



Minnesota Schools: Active Shooter Drills

Minnesota requires school districts, charter schools, and private schools to “include at least five school lock-down drills” in their policy for addressing potential crisis situations. However, it is silent on how to conduct this drill without harming students’ mental health and wellness [MINN. STAT. ANN. 121A.035 and 121A.037].

DRILLS DIFFER FROM SIMULATIONS

- Drills educate and train students/staff on how to take a crisis seriously without putting them in harm’s way.
 - They emphasize preparedness and practical components such as: practicing safe evacuation, sheltering in place, and responding to instruction from trusted adults.
- Active shooter simulations are intended to mimic an actual shooting.
 - They can include the sound of gun fire, people play-acting injuries, fake blood, teachers being shot with pellet guns, and law enforcement sweeping hallways with firearms drawn, for instance.

SIMULATIONS ARE BAD FOR STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

- Active shooter simulations do NOT make students/staff safer. Instead, they are fear-inducing and can negatively impact participants’ mental health.
- Students aren’t always able to tell that a simulation is just an exercise and not a real-life threat.
- Simulations are unnecessary; drills are enough. For example, when students participate in fire drills a real fire is never part of the learning experience.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- Simulations that include elements mimicking active shooters are likely to be traumatic to some participants.ⁱ
- High intensity exercises can increase children’s anxiety and fear that the world is a threatening place.ⁱⁱ
- If active shooter drills consider the emotional impact on participants and are also developmentally appropriate, they may not cause a major negative impact to most children.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The National Association of School Psychologists and the National Association of School Resource Officers have created best practices.^{iv}

ABOUT OUR POLICY VISION

Our vision ensures active shooter drills increase students’ safety without jeopardizing their mental health, by:

- Making drills accessible, developmentally/age-appropriate, culturally-aware, trauma-informed, and accommodating for all students.
- Providing time, immediately following a drill, for students to access mental health services if needed.
- Requiring drills to be announced, using age-appropriate language, before they begin.
- Banning simulations during regular school hours as well as mandated student participation in them.
- Putting 6-12th graders through annual evidence-based violence prevention trainings.
- Giving youth a chance to have a say in violence prevention planning.
- Requiring an annual review of the efficacy and impacts of active shooter drills.

Sandy Hook Promise (SHP) is a national, nonprofit organization led by several family members whose loved ones were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012. The SHP mission is to educate and empower youth and adults to prevent violence in schools, homes, and communities. Through our proven, evidence-informed Know the Signs programs and sensible, bi-partisan school and gun safety legislation, we teach young people and adults to recognize, intervene, and get help for individuals who may be socially isolated and/or at risk of hurting themselves or others.

ⁱ Schonfeld, D. J., Melzer-Lange, M., Hashikawa, A. N., Gorski, P. A., Krug, S., Baum, C., Chung, S., Dahl-Grove, D., Davies, H. D., Dziuban, E., Gardner, A., Griese, S., Needle, S., Simpson, J., Hoffman, B. D., Agran, P. F., Hirsh, M. P., Johnston, B. D., Kendi, S., ... Zonfrillo, M. R. (2020, September 1). Participation of children and adolescents in live crisis drills and exercises. American Academy of Pediatrics. Retrieved May 26, 2022, from <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/146/3/e2020015503/36710/Participation-of-Children-and-Adolescents-in-Live?autologincheck=redirected>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} NASP. (n.d.). Best practice considerations for armed assailant drills in schools. Best Practice Considerations for Armed Assailant Drills in Schools. Retrieved May 27, 2022, from <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>