



LOCKDOWN DRILLS

Guide & Resource

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KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Vision

Ensure each and every student is empowered and equipped to pursue a successful future.

Mission

To partner with districts, schools, families, students, business and industry, and communities to provide leadership and support to ensure success for each and every student.

About

The Kentucky Department of Education is a service agency of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, and part of the Education and Workforce Development Cabinet. The department provides resources and guidance to Kentucky's public schools and districts as they implement the state's P-12 education requirements. The department also serves as the state liaison for federal education requirements and funding opportunities.

OBJECTIVE AND KEY CONCEPTS

Objective: Students and staff learn best responses to maximize safety during a lockdown in the event of an internal or external threat. Lockdown drills are conducted in a trauma-informed manner to minimize potential re-traumatizing of students or staff.

Safety preparedness is an essential part of the school emergency plan so students and staff are able to act to maximize safety in the event of a school emergency. Safety planning should include a continuum of activities for students and staff, and combine classroom learning and practice drills. All learning and drills should be tailored to meet the unique needs of schools and their students and staff, although they share core elements. All safety preparedness also should be designed to minimize the potential for causing or creating a traumatic experience for students and staff participating in the safety exercises.

WHAT IS A TRAUMA-INFORMED LOCKDOWN DRILL?

Lockdown drills are a specific safety drill to prepare students and staff to achieve maximum safety in the event of an internal threat such as intruder or active shooter in the school building or on campus, or external threat, including community violence or disaster. Lockdown drills are one component of a continuum of safety preparedness activities for students and staff that includes classroom lessons, tabletop exercises and experiential drills. Lockdown drills prepare students and staff to respond in the event of a lockdown by teaching and practicing actions to stay safe and quiet in classrooms or other parts of the school. Students learn the basic imperatives to follow instructions, stay quiet and stay calm. Students naturally look to adults for guidance and instructions, and lockdown drills help staff prepare to quickly assess the situation, make decisions, and guide students to safety, while managing their own anxiety responses.

All lockdown drills should include three basic components:

preparation, practice and processing.

1. Preparation: Classroom instruction about the steps to take during a lockdown, expectations of how to behave during a drill and clear understanding of what to do if a student feels distressed. Preparation may include a tabletop or storytelling exercise.

2. Practice: Students and staff go through the action steps during a drill. This can be a walk-through with verbal prompts or a model response to a hypothetical situation. Effective practice drills do not require intense simulation using actors, sounds or fake weapons or ammunition, and there is no evidence that such simulations improve preparedness.

3. Processing: Students and staff should have the

opportunity to discuss the drill, ask questions, express concerns and share emotional responses to the exercise. This is best done at the classroom (rather than whole school) level, led by educators with whom students have a relationship. School staff should be trained to recognize signs of traumatic stress or other significant distress in students and colleagues that warrant referral for behavioral health support.

There are two categories of lockdown drills:

Traditional lockdown drills educate staff and students about what to do to remain safe in a classroom or other part of the school in the event of a lockdown. This typically involves locking the door, moving students to a location out of sight through windows or upon entrance to the room, and coaching students to remain calm and quiet for the duration of the drill. These activities should be conducted in ways appropriate to the developmental level of the students involved, and using appropriate language and examples. Resources for elementary school drills have been compiled into the [Elementary School Lockdown Workbook](#) prepared by the Kentucky Center for School Safety.

Options-based drills teach additional actions for maximizing safety, including leave the scene (run), hide, lockdown and barricade in place or actively resist the intruder. While several options-based programs exist for students and staff, the Kentucky Center for School Safety recommends that the option to resist/defend be offered only to staff who wish to participate, and never to students of any age. Options-based models can enhance student and staff awareness of emergency situations to enhance decision-making in the moment, but must always appropriately meet students' developmental levels and minimize potential for increasing fear.

The determination of whether to use a traditional or an options-based lockdown drill should consider student and school factors. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the National Association of School Resource

Officers (NASRO) recommend that “traditional lockdowns should remain the foundation of an options-based approach.” The Kentucky Center for School Safety has developed [KCSS School Lockdown Planning Discussion Points](#) to provide guidance to schools. Lockdown drills should be tailored to meet the unique needs of the school community including consideration of:

- Student developmental level
- School and community culture and climate
- Physical layout and geography of the campus
- Accommodations for special needs of any students or staff



Lockdown drills may be effectively conducted with advance warning. Best practices indicate that there should be advance notice to students, families and staff of the drill as recommended in the [KCSS School Lockdown Planning Discussion Points](#). School safety teams should also weigh the benefits of empowering students and staff versus the consequences of increasing anxiety, or unintentionally re-traumatizing individuals who have a history of adverse or traumatic experiences. Prior to conducting lockdown drills, school safety teams should rigorously prepare for these exercises and consider all potential consequences. Consider any accommodations that may be needed for students with IEPs or 504 plans. Students and staff who are known to have suffered recent losses or have a history of trauma exposure should be provided extra support before, during and after safety drills. Some students or staff who may be harmed by participation in the drill may need alternate learning methods and media (e.g. books, one-on-one or small group discussion, tabletop exercises, or one-on-one or small group walk-through) to ensure they learn the required safety skills in accordance with legislative requirements.

WHAT ARE THE KENTUCKY REQUIREMENTS FOR LOCK-DOWN DRILLS?

KRS 158.162(5) requires two (2) lockdown drills each school year:

“The principal shall conduct, at a minimum, emergency response drills to include ... one (1) lockdown drill within the first thirty (30) instructional days of each school year and again during the month of January.” Lockdown drills involve participation of all staff and students and are distinct from the required active shooter training for staff. Kentucky legislation does not specify the type of lockdown drill to be conducted. However, the Kentucky Center for School Safety and the Kentucky Department of Criminal Justice Training have collaborated to develop School Lockdown Planning Discussion Points, found with additional resources on the [Kentucky Center for School Safety Lockdown](#) page.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US ABOUT LOCKDOWN DRILLS?

Although schools have become increasingly concerned about the possibility of school violence, statistically schools remain among the safest places for youth to be, and school shootings are statistically rare events (Schildkraut, Formica and Malatras, 2018). There is limited research available on the effectiveness of drills in preparing students to respond to emergency situations, especially with regard to students at elementary and secondary levels, and those data are not always conclusive (Jonson, 2017; Zhang, Musu-Gillette and Ouderkerk, 2016). At least one study found that students reported feeling more prepared for a lockdown emergency in the short term following training and drills, without significant increases in anxiety or fear about their safety at school (Zhe and Nickerson, 2007). Recent data indicate that while students felt more familiar with lockdown protocols after completing a series of educational lessons and two lockdown drills, they also reported feeling less safe in school. Students who were black, biracial and multiracial were particularly noted to report feeling less safe at school, and female students reported feeling less safe than their male

peers following the training and drill. Students in combined K-8 buildings reported feeling safer and more prepared than older students in middle and high school settings (Schildkraut, Nickerson and Ristoff, 2020). There also is some research indicating that for adults, a multi-option approach may be more effective than traditional lockdown drills (Jonson, Moon and Hendry, 2020) but additional research is needed.

There also is concern that drills can create increased anxiety and fear among students and staff. Young students in particular may have difficulty distinguishing the drill from an actual emergency (Shalchi, 2019; Walker, 2019; everytownresearch.org, 2020). Numerous expert opinions (NASP/NASRO, 2017; National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), 2019) recommend announcing drills in advance, adapting language and activities to address varying developmental levels, and attending to needs of students and staff with Individual Education Plans or 504 plans or other special circumstances. Recently, there has been a proliferation of negative reports of student response to

lockdown drills that include active shooter simulations (Garcia-Navarro, 2019; Glaser, 2020; Shalchi, 2019). The Everytown for Gun Safety, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association issued a white paper stating, “Unannounced active shooter drills are a detrimental and unproven school safety tactic” (Walker, 2020, available at: <https://neatoday.org/2020/02/25/active-shooter-drills-in->

[schools/](#)). Recommendations against any unannounced drills or lockdowns keep with the recommendations from NASP and the NASRO as well as the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, and the Kentucky Center for School Safety.

TIPS FOR TRAUMA-INFORMED LOCKDOWN DRILLS

Develop lockdown training and drill protocol with input from all sectors of the school community:

- Staff (classroom, administrative, support services)
- Students and families
- Behavioral health professionals
- Law enforcement and community responders

Develop a hierarchy of learning and conduct practice drills with students and staff only after other learning is completed:

- Start with orientation and classroom learning in small groups. Avoid individual instruction, which may increase anxiety.
- Follow basic information with tabletop or storytelling exercises.
- Allow participants to do a “walk through” to understand the physical elements of the plan.
- Orient students and staff to lockdown drill actions and expectations in advance.
- Participate in simulation drill only after completing the above.
- Train staff in all training and practice components prior to implementing with students.

Choose type of drill and level of simulation carefully:

- Carefully consider benefits and consequences of use of props and simulations.
- Avoid dramatization of intruders and weapons.
- Avoid use of simulated bullets or shooting.
- Minimize use of audio simulation, such as gunshots or sirens.
- Never “shoot” students or staff or ask them to play injured or deceased roles.
- Never conduct unannounced simulation drills.
- See NASP/NASRO Best Practice Considerations for Schools in Active Shooter and Other Armed Assailant Drills and KCSS School Lockdown Planning Discussion Points linked below.

Require advance notification and consent:

- Provide students and parents with advanced notification of all lockdown drills. Avoid unannounced lockdown drills.
- Have alternative means of learning safety procedures available for students for whom participation would be harmful or is not possible, e.g. students with history of exposure to trauma, students with disabilities that prohibit full ability to participate.
- Provide staff with advanced notification of all lockdown drills and avoid unannounced lockdown drills.
- Have alternative means of learning safety procedures available for staff for whom participation would be harmful or is not possible, e.g. students with history of exposure to trauma, students with disabilities that prohibit full ability to participate.
- Differentiate consent for participation in learning the option to resist/fight/defend from other options (run, hide, lockdown) to ensure staff clearly understand what they will be learning.



Offer alternative means of learning lockdown safety procedures for those who are unable to participate in standard drills for physical or psychological reasons:

- Provide an alternative for students, using books, classroom learning, tabletop exercises, and/or individual or small group walk-through drills.
- Ensure requesting or participating in the alternative occurs free of stigma or reprisal for students or staff.
- Ensure staff who are hired after the annual training has occurred have the opportunity to learn necessary safety skills using alternative resources.

Teach staff and students calming strategies to use during and after drills:

- Teach staff calming strategies to regulate their own emotional response. Students will follow the lead of the adults, so adults must remain as calm as possible.
- Teach staff calming strategies to use with students who become distressed.
- Teach and practice calming strategies with students prior to the lockdown training and drills.

- Utilize calming strategies to assist students to remain calm and quiet during the drill.
- Use a buddy system to support those who may be more vulnerable to anxiety.

Clarify this is a drill to ensure students and staff will always be able to distinguish a real emergency from a drill:

- Start every drill by clearly stating “This is a drill” (see NASP/NASRO Best Practice Considerations for Schools in Active Shooter and Other Armed Assailant Drills document for additional language).
- Remind participants by stating “This is a drill” multiple times throughout the exercise.



Use positive behavior approaches during the drill to promote desired behavior:

- Affirm desired responses in students.
- Affirm desired responses in staff.
- Avoid using fear to correct undesired behavior, e.g. don’t say “You would die if you did that.”

Monitor impact on staff and students before, during and after lockdown training and drills:

- Teach staff to recognize signs of traumatic stress or other emotional distress in students.
- Designate staff to observe and respond to students experiencing adverse reactions.
- Designate staff to observe and respond to staff experiencing adverse reactions.
- Create a signal that students or staff may use if they need to remove themselves from the training or drill.
- Have a designated safe space where students or staff can go to calm down.

Provide behavioral health supports:

- Ensure behavioral health professionals and support services are available on site during and after lockdown drills.
- Identify Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other community-based behavioral health resources for staff.
- Check in with students and staff regularly to monitor emotional status for up to one week after the drill.
- Check in with students who are absent on days of scheduled drills to see if the drill is the reason. Follow up with alternative learning and support.

Include time to process for students and staff after every drill:

- Opportunity for students and staff to process the experience should occur immediately following the exercise.
- Include space to share emotions, thoughts, concerns and questions.
- Practice calming/coping strategies.
- Conduct as small groups (classroom size) rather than whole school.
- Involve behavioral health professional as leader or co-leader.
- Provide opportunity for caregivers to offer input following training and drills.

Ensure lockdown training and drills meet the unique needs of everyone in the school community:

- Materials and process must be developmentally appropriate for all students (see resource links below from NASP/ NASRO, NCTSN and Safe and Sound Schools for excellent breakdowns of developmental level considerations; see KCSS Elementary School Lockdown Workbook).
- Materials and process must be culturally appropriate.
- Consider recent events or history of trauma or community violence.
- Identify all students with special needs and ensure appropriate accommodations are made (i.e. consider physical, cognitive, emotional, communication or behavioral differences).
- Designate staff to assist individual students or colleagues.
- Create a buddy system for students or staff with special needs.
- Include students with IEP or 504 plans and their caregivers in creating accommodations or additional supports during drills to ensure student learning.
- Include representation across and input from all staff, students and caregivers in the planning and development of lockdown training and drills.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Kentucky Department of Education School Safety and Resiliency Act webpage: [https://education.ky.gov/school/sdfs/Pages/School-Safety-and-Resiliency-Act-\(Senate-Bill,-2019\).aspx](https://education.ky.gov/school/sdfs/Pages/School-Safety-and-Resiliency-Act-(Senate-Bill,-2019).aspx)
- Kentucky Center for School Safety:
 - [Lockdown Procedure](#) webpage
 - [KCSS School Lockdown Planning Discussion Points](#)
 - [Elementary School Lockdown Workbook](#)
- NASP/NASRO: [Best Practice Considerations for Schools in Active Shooter and Other Armed Assailant Drills](#).
- NCTSN:
 - [Creating School Active Shooter/Intruder Drills](#)
 - [Self Care for Educators](#)
- Safe and Sound Schools [toolkits](#) and [Developmental Levels of Safety Awareness](#)

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