)
 - Wearing a face mask (why do we do this?)
 - Wearing a helmet on a bike (why do we do this?)
- Tie in relevance to the type of drill you are discussing → “just like when we wear our helmets or put on our seat belts in the car, we also practice something called a “NAME OF DRILL” when we are at school. This is KEY!

3. Define Key Terms

- Ask students to help define key terms (safe/safety, emergency, dill, fire/drill, safety walk, etc)
- Ex: What is an emergency? (students define) Yes, an emergency is when something serious and sometimes dangerous happens.

TIP: If you are working with PreK & early kindergarten, invite students to share their definitions using their bodies! Prompt students to “show me what safety looks like with your body” or “how does your body look when you feel safe?” Or “draw a picture of what safety looks like”.

4. Share Why We Practice Emergency Drills

- Sharing a truthful and developmentally appropriate *why* with young people is essential to a trauma-informed approach. Consider sharing:
 - We practice these drills to help keep us safe in case of an emergency. Or in case something big/dangerous happens.
 - This drill is something we will practice throughout the year. The more we practice, the better we get!
 - Emergency drills help people like firefighters and doctors do their job in emergencies.

5. Reinforce “Just in Case”

- Just like we wear our helmets just in case, we also practice drills, just in case.
- Just like if the bus doesn't come one day, you need a plan of how else you will get to school.
- A real emergency like the ones we practice for will probably never happen, but it is good to be prepared, just in case.

TIP: Turn the conversation into a community game with a call & response activity. Name a safety practice and end the statement with WHY? And prompt students to respond with “just in case”. You can also add a move or gesture to the phrase. Ex. Teacher: “I wear my helmet, why? Students: “Just in case”. Teacher: I look both ways when I cross the street, why?” Students: “Just in case”. Teacher: “I practice fire drills, why? “Just in case”.

6. Emphasize School Safety Practices

- Discuss with your students some ways that your school works to keep them safe? And who in the school works to keep them safe? (everyone)
- Try making a list of practices and posting it in your classroom.

7. Closing Breath

- If this is where the conversation ends, give students a moment to share any final thoughts or questions. This can be shared with words or you can revisit making a pose with your body.
- Let students know: “We are going to pause this conversation for today and move on to_____”. Before we do that, let's take a moment to check in with how we are feeling and take a few deep breaths together. – check out the Breath/Grounding Activities page of the guide!

TIP: For early childhood populations, it is important to get the whole body involved. Try the Butterfly Breath or turn on some music and have a stretch/movement break.

Educator Guide: PreK - 1st Grade

During the Drill

TIP: If time has passed since your “Before the Drill”, begin with a quick review of what was discussed in your last conversation.

1. Discuss What to Expect

- a. This is your opportunity to outline the steps and procedures of the drill. Give students clear instructions and expectations. Be careful not to give too much information too quickly, go step by step and rehearse each step as you go.
- b. Leave time for students to ask clarifying questions.

2. Provide Tools to Help Students Meet Expectations:

- a. One Idea is to use visual cards/ physical cues:
 - i. Can be placed around the classroom or kept in a folder/binder for emergency scenarios/drills.
 - ii. “Quiet as a mouse” picture card or pose of a mouse can be pointed to to remind students to stay silent
 - iii. “Still as a rock” picture card or pose of rock to remind students to stay grounded, strong and to not move
 - iv. “No phones” picture card of a phone with an X through it or make an X with your arms
 - v. Any other visual reminders for students that would be helpful
- b. For very young children, you can make a game out of the procedure.
Ex: When we hear the alarm/announcement it's time to turn into mice! Let's practice, can I see your mouse ears? What about your tails? Oh! These are some really loud mice, what do mice sound like? That's right! They are very quiet and sneak. Let's be quiet and sneaky mice and scamper into the corner on the count of 3!

TIP: In a true emergency situation, what tools could you use to keep students quiet? This can be challenging with the very young. One educator recommended having lollipops or other oral props like pacifiers or juice boxes to keep students occupied.

3. Explore Regulation Tools

- a. Emergency drills can be anxiety inducing for any age. Offering students tools to cope with feelings that may come up during a drill can help make the whole experience more positive.
- b. Choose a few activities from the Breath/Grounding Activities page that will work for your students. Practice these tools before the drill and encourage students to use them individually or lead them through activities as a group.
- c. All of the activities can be done silently and independently, so they are perfect for the drill!

4. Re-Emphasize that Drills are Just Practice!

- a. Remind students of “Just in case” and that when the drill happens it is NOT a real emergency.
- b. Let students know about how/if they will be notified of drills.
- c. Address what to do if a drill occurs while a student is outside of the classroom (i.e. the bathroom, hallway, cafeteria, etc.)
- d. Address what to do if a drill is not pre-announced.

TIP: Whenever possible, emergency drills should be announced to teachers and students AHEAD of the alarm or loud speaker notification. This allows students (and teachers) to mentally prepare for what is to come. This is a crucial element of a trauma-informed emergency drill approach.

5. Closing Breath

- a. If this is where the conversation ends, give students a moment to share any final thoughts or questions. This can be shared with words or you can revisit making a pose with your body.
- b. Let students know: “We are going to pause this conversation for today and move on to_____ . Before we do that, let’s take a moment to check in with how we are feeling and take a few deep breaths together. – check out the Breath/Grounding Activities page of the guide!

TIP: For early childhood populations, it is important to get the whole body involved. Try the Butterfly Breath or turn on so music and have a stretch/movement break.

Educator Guide: PreK - 1st Grade

After the Drill

(to be done directly after an emergency drill)

1. Acknowledge & Celebrate Completion

- a. Let students know that the drill is over and you are returning to class.
- b. Acknowledge that everyone just completed something big and important!

2. Feelings Check-In

- a. Invite students to share how they are feeling after the drill:
 - i. “Show me with your body how you are feeling after our _____ drill”
(invite students to make a pose with their body, draw or demonstrate visually - teacher can provide an example)
 - ii. “Make a sound or choose one word to describe how you are feeling right now.”
 - iii. Use a feelings chart and have students point to how they are feeling.
- b. Invite students to notice how their classmates are feeling.

3. Re-Regulate the Body, Mind and Heart

- a. After sharing their feelings, lead students through a breath activity from the previous conversation.
- b. Validate students’ feelings and remind them of the mental health resources available to them if they are still feeling negative emotions.

4. Notice & Name Safety

- a. Remind students that right now, they are all safe at school.
- b. Brainstorm some ways that you know you are safe. *Ex: “How do we know that we’re safe right now? Can you think of some examples? I know we are safe because we are all together in our classroom and we are about to start our next activity.”*

5. Reflect on the Drill Experience

- a. What went well? What can we work on next time?

TIP: We don’t recommend punitive discipline following an emergency drill. Often student reactions are a manifestation of discomfort or even trauma. Instead, use this point in the conversation to name behaviors that need to be worked on for next time and why it is important. If necessary, you can invite the student to talk one-on-one with you or your school’s counselor or other mental health resource.

6. Return To Normal Activities

- a. Now that the drill is over, return to your daily activities!

TIP: After an Emergency Drill it is important to return to familiar routines. How can you help your students get back on task after an emergency? We believe that steps 1-5 will support that transition.

Information & Modifications for Neurodivergent and Disabled Students:

- For students with physical disabilities and students using mobility devices, have a conversation about their specific needs in an emergency situation. Create an individual safety plan with your student to plan for how adults and other students in the room can assist in the case of an emergency. Have this conversation one-on-one BEFORE an emergency drill to help your student feel prepared and supported. It may also be helpful to include caregivers/parents in this planning with the student. **Once a plan is in place, make it a part of every emergency drill rehearsal.**
- Consider student's sensory needs. Fire alarms and drill announcements are often loud and visually overwhelming. Try having sound canceling headphones and sunglasses available for students during emergency drills (and easily accessible in the case of a real emergency).
- Whenever possible include visual supports along with audio and visual cues. Use STC's Emergency Drill Support Visual Stories ([Fire Drill](#) and [Lockdown Drill](#)) to support students who benefit from visual supports.
- How can you adapt emergency drill procedures for your students to meet safety needs while also setting appropriate expectations? For example, asking some students to remain completely silent is not accessible. Could you offer a sensory object or an oral stimulation tool instead?
- Consider how you can engage your student's five senses during conversations to help communicate information.
- A disruption in classroom routines can be challenging to cope with. Consider if your student needs additional processing time after a drill and provide them with the space to do so before returning to regular activities.

Educator Guide: 2nd - 4th Grade

Before the Drill

1. Frame the Conversation,

- Let students know what you will be talking about today.
- Ex: Today we are going to talk about safety. Safety is...
 - Something we practice to protect ourselves and the people around us.
 - Something we do to keep our brains, bodies and hearts happy and healthy.

TIP: Trust that your students are well aware of what is happening in the school community and around the world. If this conversation is following recent news of a school shooting or an event at school, be transparent about the reason you are having this conversation.

2. Discuss Existing Safety Practices

- Brainstorm with students safety practices that they already implement in their everyday lives and the importance/significance of these practices
 - Wearing a seat belt (why do we do this?)
 - Wearing a face mask (why do we do this?)
 - Wearing a helmet on a bike (why do we do this?)
- Tie in relevance to the type of drill you are discussing → “just like when we wear our helmets or put on our seat belts in the car, we also practice something called a “NAME OF DRILL” when we are at school.

3. Define Key Terms

- Ask students to help define key terms (safe/safety, emergency, dill, lockdown drill, fire drill etc.)
- *Ex: What is an emergency? (students define, most likely with an example) Yes, these are all examples of an emergency. Basically, an emergency is when something serious and sometimes dangerous happens. (repeat this process for drill). So an Emergency drill is when we practice or rehearse what to do in case something serious or dangerous happens.*

4. Share Why We Practice Emergency Drills

- Sharing a truthful and developmentally appropriate *why* with young people is essential to a trauma-informed approach. Consider sharing:
 - We practice these drills to help keep us safe in case of an emergency. Or in case something big/dangerous happens.
 - We practice because we need to know that, in the case of an emergency, all of us will know what to do. The more we practice, the more prepared we can be.
 - Emergency drills help people like firefighters and doctors do their job in emergencies.

- Anything else that is relevant to your school community.

5. Reinforce “Just in Case”

- Just like we wear our helmets just in case, we also practice drills, just in case.
- Just like if the bus doesn't come one day, you need a plan of how else you will get to school.
- A real emergency like the ones we practice for will probably never happen, but it is good to be prepared, just in case.

TIP: Turn the conversation into a community game with a call & response activity. Name a safety practice and end the statement with WHY? And prompt students to respond with “just in case”. You can also add a move or gesture to the phrase. Ex. Teacher: “I wear my helmet, why? Students: “Just in case”. Teacher: I look both ways when I cross the street, why?” Students: “Just in case”. Teacher: “I practice fire drills, why? “Just in case”.

6. Acknowledge World Events

- Acknowledge that students have probably heard about violence taking place in schools throughout our country, and that there are likely many feelings they have connected to these events.
 - Begin by saying: *“I’ve noticed lately that there have been a lot of stories on the news about people with guns hurting other people. Some of these stories have even been about schools. Have you noticed this too? What have you noticed?”*
 - *“When we hear about bad things happening at school, it’s very normal to feel scared and sad, confused or even angry. How has hearing about these things made you feel?”*
- Check in with students about how they are feeling and allow for discussion.
- Validate and acknowledge feelings that might come up (including previous traumas or loss that might be activated).
- CLEARLY STATE: the statistical rareness of school shootings.
 - *“School shootings are very rare and it is very unlikely that something like that would ever happen at our school. If you were ever worried that something like that might happen, you can talk to me or another trusted adult.”*

7. Emphasize School Safety Practices

- Re-emphasize students' immediate safety in the moment, and remind them of school safety practices.
 - *“School staff are working with families and public safety providers to keep you safe.”*
- Discuss with your students some ways that your school works to keep you safe? Try making a list of practices and posting it in your classroom.
- Remind students of mental health/counselor or teacher resources available to them if they want to talk about these feelings one-on-one.

*TIP: This conversation may turn into a Q&A session. That is ok. **But try to avoid allowing students to go into detailed “what if” thinking.** For example: “What if someone came to our school with a gun” can be answered by following our lockdown procedures and notifying law enforcement. But questions like “What if the shooter was in our classroom and killed you (the teacher) first” can’t be answered. This is a manifestation of anxiety and will likely increase agitation and panic rather than distilling. **Instead, if a question like that comes up, try to redirect the conversation like this:***

- **Validate:** *I understand why you might be worried about that. Sometimes when we start thinking about situations like this, our brains can start to worry about scary details like that.*
- **Reinforce:** *all the ways and people involved in making school a safe environment.*
- **Regulate & Remind:** *“Let’s all take a breath and remember that right now we are safe. School shootings are actually very rare, that means something like that would probably never happen here.”*
- **Take Action:** *“For now, let’s focus on what we can practice: our emergency drills. These will help us be prepared if there ever was an emergency situation.”*
- **Take Note:** *of the students who seem activated by this conversation and check-in with them one-on-one. You can help connect students with your school counselor or other mental health resource.*

8. Closing Breath

- If this is where the conversation ends, give students a moment to share any final thoughts or questions (either verbally or in writing).
- Let students know: “We are going to pause this conversation for today and move on to _____ . Before we do that, let’s take a moment to check in with how we are feeling and take a few deep breaths together. – choose an activity from the Breath/Grounding Activities page!

Educator Guide: 2nd - 4th Grade

During the Drill

TIP: If time has passed since your “Before the Drill”, begin with a quick review of what was discussed in your last conversation.

1. Discuss What to Expect

- First define the name and reason for the drill: what are you practicing for?
 - *Ex: “Lockdown drills are when we practice what to do in case there is a potential danger to our school community. That could mean there is someone with a weapon, but it could also mean that a dog got onto campus and adults are worried that it might bite a student. Lockdowns can be used for lots of different emergencies - it doesn’t always mean there is someone trying to hurt people.”*
- This is your opportunity to outline/review the steps and procedures of the drill. Give students clear instructions and expectations. Be careful not to give too much information too quickly, go step by step and rehearse the steps as you go.
- Leave time for students to ask clarifying questions.

TIP: Provide students with information about what to do if they are not in a classroom (ie. they are in the bathroom, hallway, cafeteria, etc.) during an emergency drill or emergency.

2. Provide Tools to Help Students Meet Expectations:

- Explore what tools you can provide to help students meet the drill expectations.
- One Idea is to use visual cards/ physical cues:
 - Can be placed around the classroom or kept in a folder/binder for emergency scenarios/drills.
 - “Quiet as a mouse” picture card or pose of a mouse can be pointed to to remind students to stay silent
 - “Still as a rock” picture card or pose of rock to remind students to stay grounded, strong and to not move
 - “No phones” picture card of a phone with an X through it or make an X with your arms
 - Any other visual reminders for students that would be helpful
- *Ex: “Here’s something you can try...it’s going to sound a little silly but it can make being quiet more fun. I want you to think of something that is REALLY QUIET. Like “quiet as a mouse”. Then I want you to pretend to be that thing. OK, now you have to be extra still - you can’t move! What is something that doesn’t move? Maybe a rock? Imagine your body is a rock, steady on the ground and you stay quiet and still. It’s easier to be still and quiet when you are pretending! And it can make something that might be a little scary a little bit fun.”*

3. Explore Regulation Tools

- Emergency drills can be anxiety inducing for any age. Offering students tools to cope with feelings that may come up during a drill can help make the whole experience more positive.
- Choose a few activities from the Breath/Grounding Activities page that will work for your students. Practice these tools before the drill and encourage students to use them individually or lead them through activities as a group.
- All of the activities can be done silently and independently, so they are perfect for the drill!

4. Re-Emphasize that Drills are Just Practice!

- Remind students of “Just in case” and that when the drill happens it is NOT a real emergency.
- Let students know about how/if they will be notified of drills.
- Address what to do if a drill is not pre-announced.

TIP: Whenever possible, emergency drills should be announced to teachers and students AHEAD of the alarm or loud speaker notification. This allows students (and teachers) to mentally prepare for what is to come. This is a crucial element of a trauma-informed emergency drill approach.

5. Taking Drills Seriously

- It is important to remember that certain behaviors that students may exhibit during an emergency drill may actually be a coping mechanism or trauma response. Before a drill, remind students:
 - *“I know that we have practiced these drills a lot and that it can be hard to take them seriously but you wouldn’t wear your helmet on your ear right? Why? Because it wouldn’t keep you safe. So it is important to try and follow directions and stay quiet during the drill, even if they feel silly or hard to do. That way we are all able to hear instructions and be more prepared in case there ever was a real emergency.”*
 - *“If you are feeling like you have to talk or move during the drill, try some of the breathing and grounding exercises that we talked about earlier. If those don’t work, let’s talk about another solution.”*

6. Closing Breath

- If this is where the conversation ends, give students a moment to share any final thoughts or questions. This can be shared with words or written down.
- Let students know: “We are going to pause this conversation for today and move on to_____ . Before we do that, let’s take a moment to check in with how we are feeling and take a few deep breaths together. – check out the Breath/Grounding Activities page of the guide!

Educator Guide: 2nd - 4th Grade

After the Drill *(to be done directly after an emergency drill)*

1. Acknowledge & Celebrate Completion

- Let students know that the drill is over and you are returning to class.
- Acknowledge that everyone just completed something big and important!

2. Feelings Check-In

- **Lead students through this body scan exercise or other grounding activity:**
 - Imagine that a scanner is sliding down your body from your head to your toes, as the scanner moves down, notice how you are feeling in each part of your body. Starting at your head, moving down to your shoulders, chest, belly, hips, legs, ankles and toes (give time to complete the scan).
- Invite students to choose one or two words to describe how they're feeling in their body right now. Validate that anything they're feeling is just fine. Invite students to write down their word(s) and turn and share them with someone next to them.

TIP: Emergency Drills can often feel like solo experiences and leave students feeling alone. Consider how you can create opportunities for community before, during and after these potentially scary situations.

3. Re-Regulate the Body, Mind and Heart

- **After sharing their feelings, lead students through a breath activity:**
 - *“Let’s all take 3 deep breaths together as a group: place a hand on your low belly and breathing in through your nose, send your breath right to your belly and breathe out through your mouth. Nice. Relax your shoulders and your forehead too. 2 more breaths. The next time you breathe in, think about any feelings from the drill that you want to leave behind and then let go of those feelings as you breathe out. And 1 more breath. This time breathing in something that makes you feel good - something that you would like to take with you through the rest of the day. And exhale. Thank you.”*
 - Validate students feelings and remind them of the mental health resources available to them if they are still feeling negative emotions.

TIP: If this grounding exercise doesn't fit your student's needs. Try another exercise from the [Breath/Grounding Activities](#) list.

4. Notice & Name Safety

- Remind students that right now, they are all safe at school.
- Brainstorm some ways that you know you are safe. *Ex: “How do we know that we're safe right now? Can you think of some examples? I know we are safe because we are all together in our classroom and we are about to start our next activity.”*

5. Reflect on the Drill Experience

- What went well? What can we work on next time?

TIP: We don't recommend punitive discipline following an emergency drill. Often student reactions are a manifestation of discomfort or even trauma. Instead, use this point in the conversation to name behaviors that need to be worked on for next time and why it is important. If necessary, you can invite the student to talk one-on-one with you or your school's counselor or other mental health resource.

6. Return To Normal Activities

- Now that the drill is over, return to your daily activities!

TIP: After an Emergency Drill, it is important to return to familiar routines. How can you help your students get back on task after an emergency? We believe that steps 1-5 will support that transition.

Information & Modifications for Neurodivergent and Disabled Students:

- For students with physical disabilities and students using mobility devices, have a conversation about their specific needs in an emergency situation. Create an individual safety plan with your student to plan for how adults and other students in the room can assist in the case of an emergency. Have this conversation one-on-one BEFORE an emergency drill to help your student feel prepared and supported. It may also be helpful to include caregivers/parents in this planning with the student. **Once a plan is in place, make it a part of every emergency drill rehearsal.**
- Consider student's sensory needs. Fire alarms and drill announcements are often loud and visually overwhelming. Try having sound canceling headphones and sunglasses available for students during emergency drills (and easily accessible in the case of a real emergency).
- Whenever possible include visual supports along with audio and visual cues. Use STC's Emergency Drill Support Visual Stories ([Fire Drill](#) and [Lockdown Drill](#)) to support students who benefit from visual supports.
- How can you adapt emergency drill procedures for your students to meet safety needs while also setting appropriate expectations? For example, asking some students to remain completely silent is not accessible. Could you offer a sensory object or an oral stimulation tool instead?
- Consider how you can engage your student's five senses during conversations to help communicate information.
- A disruption in classroom routines can be challenging to cope with. Consider if your student needs additional processing time after a drill and provide them with the space to do so before returning to regular activities.

Educator Guide: 5th - 6th Grade

Before the Drill

1. Frame the Conversation

- Let students know what you will be talking about today.
- *Ex: Today we are going to talk about school safety and emergency drills (you can change this to the specific type of emergency drill you are discussing). I know you are all pretty familiar with emergency drills because you have been doing them for many years. I want to take a bit of time today to make sure that we are all on the same page about emergency drills and also talk about some of the reasons why we practice these drills.*

TIP: Trust that your students are well aware of what is happening in the school community and around the world. If this conversation is following recent news of a school shooting or an event at school, be transparent about the reason you are having this conversation.

2. Discuss Existing Safety Practices

- Brainstorm with students safety practices that they already implement in their everyday lives and the importance/significance of these practices
 - Wearing a seat belt (why do we do this?)
 - Wearing a face mask (why do we do this?)
 - Wearing a helmet on a bike (why do we do this?)
- Tie in relevance to lockdown drills → “similarly to how we use the safety practices you all just came up with to keep us safe, we also practice _____ to help keep us safe.

3. Define Key Terms

- Ask students to help define key terms (safe/safety, emergency, dill, lockdown drill, fire drill etc.)
- *Ex: This seems like a simple question, but what is an emergency? (students define, most likely with an example) Yes, these are all examples of an emergency. Basically, an emergency is when something serious and sometimes dangerous happens. (repeat this process for drill). So an Emergency drill is when we practice or rehearse what to do in case something serious or dangerous happens.*
- *Ex: What does safety mean to you? What does safety look like to you?*

4. Share Why We Practice Emergency Drills

- Sharing a truthful and developmentally appropriate *why* with young people is essential to a trauma-informed approach. Consider sharing:
 - We practice these drills to help keep us safe in case of an emergency. (Maybe share examples of when the school has used emergency practices for a real emergency)

- We practice because we need to know that, in the case of an emergency, all of us will know what to do. The more we practice, the more prepared we can be.
- Emergency drills help emergency service providers like firefighters and paramedics do their job in emergencies.
- Anything else that might be relevant to your community.

5. Reinforce “Just in Case”

- Just like we wear our helmets just in case, we also practice drills, just in case.
- Just like if the bus doesn't come one day, or you forget your lunch you need a plan of how else you will get to school or what else you will eat for lunch.
- A real emergency like the ones we practice for will probably never happen, but it is good to be prepared, just in case.

6. Acknowledge World Events

- Acknowledge that students have probably heard about violence taking place in schools throughout our country, and that there are likely many feelings they have connected to these events.
 - Begin by saying: *“I’ve noticed that there have been some stories on the news about school shootings” “Have you noticed this too?” “What have you noticed?”*
 - *“When we hear about bad things happening at school, it’s very normal to feel scared and sad, confused or even angry. How has hearing about these things made you feel?”*
- Check in with students about how they are feeling and allow for discussion.
- Validate and acknowledge feelings that might come up (including previous traumas or loss that might be activated).
- CLEARLY STATE: the statistical rareness of school shootings.
 - *“School shootings are very rare and it is very unlikely that something like that would ever happen at our school. If you were ever worried that something like that might happen or you think you know something like that might happen, please immediately talk to me or another trusted adult.”*
 - *“Although the **possibility** of school violence exists, the **probability** that it will affect us (our school) is very low. Most schools are safe, even though it may not feel that way in the moment.”*

7. Emphasize School Safety Practices

- Re-emphasize students' immediate safety in the moment, and remind them of school safety practices.
 - *“School staff are working with families and public safety providers to keep you safe.”*
- Discuss with your students some ways that your school works to keep you safe? Try making a list of practices and posting it in your classroom.

- Remind students of mental health/counselor or teacher resources available to them if they want to talk about these feelings one-on-one.

*TIP: This conversation may turn into a Q&A session. That is ok. **But try to avoid allowing students to go into detailed “what if” thinking.** For example: “What if someone came to our school with a gun” can be answered by following our lockdown procedures and notifying law enforcement. But questions like “What if the shooter was in our classroom and killed you (the teacher) first” can’t be answered. This is a manifestation of anxiety and will likely increase agitation and panic rather than distilling. **Instead, if a question like that comes up, try to redirect the conversation like this:***

- **Validate:** *I understand why you might be worried about that. Sometimes when we start thinking about situations like this, our brains can start to worry about scary details like that.*
- **Reinforce:** *all the ways and people involved in making school a safe environment.*
- **Regulate & Remind:** *“Let’s all take a breath and remember that right now we are safe. School shootings are actually very rare, so it is highly unlikely something like that would happen.*
- **Take Action:** *“For now, let’s focus on what we can practice: our emergency drills. These will help us be prepared if there ever was an emergency situation.”*
- **Take Note:** *of the students who seem activated by this conversation and check-in with them one-on-one. You can help connect students with your school counselor or other mental health resource.*

8. Closing Breath

- If this is where the conversation ends, give students a moment to share any final thoughts or questions (either verbally or in writing).
- Let students know: “We are going to pause this conversation for today and move on to_____ . Before we do that, let’s take a moment to check in with how we are feeling and take a few deep breaths together. – choose an activity from the Breath/Grounding Activities page!

Educator Guide: 5th - 6th Grade

During the Drill

TIP: If time has passed since your “Before the Drill”, begin with a quick review of what was discussed in your last conversation.

1. Discuss What to Expect

- First define the name and reason for the drill: what are you practicing for?
 - *Ex: “Lockdown drills are when we practice what to do in case there is a potential danger to our school community. That could mean there is someone with a weapon, but it could also mean that a dog got onto campus and adults are worried that it might bite a student. Lockdowns can be used for lots of different emergencies - it doesn’t always mean there is someone trying to hurt people.”*
- This is your opportunity to outline/review the steps and procedures of the drill. Give students clear instructions and expectations. Be careful not to give too much information too quickly, go step by step and rehearse the steps as you go.
- Leave time for students to ask clarifying questions.

TIP: Provide students with information about what to do if they are not in a classroom (ie. they are in the bathroom, hallway, cafeteria, etc.) during an emergency drill or emergency.

2. Provide Tools to Help Students Meet Expectations:

- Explore what tools you can provide to help students meet the drill expectations.
- *Here’s something you can try...it’s going to sound a little silly but it can make being quiet more fun. I want you to think of something that is REALLY QUIET. Like “quiet as a mouse”. Then I want you to pretend to be that thing. OK, now you have to be extra still - you can’t move! What is something that doesn’t move? Maybe a rock? Imagine your body is a rock, steady on the ground and you stay quiet and still. It’s easier to be still and quiet when you are pretending! And it can make something that might be a little scary a little bit fun.*

3. Explore Regulation Tools

- Emergency drills can be anxiety inducing for any age. Offering students tools to cope with feelings that may come up during a drill can help make the whole experience more positive.
- Choose a few activities from the Breath/Grounding Activities page that will work for your students. Practice these tools before the drill and encourage students to use them individually or lead them through activities as a group.
- All of the activities can be done silently and independently, so they are perfect for the drill!

4. Re-Emphasize that Drills are Just Practice!

- Remind students of “Just in case” and that when the drill happens it is NOT a real emergency.
- Let students know about how/if they will be notified of drills.
- Address what to do if a drill is not pre-announced.

TIP: Whenever possible, emergency drills should be announced to teachers and students AHEAD of the alarm or loud speaker notification. This allows students (and teachers) to mentally prepare for what is to come. This is a crucial element of a trauma-informed emergency drill approach.

5. Taking Drills Seriously

- It is important to remember that certain behaviors that students may exhibit during an emergency drill may actually be a coping mechanism or trauma response. Before a drill, remind students:
 - *“I know that we have practiced these drills a lot and that it can be hard to take them seriously when 1) you know they are just practice and 2) you might want to distract yourself because it doesn’t feel good to imagine a real emergency. But it is important to try and follow directions and stay quiet during the drill. That way we are all able to hear instructions and be more prepared in case there ever was a real emergency.”*
 - *“If you are feeling like you have to talk or move during the drill, try some of the breathing and grounding exercises that we talked about earlier. If those don’t work, let’s talk about another solution.”*

6. Closing Breath

- If this is where the conversation ends, give students a moment to share any final thoughts or questions. This can be shared with words or written down.
- Let students know: “We are going to pause this conversation for today and move on to_____ . Before we do that, let’s take a moment to check in with how we are feeling and take a few deep breaths together. – check out the Breath/Grounding Activities page of the guide!

Educator Guide: 5th - 6th Grade

After the Drill

(to be done directly after an emergency drill)

1. Acknowledge & Celebrate Completion

- Let students know that the drill is over and you are returning to class.
- Acknowledge that everyone just completed something big and important!

2. Feelings Check-In

- **Lead students through this body scan exercise or other grounding activity:**
 - Imagine that a scanner is sliding down your body from your head to your toes, as the scanner moves down, notice how you are feeling in each part of your body. Starting at your head, moving down to your shoulders, chest, belly, hips, legs, ankles and toes (give time to complete the scan).
- Invite students to choose one or two words to describe how they're feeling in their body right now. Validate that anything they're feeling is just fine. Invite students to write down their word(s) and turn and share them with someone next to them.

TIP: Emergency Drills can often feel like solo experiences and leave students feeling alone. Consider how you can create opportunities for community before, during and after these potentially scary situations.

3. Re-Regulate the Body, Mind and Heart

- **After sharing their feelings, lead students through a breath activity:**
 - *“Let’s all take 3 deep breaths together as a group: place a hand on your low belly and breathing in through your nose, send your breath right to your belly and breathe out through your mouth. Nice. Relax your shoulders and your forehead too. 2 more breaths. The next time you breathe in, think about any feelings from the drill that you want to leave behind and then let go of those feelings as you breathe out. And 1 more breath. This time breathing in something that makes you feel good - something that you would like to take with you through the rest of the day. And exhale. Thank you.”*
 - Validate students feelings and remind them of the mental health resources available to them if they are still feeling negative emotions.

4. Notice & Name Safety

- Remind students that right now, they are all safe at school.
- Brainstorm some ways that you know you are safe. *Ex: “How do we know that we’re safe right now? Can you think of some examples? I know we are safe because we are all together in our classroom and we are about to start our next activity.”*

5. Reflect on the Drill Experience

- What went well? What can we work on next time?

TIP: We don't recommend punitive discipline following an emergency drill. Often student reactions are a manifestation of discomfort or even trauma. Instead, use this point in the conversation to name behaviors that need to be worked on for next time and why it is important. If necessary, you can invite the student to talk one-on-one with you or your school's counselor or other mental health resource.

6. Return To Normal Activities

- Now that the drill is over, return to your daily activities!

TIP: After an Emergency Drill, it is important to return to familiar routines. How can you help your students get back on task after an emergency? We believe that steps 1-5 will support that transition.

Information & Modifications for Neurodivergent and Disabled Students:

- For students with physical disabilities and students using mobility devices, have a conversation about their specific needs in an emergency situation. Create an individual safety plan with your student to plan for how adults and other students in the room can assist in the case of an emergency. Have this conversation one-on-one BEFORE an emergency drill to help your student feel prepared and supported. It may also be helpful to include caregivers/parents in this planning with the student. **Once a plan is in place, make it a part of every emergency drill rehearsal.**
- Consider student's sensory needs. Fire alarms and drill announcements are often loud and visually overwhelming. Try having sound canceling headphones and sunglasses available for students during emergency drills (and easily accessible in the case of a real emergency).
- Whenever possible include visual supports along with audio and visual cues. Use STC's Emergency Drill Support Visual Stories ([Fire Drill](#) and [Lockdown Drill](#)) to support students who benefit from visual supports.
- How can you adapt emergency drill procedures for your students to meet safety needs while also setting appropriate expectations? For example, asking some students to remain completely silent is not accessible. Could you offer a sensory object or an oral stimulation tool instead?
- Consider how you can engage your student's five senses during conversations to help communicate information.
- A disruption in classroom routines can be challenging to cope with. Consider if your student needs additional processing time after a drill and provide them with the space to do so before returning to regular activities.

Breath/Grounding Activities for All Grades

1. Do a body scan: imagine that a scanner is sliding down your body from your head to your toes, as the scanner moves down, notice how you are feeling in each part of your body. Maybe you make a fist with your hands and then release it. Or curl your toes for a few seconds and then relax your feet. Maybe you lift your shoulders up to your ears and then let them fall. Noticing the difference between tension and relaxation in your body can be a great way to help calm yourself down and release some energy.
2. Take low breaths: there are a lot of different ways to take deep breaths. You can put a hand on your belly, under your belly button and take a deep breath into your hand and then let it out.
3. Butterfly Breath: Extend your arms straight out in front of you, put your hands together, inhale as you lift your arms up above your head. Hold your breath while opening your arms above your head into a Y position. As you exhale, lower your arms back down to your side. Repeat.
4. Take a Box Breath: A box breath is when you breathe in for a count of 4, hold your breath for 4, breath out for 4 and hold at empty for 4.
5. Breathe In & Out: You can also imagine breathing in any scary thought you might be having into an air bubble and then blowing it away.
6. Engage Students Senses: Invite students to notice something that they see, hear, smell, and feel in the room. This can help remind them that you are safe in the moment.
7. [Belly Breathing](#)
8. [4/7/8 Breathing](#)
9. [Box Breathing](#)
10. [Thought Bubbles! Blow away your worrisome thoughts](#)
11. Counting breaths up to 10 and back down: Inhale 1, exhale 2, inhale 3, exhale 4
12. “Now I’m inhaling....now I’m exhaling....now I’m inhaling... now I’m exhaling...” repeat silently in your own mind
13. [Body Scan](#) → teach students to do this silently on their own

Expert Tips For All Grades

- Take into account students with prior trauma who might be activated by these conversations. Take care to check in with the student and their caregivers before having this conversation in class to make sure they are appropriately supported.
- Without these conversations, the event or worry can become bigger in a child's mind than it is in reality. It is important to have these conversations so that adults can provide clarity and support. Making sure (especially for young children) that you clarify any potentially scary connections they have made.
- **General Guidelines for Answering Student's Questions About Emergency Drills:**
 - Answer questions simply, without extensive details; balance with reassurances that they and their loved ones are safe and protected.
 - Provide factual information to correct misinformation. Help them separate reality from fantasy. Invite students to share their thoughts and offer alternatives of expression, such as play acting or drawing.
- Often conversations of school shootings and things that are scary are avoided but we have to have a conversation about it. If we are going to have drills, we need to be able to have open dialogue with our students about the actual issues.
- **For Schools in Communities where Guns and Gun Violence is Present:** It is IMPERATIVE for schools in communities where gun violence is prevalent to be even more proactive about informing the community BEFORE a drill is happening or DURING a drill that it is just a drill (trauma informed). Additionally, conversations around community safety and gun violence should be happening either in conjunction with or outside of conversations about lockdown procedures. It could also be an acknowledgment that students may have experienced violence within their own communities and stressing that we do lockdown drills in order to keep this community safe - providing agency and a sense of control over circumstances that feel out of our control.
- **Answers to some of the common questions young people might have about/around emergency drills:**
 - How long will this last?
 - Drills last as long as it takes for folks in our school to determine that everyone is following proper protocols. That means remaining quiet and calm and staying inside our classroom. I can assure you that,

once the drill is over, we will all be notified and we will go back to our regularly scheduled school day

- Is this a real EMERGENCY?
 - In order to practice these drills to the best of our ability, it is important that we take them seriously, as if we were in a real emergency. We will not always know in advance whether we are practicing a drill, like a dress rehearsal, or whether there is a real threat to our school. However, each time we engage in our lockdown procedures, we should treat it as a performance and go through all of the steps as we've practiced.
- Why would someone outside the school want to harm us if we didn't do anything to them?
 - "Sometimes people do things that hurt others, and we don't always know why. Adults work very hard to get those people help and keep them from hurting others. It is important for all of us to know how to get help if we feel really upset or angry. You can always tell me, the counselor, the nurse, your dean, a parent, etc about how you're feeling or if you're concerned about a friend or classmate..."
- Will someone let their parents know if there was a real emergency?
 - Yes. If this were a real emergency, either the school or the people responding to the emergency (police/firefighters/etc) would contact your parents. Your parents also know that we do these types of drills throughout the year in order to practice keeping everyone safe.
- Why are we doing this?
 - It is important to practice our safety procedures often in the event that we ever need to use them. What are some other safety procedures we practice to keep us safe? We wear our seatbelts in the car to prevent injuries on the off chance we get into an accident. We wear our helmets when riding our bikes for the same reason. Has anyone ever flown on a plane before? Each and every flight the crew will review the safety procedures so that the passengers know them, even though the actual chances of needing to use them are very low. Knowing how we can keep ourselves and others safe

is incredibly important, even if the likelihood that we will experience something unsafe is very, very low.

- “Being prepared rather than being scared” → practice means being prepared
- It might be useful to bring in a security guard or administrator to speak from their perspective about why these drills are important. "Ask an expert": kids could ask questions to this person and normalize conversations around safety.
- Your students will actually focus better, learn more and be more able to return to the lesson if you take the time to go through these steps.
- If necessary, allow time for students to decompress in whatever way they need. Give opinions like: listen to music on your phone, take a quiet minute, flash writing (write what you are feeling). Sometimes cellphones can help students re-regulate after heightened emotions.
- When can you find opportunities to say: “Today we aren’t going to focus on content but instead on how you are feeling...what is really bothering you?”
- A lot of times students are looking for the why...give that to them. Students are owed an explanation: WHY!

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Cited Sources:

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- [Talking to Kids About a 'Lockdown' | HuffPost Life](#)
- [Lockdown Drill – How To Talk To Children Friday Harbor Elementary School](#)

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Online Trauma-Informed Professional Development Resource:

- [The Trauma-Informed Toolkit for Educators](#)

Additional Resources:

- [Emergency Readiness](#) - NYC Department of Education
- [Code of Conduct and District-wide Safety Plan](#) - NYC Department of Education
- ["I Felt Disposable": A Woman Shared How She And Other Students With Disabilities Were Treated During A School Emergency. Saying Protocol Needs To Change](#)
- [NYC teachers get little to no training on lockdown drills - Chalkbeat New York](#)
- [Impacts of school shooter drills on the psychological well-being of American K-12 school communities: a social media study](#)
- [Reconsider Active Shooter Drills | Everytown](#)

Gun Control Advocacy Groups:

- [Everytown for Gun Safety](#)
- [March for Our Lives](#)
- [Sandy Hook Promise](#)